

2013-2014  
FNMI GRADE 12 STUDENT EXIT INTERVIEWS  
Wetaskiwin Composite High School  
June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Facilitated by:

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11 Students

Preamble

Students were informed this meeting was requested on the behalf of Dr. Shauna Bruno, Maskwacis Trustee for Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools. The purpose of the meeting was to learn from students what contributed to their successful completion of high school. Students were informed that this is a strategy outlined in the Wahkotowin Report, completed the past year. Students were informed that:

- seven out of ten overall students successfully complete high school on time (within three years of starting Grade 10) in Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools while only five in ten First Nations, Metis or Inuit students do;
- these are unacceptable results and the school district is committed to improving support of students;
- adults - student families and staff – are developing ideas and strategies to success at school and improve high school completion; and
- learning from successful students is vital.

Students were informed that their feedback would be reported back to the adults and it would be used to start conversations with younger students.

An unstructured open conversation occurred with the group of students. Students were asked to discuss what helped them successfully complete high school. Students were asked to elaborate on their responses. Statements were paraphrased to check for understanding. All students contributed to the conversation.

Summary of Student Feedback

1. Family support – Students overwhelmingly reported family support is a key to school success. Students value encouragement from their families.

In addition to encouragement, students said their families expected them to be successful. In one instance, a student said she was informed that if she did not attend class regularly that her parent would start accompanying her to school and classes. The student believed the parent would follow through. The student improved her attendance rather than be accompanied to class by a parent.

A concern was expressed that some students do not have supportive parents. The question asked was, "What can be done if the student does not have that support." Two suggestions were offered and seemed acceptable to the students. They were:

- Schools realize the importance of family support. If a parent is unavailable or unable to provide that support, schools should be willing to work with whichever family or community member that the student identifies as supportive.
  - Many schools have hired staff who have a specific responsibility to offer encouragement and support balanced with high expectations to work with students and their families. These positions can take on a greater role when students are not experiencing sufficient family support.
2. Supportive Teachers – students reported the importance of supportive and encouraging teachers. They are essential to student success.

When asked to describe a supportive or encouraging teacher, students commented:

- "They don't just write on the board."
  - I know they're supportive based on how they interact with us – whether or not it's in class or doing something else with us in the school.
  - When a teacher takes time after a class to discuss things, it shows they care how we're doing.
  - It's not just caring teachers. Sometimes teacher's aides "can help better" than the teachers to complete school work.
3. Qualities of Successful Students – Student comments revealed qualities and attributes about themselves that contributed to their success.
- Successful students believe in themselves.
  - Students need to believe high school will lead to something better. Without that belief, there would not be enough motivation to complete high school.
  - It is very important to have a specific goal. A specific goal provides the focus and motivation to complete high school.
  - Friends at school are important. While friends are important, one student commented, "It's not just that friends are important...it's the right friends." The right friends are students who want to be successful at school and act in successful ways i.e., attending regularly, completing school work, being prepared.... Students were informed that this is sometimes referred to "as the power of association."
  - "Future stuff" makes a difference. Future stuff includes practices like visiting colleges and post-secondary schools to make students aware of possibilities.
4. Student motivation – The desire to provide support to students needs to take into consideration what students find motivating or, in some instances, not motivating. Comments were made with regards to holding high expectations of students.
- "Just do better, that's not motivating."
  - Students agreed it is important to be held to a high expectation of success. However, it was clearly stated that there needs to be a balance between "high expectations and the pressure they create." Students said pressure itself is not motivating and that they require support and encouragement.

5. Culture – With reference to the Wahkotowin Report, students were informed that parents, families and community members believed it is important that schools recognize and value aboriginal culture, and specifically that of the Plains Cree People living in the Maskwacis Territory. Students were informed that there are concerns about racism in the schools.

Students responded that schools need to focus on supporting the culture and race of all students – Aboriginal students and students from all nationalities. They commented that in order to successfully address matters related to aboriginal culture and racism it will be necessary to “talk to more than just the native kids.”

Students said that “more research is needed.” It needs to be understood what students want and need. However, it also needs to be clear what students do not want in order for schools to be “better for all kids.”

Students advised that however things proceed, that they do not appreciate being “singled out” as Aboriginal students for attending meetings or being asked questions – like today’s meeting.

Finally, students stated that schools need to be more aware of offensive and hurtful language in textbooks and print resources or comments made by teachers. They provide two examples of particular note:

- In a high school textbook, students reported that aboriginal people are referred to as “savages”.
- What they learned about “treaties” is that is how “natives got put on reserves.”