

2022-2023 - Year 3

Charles Dickens Elementary School Learning Plan

GENERAL SCHOOL STORY:

Charles Dickens Elementary School is located in East Vancouver and has a population of about 440 students. Dickens embraces a philosophy where multi-age classes, committed team-teaching practice and project-based learning are common throughout the school. Most classes are organized with two or three grade levels and taught with a multi-age philosophy. Dickens is a caring, child-centered school and student leadership is nurtured. The staff is committed to collaborative decision-making and works as a Professional Learning Community. We are a Collaborative Early Literacy School and offer Reading Recovery for Grade One students. In addition to the mainstream school community, Dickens is home to a district ELSP class supporting students with unique learning needs. Dickens has an active and supportive Parent Advisory Council (PAC) with high parent involvement in the classrooms and throughout the school.

The physical space of our school building is well utilized. With its wide corridors, sliding glass garage-style doorways, and adjoining classroom spaces, it is conducive to the child-centered, group learning philosophy that the community has embraced for many years. The multipurpose room and gym are additional community spaces that reinforce the multi-age group experiences. At Charles Dickens, our child-centered program is based upon what we know about learning and optimum social and emotional development. The main tenets of our beliefs are that the child is the focus of education; that social responsibility and decision-making must be fostered; that learning is continuous; and that the purpose of evaluation is to promote further authentic learning.

Dickens offers a variety of extracurricular activities, sponsoring cross-country, basketball, Ultimate and track & field teams for both the primary and intermediate students. Students also have opportunities to participate in other physical activities that may be offered throughout the year, as well as school-wide programs and presentations. Student leadership is supported and shared through various school opportunities such as student-led assemblies, buddy reading, library monitors, student council, green team, and lunch monitors. Students come together to celebrate one another and the unique gifts we all bring by participating in Winter and Spring concerts and the talent show.

Dickens staff have had discussions each year since 2020 to discuss the school philosophy. The original 'Four Pillars' are: 1) multi-age classes so that students continue with the same teacher for two or three years; 2) team teaching; 3) authentic assessment; and 4) child-centred learning.

The last two are part of the Redesigned Curriculum and no longer unique to Dickens. However, teachers have reaffirmed their commitment to Collaboration and Teaming and to multi-age classes.

For the past two years we have continued the school goal of collaboration through an inquiry question that focuses on improving student writing. This was based on the written output needs observed across grade levels by our Resource Team and classroom teachers. During the 2020-2021 school year we engaged in professional development on writing and had rich discussions about how this goal could be achieved.

Our goal is connected to the VSB Education Plan Goals of student achievement, specifically in written output in Language Arts and in all subject areas where written communication is required. Our continued focus on collaboration and teaming supports the mental well-being and belonging of staff and of students. Equity in terms of consistency across grade levels in different classes is enhanced with teaming and common practice and expectations among teachers.

1. WHAT DID WE SEE?

As with any group of learners, Dickens students demonstrate diverse interests, strengths and needs. The Dickens community is very accepting of diversity. Our school population includes approximately 40 students with identified special needs and 50 who are English Language Learners (ELL). Eight students at Dickens have self-identified as learners of Indigenous ancestry. Our student population is diverse and includes a number of immigrant and refugee families. While most families speak English at home, approximately 20% of our families have a different first language. The Middle Years Developmental Instrument Survey indicates that grade 6 students at Dickens are doing better than the district average in all categories, particularly in Well-Being, Connectedness with Adults, and Our of School Activities. Anecdotal feedback from the staff at Tupper Secondary indicates that former Dickens students are finding academic and SEL success in high school.

The School Learning Plan with the Inquiry Question: 'Exploring the connection between collaboration and continuous learning' was rolled over because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the Spring of 2021 Dickens staff met several times to discuss the school philosophy and to reaffirm their commitment to collaboration and teaming. Recognizing that written output was a concern for many of our students, we adjusted the goal to 'collaboration through an inquiry question which focuses on improving student writing.' A writing committee met at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year and discussed improving student written output, which included what our students' needs were and how we could best meet them. Following a teacher-led collaborative process we decided on the specific wording of our school goal: **To develop student voice and confidence through written communication while establishing a common language around the writing process and assessment.** We felt that this goal would help us meet the criteria of building student confidence and honouring student voice while teaching the writing process in a systematic way across grades. Thus, the importance of student voice was at the centre of our inquiry.

2. WERE WE SUCCESSFUL?

Following the restrictions of the pandemic we were able to embrace the team-teaching component of our School Learning Plan Inquiry Question in 2022-2023 as teachers recommenced teaming in various capacities – from buddy classes and collaboration with a partner, to shared teaching among grade groups. Intermediate and Primary collaboration resumed regularly, resulting in rich experiences supporting writing. Staff engaged in many Pro-D activities to support writing, including Story Workshop, Lunch and Learn workshops, and Morning Meetings where Intermediates and Primaries shared what was working in their writing programs. We brought back the School Wide Write and teachers got together in grade groups to discuss the writing at each grade level, which proved to be an extremely valuable experience.

Report card data shows that from June 2022 to January 2023 student results at Developing/Applying levels and higher improved at four grade levels.

Grade	2022	2023	Increase	Decrease
1	77%	91%	14%	
2	71%	85%	16%	
3	85%	66%		19%
4	81%	84%	3%	
5	80%	84%	4%	
6	83%	81%		2%
7	82%	78%		4%

This data indicates that there is still room for improvement, although some gaps in learning may be a result of the pandemic. FSA data shows that 93% of grade 4 students and 100% Of grade 7 students who wrote the Foundational Skills Assessment in Fall 2022 were 'On Track' or 'Exceeding' in Literacy.

Teachers reported doing a rich variety of writing activities throughout the year including direct teaching of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and sentence and paragraph writing; teaching the Writing Process and providing graphic organizers for brainstorming and planning; instruction in editing and rubrics for proof-reading and publishing. Teachers taught many genres of writing, from personal writing, journals and memoir, to stories, poetry, newspapers, and non-fiction. There were many instances of collaboration which ranged from shared writing projects with buddy classes to the publication of a newspaper, The Salmon Scoop, by primary students who were studying salmonids. Teachers also teamed to plan writing units and got together to look at student work for assessment purposes. Having a common goal helped us focus on writing with intention, and by doing so through the lens of teaming, staff became more collaborative in other areas.

3. HOW HAVE WE SHARED?

The monthly newsletter has consistently had a strong focus on student writing from Kindergarten to grade 7. Teachers submit work which showcases the variety of writing that their students are doing. This not only allows parents to see how student ability in writing improves from grade to grade, but also highlights the many interesting projects being done in different subject areas and encourages teachers to share and collaborate in this monthly publication. It is also empowering for students who are published in the newsletter to see their writing in print for the whole community to read. Oftentimes I will ask student 'reporters' to do a write-up about an event, giving them the opportunity to write for a real purpose. Writing is also displayed on our walls and is read by students and parent visitors. Stories and projects such as Power Points, posters and videos with student-created scripts are shared at our Monday Morning Assemblies in front of students and parent guests.

4. WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

2022-2023 is our third year with a teaming goal, with the past two years having the additional focus on writing. Our incoming report card data continues to demonstrate that we are doing well with writing, and teachers are teaming and collaborating systematically within and across grade levels to deliver the curriculum. Staff are beginning to discuss new goals – the need for a focus on behaviour – a consistent SEL program to support common behavioural expectations throughout the school. We have noticed that there is a greater need for Mental Health support, self-regulation, and executive functioning strategies, and help with peer interactions following the pandemic. We know that self-regulation helps students develop improved focus and thus can directly impact academic outcomes.

Assessment is another area in which teachers have expressed interest as it relates to the New Reporting Order. It is interesting to note how similar ideas are voiced by teachers at different grade levels as common needs are seen. A goal that emerges from teacher observations of current student needs which is embraced by all is paramount for success. We will continue to look at data (reports cards, Middle Years Development Instrument, Early Years Development Instrument and Student Learning Survey) and have open conversations at staff meetings about current student needs and decide on a new goal for the 2023-2024 school year.



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

5. WHAT HAVE WE DONE AT OUR SCHOOL TO SUPPORT ALL LEARNERS IN REGARD TO THIS FOCUS?

- Requested student leaders give the Traditional Indigenous Acknowledgement at our weekly assemblies and at all school and community gatherings.
- Incorporated the land acknowledgement into our entrance to acknowledge the land on which our school resides with art created by a student of Indigenous ancestry.
- Indigenous Ways of Learning are woven throughout our curriculum across grades.
- Content in Social Studies, Language Arts, Science and Art is taught extensively.
- Our Indigenous Support Worker has completed projects with many classes and the resulting artwork, including beading, mini drums, and medicine wheels, has been displayed and featured in the monthly newsletter.
- Teacher librarian and VP have focussed on Indigenous stories and history throughout the year.

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

To honour the history of the First Nations People and support the learning of all students within the Charles Dickens's community, as a collective group we have:

- Celebrated student success with our Indigenous Enhancement Worker, whose work has proved to be invaluable to our school. With her support, students have:
 - learned to make wool weaving.
 - made mini drums.
 - made mini moccasins symbolizing moving forward.
 - made medicine pouches to place items that helped students connect to their personal strength.
 - learned about medicine wheel teachings.
- Themes covered within classes this year include cultural knowledge for a variety of Indigenous Nations; impact and history of residential school; Truth and Reconciliation; participated in Orange Shirt Day; incorporated Indigenous themed books and novels within Literature study; developed writing skills using Indigenous themed books; understanding of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2 Spirit People; Indigenous Veterans' Day.

- Purchasing of authentic literature.
- Completed Aboriginal Success Plans collaboratively through our School Based Team.
- Provided safe, nurturing learning environments for all learners.