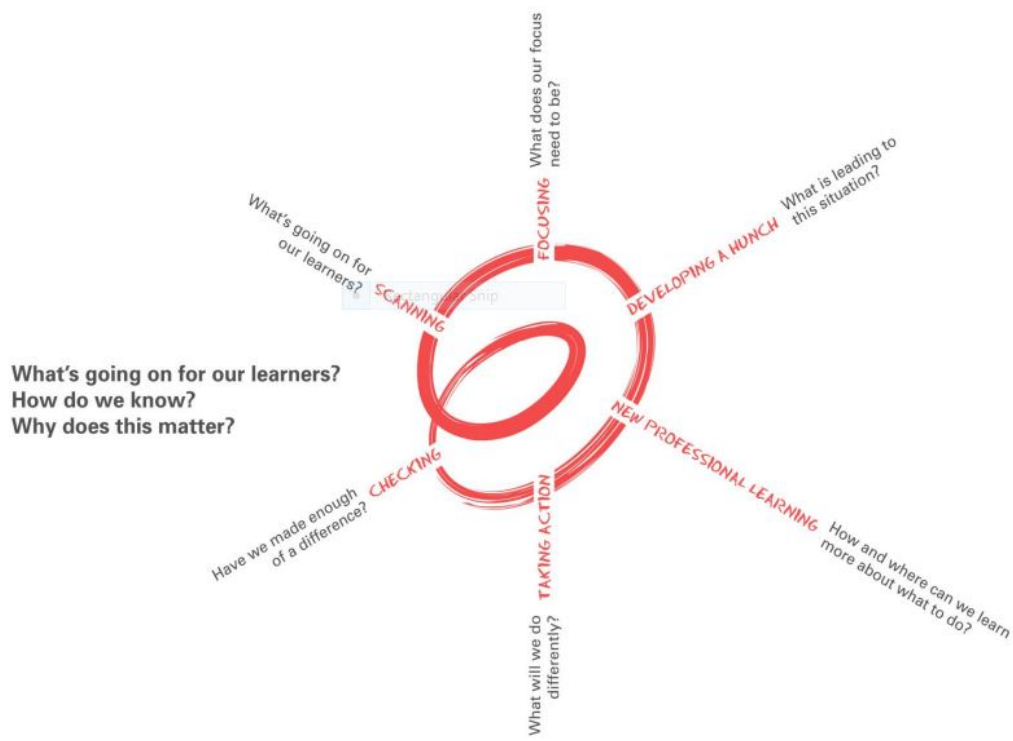


SCHOOL GROWTH PLAN – INQUIRY MODEL

Phoenix Elementary School- Growth Plan 2016/2017



***Based on the book by Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser:
"Spirals of Inquiry for equity and quality"**



SCHOOL CONTEXT

Phoenix Elementary School is a K-8, BC public school located on Salt Spring Island, BC. The school is situated on 15 acres of natural forest, across from Mouat Park and down the road from downtown Ganges. This beautiful location enables our students to utilize the natural world in their everyday learning experiences and explorations.

The outside environment (including our viable and productive community garden) is utilized as an outdoor classroom/ gymnasium for physical education and place-based learning and exploration. As part of the Gulf Islands School District 64, students of Phoenix Elementary not only develop foundational skills and core competencies (the BC curriculum) but also pursue their curiosities and various interests for personalized, inquiry-based learning. The First Peoples Principles of Learning guide our beliefs and principles in our teaching and learning approaches to support the individual and the community.

We are a small school with 3 class configurations - K-Gr.3; Gr. 4-8; K-Gr.8 Home Learning Partners (home-learning). The multi-age configurations provide opportunities for students to benefit from collaborative interaction and to contribute positively to others' learning experiences. As a family/community oriented school, strong parent support and participation enhances and enriches the learning experience of all students. Our teachers, education assistants, administrative staff and PAC work closely with all stakeholders to maintain strong connections and volunteer opportunities to enhance the learning experiences for our students. This connection enables our school, for example, to run a weekly hot lunch program throughout the year and multiple explorations each term. This learning "ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors" (First Peoples Principles of Learning).

Vision and Values:

All members of the Phoenix Learning Community strive to work together to help individuals reach their fullest potential. Everyone is treated with respect and dignity, focusing on the school's expected guidelines for Self, Others, and Environment (Phoenix Elementary- Bill of Rights and Responsibilities):

- **BE RESPECTFUL:** Treat others the way you would like to be treated.
- **BE RESPONSIBLE:** Know, as a responsible person, what to do and carry it out, or be willing to learn and cooperate with a good attitude.
- **BE SAFE:** Find appropriate solutions and alternatives to problems.

(Phoenix Elementary School - Code of Conduct)

<p>SCANNING “What’s going on for our learners?”</p>	<p>The staff utilized various assessments [DART, DMA, EPRA, PM Benchmarks, BC Performance Standards, observations, individual student conferences (feedback/reflections), and parent meetings] to scan and gather data to inform our areas of focus for the year.</p> <p>Phoenix Elementary has a diverse student population. Our students exhibit some of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keeness to learn, try new ways, high level of interest in various areas. - Diverse learning styles, abilities and needs, use of technology for learning. - Staggering differences in backgrounds (family, socio-economic, cultural) - A number of students are experiencing various challenging situations outside of school. <p>Throughout the district, we are noticing that a growing number of our students are afflicted with varying degrees of anxiety, some accompanied by low self-esteem/lack of self-confidence. This impacts their learning: ability to do cognitive tasks; ability to develop positive peer-relationships; develop a sense of belonging; and a feeling of general wellness. We recognize the need for continued support in self-regulation and social/emotional support in the classroom and during whole school activities.</p> <p>Our data revealed that a significant number of our students are having challenges with written output (quantity and quality). Attention is needed in general understanding of sentence structure, punctuation and descriptive language. Their ability to convey their understanding/knowledge through their writing is becoming a “road-block” for a significant number of our students, especially in the mid-intermediate grades. In conjunction with the writing challenges, some of our students have challenges accessing grade-level materials as struggling readers. Accessing and reading materials that are relevant and are of interest to them have been difficult.</p>
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FOCUS

“What does our focus need to be?”

Areas of focus: mental wellness and literacy skills

Based on our scanning of our student population, we have determined that the two areas of focus will continue to be on mental wellness and literacy development.

A). Incorporate a daily practice to prepare students and to create the conditions for optimal learning:

- **Schedule - first block of each day for mindfulness/ meditation, yoga or, PFFL to start the day.**
- **Integrate “body-breaks” throughout the day.**
- **Provide options for students select body-break activities when required.**

Engaging in basic brain/body development and function for older students will help develop an awareness of the role of brain health, neuroplasticity and its relationship to learning, emotional regulation and social engagement.

In the younger students, this will support integrating reflexes and developing lower brain centres which will enhance their ability for executive functioning and higher brain functions (such as learning to read, write, do math, form caring relationships, and regulate emotions).

B). Put in place direct supports (instruction, assistive tools, strategies, common language) to support students in literacy (reading/writing):

- **Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create texts for a variety of purposes and audiences Use language in creative and playful ways to develop style.**
- **Use technology (iPads) to support the students in the way they access, engage and express their learning.**
- **Develop foundational skills through relevant, meaningful activities (incorporate strategies for social/emotional needs to support learning).**
- **Create smaller literacy/numeracy groups (Elements groups - Earth, Wind, and Fire) to create a safer, more intimate learning environment for whole school literacy/ numeracy time (full mornings/4 times/week).**
- **Use the assessment results (DMA, DART, EPRA, PM Benchmarks) to inform our practice: what do we need to focus on? Where are the challenges, strengths of individuals/collective? Where do we go from here...what do we need to do?**

<p>HUNCH</p> <p>“What factors are leading to the situation?”</p> <p>“How are we contributing to it?”</p>	<p>Mental wellness: We recognize that these days, everyone leads frenetic lifestyles. The “busyness” of family, work, and school makes it challenging for students, parents and staff to slow things down, to ground ourselves and “settle” our minds and bodies. This makes it difficult to fully attend to, fully listen to what is happening at the present moment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What will happen if we schedule a whole school activity that focuses on mindfulness, settling/grounding our minds and bodies (eg. Meditation, yoga, etc.) or body movement activities (engaging our brain centres/body movements)? - Will this activating of the mind-body connection enable students to better engage in learning, resulting in greater gains in higher brain functioning? <p>Literacy skills development: We recognize that there exists challenges in engagement (disengagement) due to “barriers” for a number of our students who are unable to access relevant and meaningful curriculum and have challenges conveying their understanding/learning through writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would happens if we focused on being more explicit in our teaching (best practice) and in sharing learning intentions? - Would more dedicated time, more Teacher-Student contact in class support greater skills acquisition? - Would this allow for more opportunities for meaningful, descriptive feedback to affect skills development?
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LEARNING

“How and where can we learn more about what to do?”

Through consultation with school and district staff and through various professional development opportunities (workshops, webinars, resources), we are developing our capacity to better support our students in these areas of mental wellness and literacy development.

Professional Opportunities:

- Mindfulness practice
- Yoga practice
- Physical Foundations for Learning movement program
- Technology workshops - as instructional tools and learning tools

Additional supports from:

- District staff (OT, PT, SLP, Counselor, School Psychologist, Integration teacher, curriculum coordinators)
- District inquiry groups - writing, early literacy in-service,

Community members:

- ArtStart (Body Movement, Yoga, Zumba)

Project-based teaching:

- Garden studies
- Student generated, school newsletter
- School year book
- Individual inquiry projects

Resources/Website/Webinars:

- UDL
- Self-Regulation
- POPFASD
- SETBC
- Growth Mindset
- Neuroplasticity

TAKING ACTION

“What will we do differently?”

“With what and how?”

Innovative scheduling and reconfiguration of classes:

As a school, we have changed the schedule to reflect the importance of the essential learning times for all students:

- **4 full mornings of dedicated (uninterrupted) time for whole school literacy/numeracy blocks (no scheduling of any other activities during this time).**
- **30 minutes at the beginning of each day for whole school mindfulness/meditative practice and/or body movement sessions to engage and activate the brain centres for the essential learning times.**

Along with the scheduling changes, we have reorganized our classes (Primary class and Intermediate class) and created 3 smaller groups (Elements groupings) for the essential learning times. These are fluid groupings based on abilities (with social/emotional consideration). To move away from the “grade” assignments and towards developmental stages, we have coined the 3 groups, Elements groups: Earth, Wind and Fire.

- **Smaller groupings for more Teacher-Student contact.**
- **Greater opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of each student’s needs, strengths, interests, passions.**
- **Greater opportunity to personalize each student’s learning (using assistive technology to support or extend their learning).**
- **An opportunity to provide the most effective Tier 1 supports (under the UDL framework); using assistive technology to accommodate, personalize or enrich learning opportunities.**

We have experienced the incredible impact assistive technology has had on students for supporting and/or extending their learning. A number of students (designated and non-designated) have exceptional reading and writing challenges. Because of these challenges, many are unable to access grade-level curriculum or utilize curriculum content from various sources independently. Written output and writing quality continues to be a challenge, unfortunately, for too many of our students. Their challenges in writing hinders their abilities to represent their understanding in a meaningful and accurate way. We intend to continue to incorporate technology into our instruction to engage our students in multiple ways and make the curriculum accessible to all students at various developmental stages. We will utilize technology as a tool to support our students in developing their writing skills; experiencing an enjoyment in writing; and engaging in independent and collaborative writing process. We hope to use a variety of iPad built-in assistive feature (text to speech, speech to text, dictation, word prediction) and various apps such as Book Creator, Explain Everything, iMovie, Photos, Pages, Keynote, Newsela, QR Codes to allow students to explore a variety of creative ways of accessing and representing learning.

<p>CHECKING</p> <p>“Have we made <i>enough</i> of a difference?”</p>	<p>How do we know if we have have enough of a difference?</p> <p>Student feedback Student reflections/self-assessments</p> <p>Teacher feedback Teacher reflections/self-assessments</p> <p>Parent feedback/comments Parent reflections</p> <p>Assessment results Whole school writes Reporting data (student-led conferences, e-portfolio, etc.) Observations</p>
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<p>CONNECTIONS</p> <p>“How are we part of a bigger whole?”</p>	<p>Our approaches to better support students are aligned with the BC Redesigned Curriculum and Gulf Islands SD64 district goals. Our beliefs and principles in our teaching and learning approaches to support the individual and the community reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning.</p>
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<p>Summary of Inquiry Question:</p> <p>How will incorporating a daily practice of mindfulness/ meditation and/or body movements impact students’ mental well-being and learning development?</p> <p>How will changing the structures for essential learning times impact student achievement?</p>
