



REPORT

Recognition of Excellence

Donald Young School Attendance Project

Rainy River District School Board

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Date: March 5, 2024
To: Rainy River District School Board of Trustees
From: Serena Maharaj, Principal of Donald Young School
Melanie Williams, Vice Principal of Donald Young School
Recommendations: *This report is for information only.*

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- Our students and staff experience a sense of belonging in safe, caring environments that will encourage their well-being and mental health.
- We build supportive relationships with students to deliver equitable and inclusive learning experiences.
- We work with families, partners, and communities in mutually respectful and productive relationships to enhance the success of all students.

Donald Young School believes that regular attendance fosters a sense of belonging that contributes to students' overall well-being. When students feel safe and cared for, they are more accessible to learning, thus improving their overall success, achievement, and educational experience.

CONTEXT

Providing educational opportunities that promote student achievement and well-being is a priority at Donald Young School. Improving student attendance rates has been an area of focus over the past few years with our school piloting an attendance project research study. Last year, the study focused on attendance rates in students from Grades 3 through 6. Students were selected based on 80% to 90% attendance in November 2022. Educators participated in ten professional development modules, with live calls, offering strategies for developing more positive, genuine, and professional relationships among students and staff. The findings from the study included:

- Fifteen students had an attendance percentage between 80% and 90% during November 2022.
- By May 2023, three of the 15 students were no longer enrolled at DYS; 1 student was added with 86% attendance.
- Comparison of November and May data revealed that ten of 12 students had decreased attendance by an average of 8.5%.
- No statistical significance was observed with attendance percentages that increased.
- Educators who participated in the study found an increase in being more mindful of making genuine connections with students and having intentional conversations.

These findings piqued our interest in pursuing the next phase of this project.

SUMMARY

The attendance project continues with our school as a pilot school for the 2023-2024 academic year, looking at attendance rates among students in Junior Kindergarten through Grade 2. Educators and the Youth Outreach Worker will be completing 5 modules, with live calls of professional development focusing on strategies to foster

positive relationships with students and parents. In November 2023, attendance rates were calculated for these students, with 8 students determined to be within 60% to 80% attendance. Based on parent feedback, we modified how attendance information was communicated, and implemented a more general platform.

Although this study is ongoing, we are realizing gains and have been able to apply effective attendance improvement initiatives developed through feedback from staff who participated in the first phase of the project. Although many additional initiatives were suggested, our focus has been on establishing the Playground Activity Leaders in Schools (PALS) program, school spirit days, parent engagement events in the community, and the DYS Cooking Club.

Originally stemming from unclaimed healthy food bags provided through our partnership with the Northwestern Health Unit, the DYS Cooking Club is particularly interesting. Not wanting to waste the food, our Autism Support Worker and Youth Outreach Worker selected students they felt could benefit from experiential skills to form the cooking group. This slowly evolved into weekly cooking sessions featuring recipes aligned with the Nutrition on Weekends (NOW) program weekly ingredients. The Cooking Club now includes students who require attendance incentives.

Our goal is to improve JK through Grade 2 attendance through continued efforts focusing on developing and building relationships with students and parents. We will continue to implement attendance initiatives that increase our students' sense of belonging, reinforcing their understanding that Donald Young School is a safe and caring learning environment.

ROUTING

Board of Trustees

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