

2022-2023 - Year 3

School Learning Plan

1. General School Story:

Sir William Van Horne Elementary School is in a diverse neighborhood in the Oakridge - South Slope area of Vancouver. It currently enrolls approximately 430 students in 18 divisions from Kindergarten to Grade 7. We have approximately 130 students who are designated as English Language Learners (ELL) which is an increase from this past year when we initially only identified about 80 ELL students (most likely largely in part due to a return to normal immigration levels post COVID). About 40 students have Ministry Designations which is consistent with past data.

The Van Horne school community is proud to work closely with our Van Horne Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). We have a shared value focused around building a thriving community. Over the last several years our community has been working on: a growing recognition of our community's diversity, a commitment to environmental issues and challenges (especially around the topic of transportation), and a working relationship between school and parents based on the values of transparency and cooperation. All these efforts are to make a difference in the lives of our students.

Van Horne has a varied and diverse staff that supports the holistic development of each student. Staff focusses and interests vary, but generally include: developing academic rigor, providing extra-curricular opportunities (i.e. lunchtime clubs and school teams), and improving Thinking, Communication, or Personal and Social core competencies of each child. In particular, a focus this year by many teachers was in the realm of Cultural Identity where the PAC supported cultural field trip initiatives by providing funds. Students are challenged to improve in many areas of learning as well as becoming contributing members of our community. Staff work collaboratively to discuss students' needs, strengths, and how to best support students. Our highly dedicated staff provide varied learning experiences including project and inquiry-based learning to Van Horne students.

During a typical school year, Van Horne Elementary School offers additional opportunities for various students in arts, sports and student leadership. Examples of this include: student government, choir, cross-country, volleyball, basketball, badminton and track and field. There are also student leadership opportunities such as student council, PA announcers, library monitors, and big buddy/little buddy classes.

At Van Horne, *our school as a community* is a phrase that is used often by PAC executive and school administration as a guiding value.

In the 2019-2020 school year, before the COVID pandemic, the Van Horne School staff were investigating how students were engaging with their learning and were interested in how to improve student attitude towards their own learning. Staff identified some students appeared to be not as interested in their learning as they could be. Many studies suggested that learning improves when students have an opportunity to decide what they want to learn about as it aligns with what their own personal goals may be for their own lives. So, the staff began working on a School Growth Plan that was centered around providing students with some choices in their education. The goal was to improve student learning and the student experience by allowing students to make some decisions about what they wanted to learn about. Many studies suggested that learning improves when students have an opportunity to decide what they want to learn about as it aligns with what their own personal goals may be for their own lives.

During the spring of 2020, students were given an opportunity to sign up and attend short term workshops being offered by staff around various topics (which was called Wednesday Workshop). Some of the topics that were offered were: mathematics, art, science, leadership and learning more about the self, visual media, music, and construction for STEM. All available staff participated in the offering of workshops including non-enrolling teaching staff such as the counsellor, resource teachers, librarian, and the principal.

From our experiences we learned that Wednesday Workshop was an overwhelming success and should be continued. From this, we celebrate that student achievement is increased in relation to the VSB Education Plan goals.

2. What did we see?

At Van Horne, the students are generally kind and accepting of others. However, some of them do not appear to be connected to the curriculum and their learning and more importantly, do not advocate for their own learning. This finding came about through many casual conversations between principal and students and teachers and students about what they are learning in class, in which some of them expressed general feelings of the lack of importance of what they are learning, failing to see connection with their future selves, and lack of interest in the topics.

Furthermore, Some students appear to lose interest in school over the years, a quandary given that many enter school excited by the notion of learning. This is in no way unique to the Van Horne experience.

From our research we found educator and media critic Neil Postman who remarked that kindergarteners and first graders are full of enthusiasm, raise their hands high when asked a question, and respond favorably to new learning activities, but by high school, the zip is gone. Mr. Postman uses statistics gained from [A 2016 Gallup Student Poll](https://www.sac.edu/research/PublishingImages/Pages/research-studies/2016%20Gallup%20Student%20Poll%20Snapshot%20Report%20Final.pdf) (<https://www.sac.edu/research/PublishingImages/Pages/research-studies/2016%20Gallup%20Student%20Poll%20Snapshot%20Report%20Final.pdf>) that revealed that 74% of fifth graders report being engaged in their learning at school, but by tenth grade that figure goes down to 33% (with 34% of students feeling "not engaged" and another 33% experiencing themselves as "actively disengaged"). Mr. Postman then asks what could be done about this? His answer is to find ways to engage students, and one of the best ways to do this is by giving students choices and fuel their sense of autonomy (<https://www.institute4learning.com/2018/05/04/8-ways-to-boost-student-engagement-by-giving-students-choices/>). "Student choice makes students active participants in their

educations, thereby increasing levels of engagement.” <http://www.gssaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Impact-of-Student-Choice-and-Personalized-Learning-1.pdf>

One avenue to gain further insight into this comes from the results of our UBC MDI (Middle years Development Index) 2022-2023 report which gathered answers from only our grade 6 population. While no question specifically mentions student engagement in their own learning, we can still gather some data that may inform us. On the question of well-being, students at Van Horne indicated that 27% were thriving, 23% were medium, and 50% were low. The lack of well-being reported may be partially due to lack of engagement in their own education. Additionally, when asked about their own academic self-concept, 60% indicated it was high, 30% indicated medium, and 10% indicated low. While personal self-concept is not directly linked to engagement in one’s own learning, it can be hypothesized that if one was engaged in their own learning, the likelihood of one’s own academic self-concept being higher is much more likely. It is worthwhile to note that the Wednesday Workshops were conducted at about the same time as the UBC MDI, which may have affected the results.

Another source of insight on this topic can be found in the Student Learning Surveys conducted by the Ministry of Education each year. The Student Learning Survey were conducted after the Wednesday Workshops had been completed. In the 2022/2023 school year, Grade 4’s were asked if they have a choice in their learning. Interestingly enough, 9% indicated never, despite getting to do so for Wednesday Workshops. 48% indicated sometimes which is possibly reflective of the choice they got when they participated in Wednesday Workshop. The grade 7’s were asked the same question with similar results. 5% indicated never and 46% indicated sometimes.

The revised curriculum as well as the 2021 VSB Strategic Plan (which was what was in effect when the original School Growth Plan was developed over 3 years ago) encourages and looks for improvements in learning and the student experience which could be addressed by offering more student choice. Specifically, Goal 1 of that plan looks for providing increased opportunities to connect students to their learning. In the current Education Plan 2026, we find the plan continues to support improvements in student achievement. The 2026 plan directs schools to report on student performance and to use the results to improve the quality and effectiveness of the education provided to students. This School Growth Plan will show a pathway to improving student achievement through student choice.

Data collected from an informal poll and a formal questionnaire just before the pandemic on Wednesday Workshop showed an over-whelming majority of students (> 95%) found value in the opportunity, felt it was time well-spent, and advanced their learning in the subjects of the workshops they attended. Students overwhelmingly supported a continuation of these opportunities. Our learners valued the opportunity to learn more about topics that interested them and that some learning opportunities may not be “traditional” school subjects.

3. Were We successful?

At the completion of the 2023 Wednesday Workshops, we conducted a survey of the student population in order to gather data to inform our future practice.

In the survey, primaries and the intermediates were both asked if they enjoyed the workshop they participated in and if they thought it was important to have choice in what you are learning at school.

The following table summarizes the results of this survey:

	Primaries indicating "yes"	Intermediates indicating "yes"	Primaries indicating "no"	Intermediates indicating "no"
Did you enjoy the workshop you participated in?	91.7%	91.1%	4%	6%
Do you think it is important to have choice in what you are learning at school?	91.8%	70.4%	5%	2%

Feedback from students was overwhelmingly in favour of continuing Wednesday Workshops in the future. From parents who responded at a PAC Meeting or from an email sent home, the comments all indicated positive feelings from students who went home and discussed this or comments that stated they wished this was offered when they were children attending school. From staff, there was a general consensus that this should continue in the future. However, there will need to be a closer examination on why there is a sudden and evident decrease from primary to intermediate ages in regard to the question as about whether choice is important in school.

4. How have we Shared?

Prior to implementation of the Wednesday Workshops, parents and students were involved in discussions around the reasoning for this action as well as gathering their feedback on how they may envision the process. It was clear from parent feedback that students should have a say in what courses were offered, rather than just being staff generated. Over the course of a week, students were involved by gathering their responses about what workshops they would like to see offered. Students were asked to go to the main lobby each day at recess or lunchtime and to indicate their ideas with the help of older students recording their responses. From there, the responses were shared with staff so that they may account for the student preferences when formulating their workshop courses.

The results of the final survey were shared with students and staff via PA announcements. Additionally, a further discussion was held with staff for a deeper dive into the results. With parents, results were shared via a PAC meeting and afterwards via email to all families. Both presented opportunities for parents to provide feedback.

5. What are our next steps?

With the conclusion of this action, we will look to continue to do Wednesday Workshops, without it being part of a School Growth Plan.

Using techniques learned from Liberating Structures, a series of techniques designed to gather opinions, ideas, and thoughts from all, a discussion will be had with the new staff about what a new focus could be, perhaps math as staff have discussed this possibility over the last 2 years.



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

6. What have we done at our school to support all learners in regard to this Focus?

Currently, 6 of our 413 students are Indigenous. This is made up of 1 grade 1, 2 grade 5's, 3 grade 7's. There are 3 students identified as male and 3 identified as female.

Our Indigenous Learners are like any of our other students – they have curious minds when it comes to learning and they have their challenges as well. It is difficult to make blanket statements of an entire segment of our student population since their experiences are so vastly different. However, it is acknowledged that our Indigenous students should be proud of themselves and their accomplishments, traditions, culture, and Van Horne is committed to Reconciliation.

The discussions had from our Indigenous focused professional development day back in the fall of 2022 helped provide direction for our school this year. Coming out of that day the staff came upon with several actions. We were only able to complete some of those actions as they will either take more time or we need access to resources which we were not able to procure.

Additionally, this information was shared with parents via a PAC meeting afterwards to inform and gather feedback. There was a general understanding of the direction the school wanted to head in and support for such.

7. How will we sustain and enhance our understanding of indigenous perspective and knowledge?

The following is a list of continuing and new learning opportunities.

- Many staff are committed to increasing their knowledge. They have undertaken a variety of professional development opportunities including but not limited to: participating in the district's Indigenous Focus Day, other Pro D opportunities, and various self-directed readings. Such opportunities allow us to build our cultural sensitivity and awareness.
- Tsimshian artist Art Bolton has been invited in and has provided staff with an in-school workshop on drawing Indigenous art in past years. This year he works with most of our students from our K-7 classrooms on a regular basis in the spring to teach our students how to draw shapes common to West Coast Indigenous Art and to create images of various animals.
- Kwak-wak-wak medicine woman, Veersh WhiteEagleFeather has performed smudging at our school and shared her residential school experiences
- Schoolwide participation in Orange Shirt Day and providing age-appropriate lessons for students on residential schools. Our school librarian has spotlighted Indigenous authors and books by reading aloud and displaying Indigenous books and by signing up for virtual author visits for both our primary and intermediate classes.
- In classrooms, teachers are reading aloud stories written by Indigenous authors (primary grades); book studies such as *My Name Is Seepeetza*, *Fatty Legs*, *Barren Grounds*, etc. (intermediate grades).
- Staff have been incorporating the Principles of Learning and Aboriginal Ways of Knowing and Being into the curriculum when possible. Some highlights include: our Kindergarten classes have participated in weekly outdoor walks where students focus on connecting to the environment and learning about the land and the use of our stone seating circle for gathering and learning outside
- The staff have always supported a garden on school grounds as a learning tool that helps students learn from the land
- The school is acknowledging the traditional territory of the Musqueam each morning announcement
- In recognition of the acts of Residential schools, our staff have created a new mural using a feather designed and donated by Art Bolton. The mural spurs further conversation about residential schools with our students.

There is a shared understanding among staff that reconciliation needs to be a continued focus for the school. It is important to the well-being of all members of Canadian society. Therefore, staff will continue with the above-mentioned examples. As well, we want artist Art Bolton and medicine woman Veersh WhiteEagleFeather to have an ongoing active presence at the school. We will continue to invite them into our school to teach and work with our students.