



# Vancouver School District

## School Plan for Queen Elizabeth Annex

### Year 3 (2021) of 3 Year Plan, 2018-2021

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## 1. GENERAL SCHOOL STORY:

- Queen Elizabeth Annex (QEA) is a single-track French Immersion school serving 68 students from Kindergarten to Grade 3. We are located on the West side of Vancouver, on the very edge of Pacific Spirit Park, on the unceded Musqueam lands. We are the Annex to Jules-Quesnel, our main school.
- Our code of conduct is: “I take care of myself, I take care of others, I take care of my environment.”
- The small scale of this school and its access to outdoors are highly valued by the community and are seen as an asset
- At QEA, parents are welcomed partners in their children’s educational development and our parent community contributes significantly to our school culture. Many parents share their passion and expertise. Through PAC and/or school sponsorship, our students are offered a variety of activities to enhance the curriculum such as our learning garden,.
- QEA is following the Action School model of daily exercise for better learning. Our students in grades 1-3 start each school day outside, playing cooperative games as a whole school for 20-25 minutes.
- Kindergarten students join in with Action School in the Spring, once they are settled into the school routine and are more secure interacting with the large group.
- There is a strong outdoor component to learning at our school. We have an active gardening program where the teachers share the various garden boxes to learn about plant life and food production. Having access to Pacific Spirit park, classes regularly go on walks, collect samples and are given the opportunity to observe and ask questions.

## 2. WHAT DID WE SEE?

The students at Queen Elizabeth Annex see the adults in the building as helpful to support them academically, socially and emotionally. They have been using and referring to techniques taught and practised in the classroom to help with social troubles both in class and out on the playground. The school has adopted a common language and framework to develop a common understanding of social expectations and problem solving. Over the course of this school growth plan, the school had tried different SEL programs and had found Second Step to be the best choice for our situation.

Teachers have employed talking circles on a more regular basis to help solve social problems. Instead of a student simply being told how to behave, this has given them the opportunity to have their feelings and thoughts heard by adults and their peers. With careful adult facilitation, and with adult supervised rebuilding activities, QEA has seen success in minimizing longer-term social issues. These circles have helped students build empathy for one another and also see how working towards a common goal rather than taking an adversarial stance has been beneficial for their happiness at school.

Every classroom has employed some form of mindfulness in to their regular routine. Across the classrooms this can vary from breathing exercises to calming practices to using the sound of a chime to focus the mind and the body to guided meditation to taking quiet moments on the weekly forest walks. Although mindfulness looks different from classroom to classroom, the students respond to it similarly. Teachers have reported that students are more calm, focused and ready to learn after participating in one of these exercises. These techniques have also been successful during the aforementioned talking circles as a way to ease tensions before expressing feelings.

Students have begun to learn about basic brain physiology to help make sense of their feelings and reactions to stress and conflict. Teachers are beginning to refer back to these concepts when students are agitated in an effort to help them understand that the physiological and emotional effects of their heightened state will soon pass so that the problem can then be properly addressed calmly.

During this pandemic time, we have taken the approach that our entire society is experiencing a long-term traumatic event. Our staff has learned to see the context of student and adult emotions and respond with a trauma-informed approach. With fear around us, we needed to find calmness from within and model it to students. Staff have also learned how to adjust their expectations, how to modify their teaching to fit in this context with the students and staff's safety at the forefront. This has not been an easy task, however, and has been effortful and worthwhile for everyone involved. This year, more than any other, we have been able to share from the heart with our students, to listen to our own emotions and to be able to react with empathy and compassion when listening to our learners' needs.

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### 3. WERE WE SUCCESSFUL?

Much of our focus on empathy and emotions has been for the purpose of reducing playground and in-class peer conflicts. Whereas incidents of conflict frequently feature varying levels of involvement by individual students, teachers worked with their entire classes so that all students can better understand others' and their own needs and see how different strategies can either escalate or de-escalate them.

Using these strategies, we have been successful in reducing the number of incidents of conflict both in and out of the classroom. We have seen friendships and bonds created in students who previously may have had difficulty finding common ground. In interviews with students and staff, the most credited approach was the guided talking circles with a follow-up collaborative activity.

Teachers have also reported seeing a noticeable difference after employing a mindfulness exercise after a transition. Over the course of the each year, students show more buy-in as they see the benefits of these exercises and grow to enjoy participating in them.

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### 3. HOW HAVE WE SHARED?

We have shared what is going on in our school via regular newsletters and by teachers sharing their practices and learning highlights with the QEA community. As this was a particularly difficult year to give families a sense of what is happening inside the school, teachers and the office have put an emphasis on sharing photos and videos with families to offer a window into a building that health regulations have not allowed them to experience in person.

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### 4. WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

Looking forward, we will be transitioning our goal by building on Social-Emotional Learning skills that our students have gained to be able to approach their learning from an inquiry perspective.

Teachers have remarked on an increased level of participation and engagement in their students when they are given an element of choice to pursue topics and strands that are of personal interest to them. These have ranged from personal interest projects to school-wide presentations of family culture. Teachers have been able to build skills and capacities around these activities and as a school we look to better this approach for a deeper sense of learning.

As adult and children learning is symmetrical, we look to also examine our own practice through the model of *Spirals of Inquiry*. To best align our common language and approach, we plan on holding regular meetings where staff can share their successes and challenges and develop a common framework.



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

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

With the restrictions in place due to provincial health orders, we were not able to parter with the Musqueum community as we have in the past. Instead, we turned our focus inward to examine our practice in the school. Staff was moved by the stories and approaches presented at the District-wide Indigenous and BIPOC Pro-D. From the rich discussions held as a staff, we established a rotating schedule of anit-racism collaboration. Staff were all bought a copy of Ibrim X. Kendi's *How to be an Anti-Racist* and used some of this time to develop and review resources, educate themselves and better align our teaching with Vancouver and Canada's diversity. The library expanded its collection of books by Indigenous authors and publishers. These books were given a more prominent display and teachers have been regularly featuring them in their classrooms.

Teachers have also further incorporated First Nations history and culture into their teaching practice. This includes, but is not limited to, math games, art projects and rich and heavy discussion about the residential school system and its generational effects.

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

QEA plans on continuing our journey in Anti-Racism by continuing our discussions and teaching practices to raise Anti-Racist students. The school is partnering with the PAC to participate in a workshop to align district language with community understanding of the issues.

Going forward, we hope to rebuild our connections to Musqueum community so that our students can experience and learn more about the culture directly from those who live it.