



REPORT

Recognition of Excellence

***Celebrating Students' Strengths
North Star Community School***

Regular Board Meeting:
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RAINY RIVER DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Celebrating Students' Strengths North Star Community School

Every student has a strength! As educators, it's our job to create learning opportunities that allow students to demonstrate them. Three years ago, North Star Community School started to purposefully focus on students' strengths and adopted a "bucket filling philosophy" at the school. Simply stated, through our actions and words we can fill people's buckets or dip from them. When our bucket is full we feel optimistic, happy and resilient. When our bucket is empty we are less productive and negative. By recognizing students' strengths and providing them with opportunities to see strengths in their peers, the school helps to fill their buckets. Research shows that the most powerful effects of the school on achievement are climate in the classroom and peer influences. The hope is to create a community of caring within the school, so that each student can achieve to his/her highest potential.

Some of the activities implemented to support this initiative are:

- Lunch time clubs based on student's interests (Lego, skipping, volleyball, playground leaders);
- School-wide and classroom bucket filling boards;
- Morning announcements recognizing students' strengths;
- How to fill your bucket for kids book given to Early Learning Kindergarten registrants and read in every classroom.

Through the Tell them from Me Survey, students shared some thoughts on how bucket filling has impacted them.

- "It makes me feel happier."
- "It makes me work harder."
- "Bucket filling has helped me and other people at school try to be nicer to other people."

To continue to build on the strengths-based mindset, this year in their Professional Learning Communities, staff chose to explore teaching using an inquiry-based approach. This pedagogy provides students and educators with the opportunity to be co-learners. Students and educators pose questions about a problem or idea, and then brainstorm methods to answer the questions. Building on their peers' thinking, students work collaboratively to a solution to a larger problem. This framework creates opportunities for any student to be "the expert", to have a voice, and to share his/her knowledge with the class. By using this approach, teachers have observed students taking more responsibility to improve on their learning, asking more and better questions, collaborating more with their peers, and being risk takers.

As Marilyn vos Savant said, "*Success is achieved by developing our strengths, not by eliminating our weaknesses.*" It is this belief, that if each student feels valued and is given opportunities to have a voice in his/her learning, he/she is empowered to take risks, persevere through difficult problems, and become more resilient.