

2022-2023 - Year 1 School Learning Plan

1. GENERAL SCHOOL STORY

Vancouver Technical Secondary School (commonly known as Van Tech) is a thriving, diverse learning community, which supports approximately 1650 students. Our students come from a variety of ethno-cultural backgrounds and represent over fifty language groups. The programs and initiatives offered at Van Tech are as diverse as our student body and are responsive to the changing needs and values of school community. We have strong partnerships with organizations such as Vancouver Coastal Health in our Leadership and Resiliency Program (LRP), Fresh Roots in our school farm, and various Neighbourhood Houses such as Frog Hollow that work with our Community Schools Team (CST) to support students.

Unique to Van Tech are our annual focus weeks (Literacy Week, Indigenous Awareness Week, Fine Arts Week, Applied Skills Week and Wellness Week), our schoolyard garden projects (Indigenous Foodscape, Accessible Garden, Garden Club and Science Garden Beds and the Fresh Roots partnership) and our strong social justice and Indigenous focus (displays, presentations, activities, clubs and classes). We celebrate our students' Grit and Determination, Diligence, Improvement, Creative Measure, and/or Class Inclusion and Leadership at our Celebration of Champions. Students receive leadership opportunities through formal means (PE Leadership and Mental Health Leadership courses) as well as informal through the various clubs and opportunities presented through CST and LRP.

We seek to build and strengthen our community at our Grade 8 Family Welcome, Indigenous Family Meal, a variety of program potluck evenings, as well as the variety of music concerts, athletic events, and community celebrations. We host three events for grade 7 students who will be entering grade 8 at Van Tech in order to build community and reduce student and parent anxiety.

At Van Tech, we continuously look for new ways to foster student agency and develop student ownership of educational programming and school policies and procedures. Our student forum provides an excellent opportunity for students to be involved in how the school operates and also develop targets for actionable change. Through this year's plan, we will be looking at how we can improve the sense of belonging for all members of the school community.

Established in 1916 Vancouver Technical Secondary School, in its early years, was a technical school located at 12th and Oak. The building we are currently in was built in 1928 with all the expected technical facilities and served an exclusively male population. Female students were admitted to Vancouver Technical in 1940, major additions were built in 1954, and in 2011 a seismic upgrade was concluded. The physical space of Van Tech continues to be adapted and changed to meet the changing needs of our community. Most recently, staff and students have been working to develop a plan on how the physical spaces can be more welcoming to students especially those with accessibility needs and gender-diverse students.

2. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS?

Through student surveys as well as the Student Forum, we know that students at Van Tech are socially conscious, have a clear understanding of what they want in and from their school, and exercise their voice as a student body. These themes emerged from student voice and are what shaped the development of this plan.

Van Tech student strengths:

- involved in a wide-range of school-based activities (clubs, athletics, events)
- resilient in the face of adversity
- look for creative way to learn (student-led FIT, booking presentations, etc.)
- care about the feelings and safety of other people in the building
- seize the enrichment opportunities that happen at school
- eager to plan, implement, and participate in a variety of events around school culture
- take ownership over situations that affect student day-to-day life

Van Tech student support needs:

- getting to school/class on time
- dealing with mental health and wellness
- more opportunities for student-led initiatives
- developing a greater sense of agency
- opportunities to build identity at school

3. WHAT EVIDENCE SUPPORTS WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE LEARNERS?

Entering the school growth plan process for the next three years, we already had data from staff, parents, and students around what each group valued. Belonging became a common theme and, indirectly, work was done around this during a staff professional development day in May of 2022, where a set of values was agreed upon.

This year, the following was used to collect data:

Student Surveys (beginning of the year)

- As part of our start-up process to the 2022-23 school year we surveyed students from various grades to determine areas of focus for the year

Student Learning Surveys

- Grade 10 and 12 students completed the student learning surveys, but other grades were also able to complete these surveys during our Tech Day.
- Our action is based on data submitted by grade 10s as we will be able to track this group over the next 3 years.

Student Forum

- The student forum provided an opportunity for randomly selected students to engage in conversations about education at Van Tech
- Students were randomly selected from homeroom assignments to ensure representation from all facets of the student body.
- We were able to get a sense of what students wanted from the school growth plan and what actions they thought would be helpful

4. WHAT IS THE FOCUS FOR OUR COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS BASED ON THE EVIDENCE?

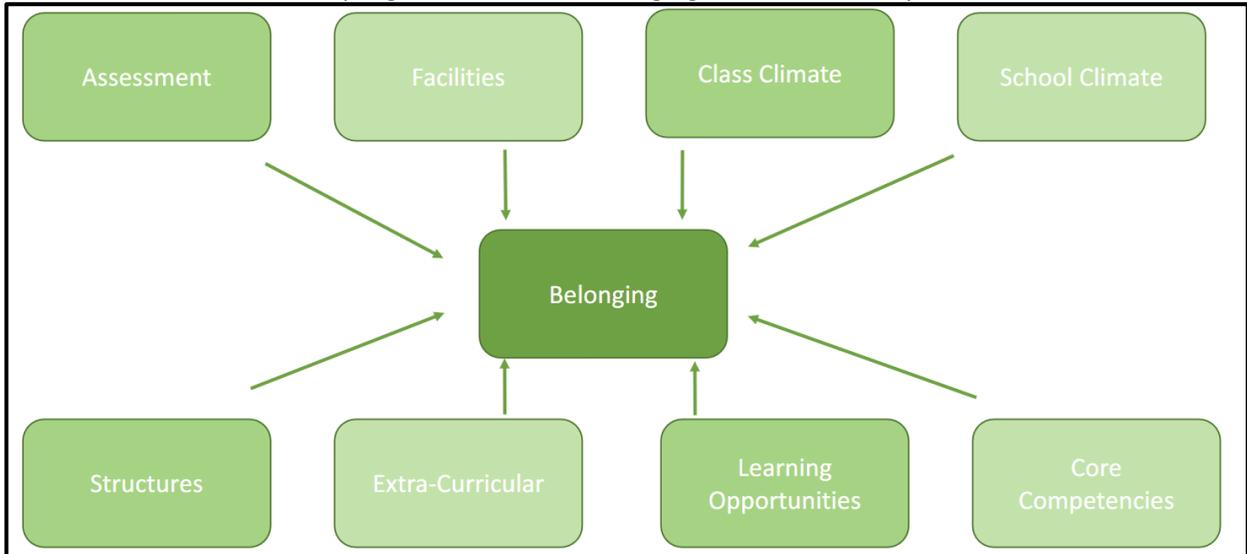
Our focus on belonging for this plan is for all members of the school community and has been chosen because it sits at the nexus between education and community. For students, parents, and staff to feel like they are part of the learning process, there needs to be some sense of belonging. We are examining how the increasing a sense of belonging might impact academic achievement. When we look at this through an equity lens, we see how groups who may not feel like they belong to a school community begin to disengage and creates further inequality in terms of educational opportunities and success.

One of the central tenets to Deeper Learning is that adult learning and student learning is symmetrical. Based on this tenet, we chose to focus on belonging as a whole community. There needs to be learning done on how to foster belonging to turn that into actionable change for students. A focus on belonging aligns with the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (AEEA) goal one, to increase students' sense of pride, self-esteem, belonging, place, acceptance, and caring in their schools. Furthermore, this focus aligns with the VSB Education Plan goal to improve physical and mental well-being and belonging. Lastly, there are curricular ties to belonging that can help guide this work, especially in the core competencies of the curriculum. The Personal and Social sub-competency of positive personal and cultural identity explores how, and in what ways, understanding and appreciation of factors that contribute to a healthy sense of self.

We have noticed that students thrive when they feel like they are a part of something, when they feel seen, and when they feel like they belong. We have noticed that this sense of place has been developed in certain areas of the school. Areas such as the Learning Hub, where students can go to receive academic support, or work quietly in a separate setting, has been very successful largely due to the sense of belonging students feel in that space. Students who consistently use that space have improved attendance and academic success than they did prior to using the space. There are other examples of how classes and programs have helped students find a place where they belong such as the BC African Descent course as well as X-Block which focuses on a students-mentoring-students model to raise voices of students who identify as being black. Our aim is to emulate this sense of belonging that students have in specific places and spaces across the whole-school community.

5. INQUIRY QUESTION

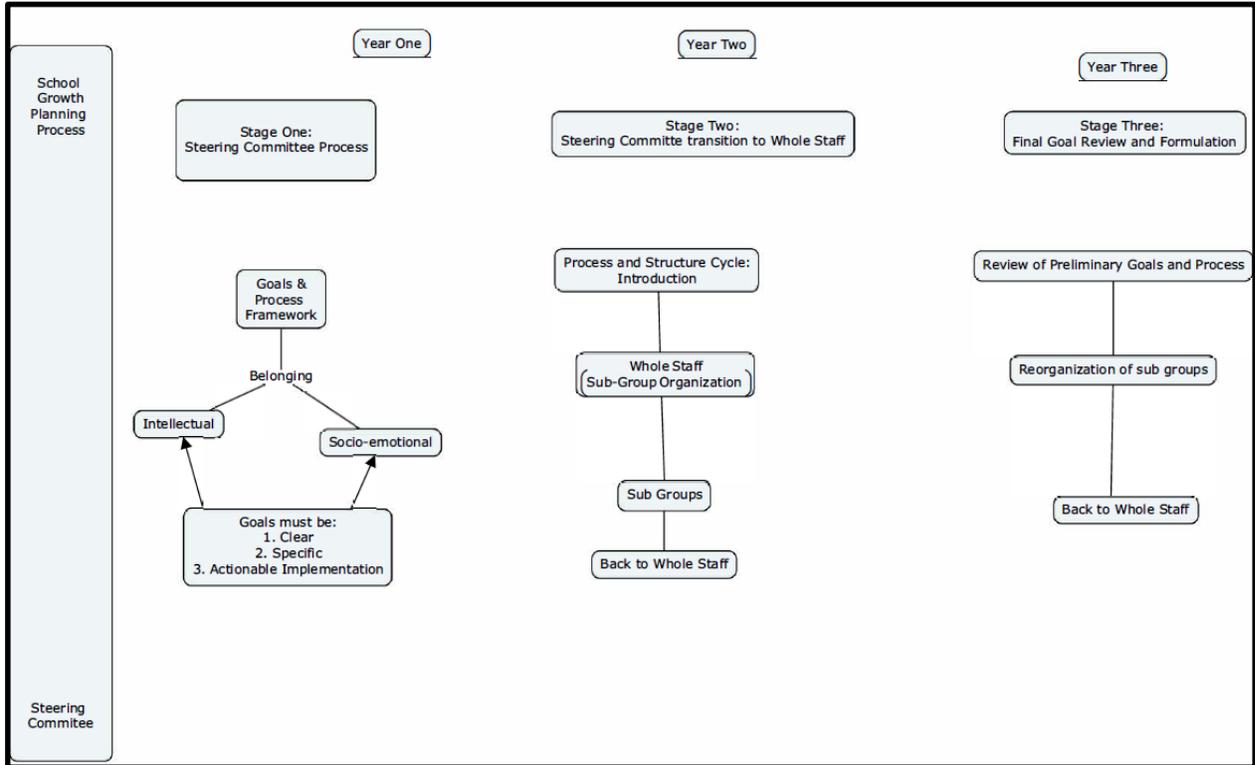
Based on our work as a staff in May of 2022 on creating a set of values, belonging was a recurring theme. Belonging was also identified by parents and students as being one of the main things that they look for in a school. Our inquiry question centers on, *“How do we develop a sense of belonging amongst all member of the Van Tech community, working towards an increased sense of belonging over the course of our 3-year plan?”*. For our purposes, belonging refers to the extent to which students, parents, and staff feel they are valued members in the school community. We feel that a focus on belonging will lead to higher engagement, stronger academic achievement, and fewer behaviour incidents. In our previous growth plan, “fostering a sense of belonging” was one of the areas for further examination. This plan seeks to dive deeper into this theme of belonging and identify ways that we can use seemingly disparate areas of education to develop a greater sense of belonging in our community:



In our goal to build a strong sense of belonging, the key question is: what positive and sustainable practices can we employ to develop deeper connections, and feelings of belonging for our students?

6. WHAT IS OUR PLAN?

The School Growth Plan working group met throughout the year to develop the inquiry question and create an action plan to move this work forward. Over the course of our three-year plan, year one focused on defining the context and actionable items that we can work toward as a staff to build on our repertoire of strategies around creating a school climate that fosters student belonging. Staff was introduced to this topic through engaging in activities that centered on how to make *students* feel they belong, but also increased feelings of *staff* belonging.



As a staff, we will be developing the skills necessary to engage in this work through inter-departmental groups with the aim of fostering staff belonging to then affect students' feelings of belonging. Year three involves a review of the process as well as a reorganization of the groupings to evaluate the work done.

7. WHAT SUPPORTS WILL WE NEED?

The learning needed for this plan to be effective involves staff working together to share strategies and success on how they have built a sense of belonging for students in their classroom. We are looking to use collaborative time as well as professional development days to do this work. We will also be using time during staff meetings to report out on what we are doing in order to keep the work moving in a positive direction and to make it meaningful for staff and students.

8. HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'RE ON TRACK?

We will continue to make use of survey data, focus groups and anecdotal reports to monitor our progress. We have established baselines with our various tools and can gauge progress over the next 3 years. The leadership teams established in Student Voice, Indigenous Education, Wellbeing and Social Justice will take an active role in leading and monitoring the impact of this work.

9. HOW WILL WE SHARE THIS INFORMATION?

We have continued to share information through our school website, announcements, emails, Teams posts, Instagram posts and tweets. Our school newsletter is also a place to share out important information as well as pictures to document the different activities/events happening around the school.

Staff have discussed issues related to our school plan at staff meetings, collaborative time sessions, professional development days, and department time. Staff also participated in committees, focus groups and activities in support of a number of our new initiatives.

The Parent Advisory Council receives an update each month at their meeting, which is also shared with other parents through our school website.



District-wide Indigenous Focus (worldviews): To increase knowledge, acceptance, empathy, awareness and appreciation of Indigenous histories, traditions, cultures and contributions among all learners.

10. WHAT LEARNING HAVE WE DONE AT OUR SCHOOL TO SUPPORT AND ENHANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS AND KNOWLEDGE?

Staff and students at Van Tech demonstrate a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of all young people, particularly those of Indigenous heritage. We have a very active and committed group of staff and students who continuously work to raise the voices of Indigenous artists and speakers and provide opportunities for whole-school participation in these events. There is significant focus on working towards action:

- Interest in Indigenous histories, traditions, cultures and contributions is strong at Van Tech and continues to grow in our community. Currently we offer courses BC First Peoples 12, English 12 First Peoples and Contemporary Indigenous Issues 12. French Immersion students also have the option to complete a course with an Indigenous focus with French Contemporary Indigenous Studies.
- This year we were fortunate to have Xwalacktun, a carver from the Squamish Nation, work on a new carving for the main entrance of Van Tech. Xwalacktun, carved each of the three pieces (representing the host Nations – Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Wautuh) in the Van Tech foyer which provided students the opportunity to see a master artist turn cedar into art. Individual students as well as classes were able to ask questions and also try their hand at carving.
- During our Orange Shirt Day event, JB The First Lady, an Indigenous hip-hop artist, performed songs from her album that touched on reconciliation. Her words were very powerful, and students were able to interact with her after her set.
- The Coast Salish anthem is being taught by our music department to teachers and students this year to ensure that everyone is able to participate in the singing of this gifted song during our assemblies.

11. WHAT EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING OF INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS AND KNOWLEDGE HAVE BEEN FOSTERED WITHIN YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY? PLEASE SHARE HOW IT IS EMBEDDED THROUGHOUT.

Completed and ongoing work embedding Indigenous world views:

- Indigenous Awareness Week (announcements, stories, songs, activities, presenters)
- Outdoor murals
- Elders visiting
- Artists
- Library: Indigenous reads
- Drum making
- Ribbon Skirts/Shirts Making
- Beading workshop
- Support for staff and students
- Carving
- Family Potluck
- Jerry Whitehead - Tipi Teachings
- Honouring those who have impacted the community (ie artist who recently passed – Women's Warrior Song)
- Remove symbols of colonization
- Permanent Indigenous Displays
- Smudging
- Having relevant educational opportunities for all students (I.e. JB The First Lady) to connect with youth
- Weaving cedar caps for grade 12 Indigenous students

12. HOW WILL WE SUSTAIN AND ENHANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE AND KNOWLEDGE?

Actions that we are taking forward in this plan to enhance our understanding of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge include:

- Teaching the Coast Salish Anthem to all staff
- Promote/provide more experiential learning opportunities.
- Create opportunities for Indigenous artists to showcase art.
- Add hə́ŋqəmiñə́h language to spaces around the school.
- Advocate for Indigenous language courses at Van Tech
- Provide opportunities for cross-curricular planning and instruction.
- Creating new spaces for students to connect or reimagining current spaces.
- Reimagining student schedules for those who may need adjusted timetables.
- Create opportunities for elders, to connect with students in the foyer/front steps – how would this change the energy?
- Finding ways to honour learning through external credit process
- Providing more opportunities to have parents and staff connect around Reconciliation goals.
- Joining the UNESCO Schools Program

The process of reconciliation through action is one that is ongoing at Van Tech. We have students and staff committed to working toward this and are looking for new and different ways to embed this across the curriculum and within the culture of the school.