

CONVERSATION GUIDE

Whole School Approach

Part 2: Strategies and practices to support a whole school approach

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Boyle Street Education Centre, a charter school in Edmonton, offers examples of how a whole school approach to engaging and supporting students can make a positive difference, especially for students who have experienced serious interruptions in their learning.

Key understandings:

- A whole school approach facilitates the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual growth of students, particularly those who have experienced interruptions in their learning.
- Socio-emotional factors such as mental health challenges, racism, abuse, extended periods of unstable housing and other traumas can substantially inhibit the success of the young people that experience them.
- A whole school approach is culturally responsive. For example, Boyle Street Education Centre works to ensure the prevailing cultural heritage of its First Nations students is the foundation for the educational experience. This means the learning environment and opportunities available in the school are set within a context of celebrating the origins of each learner, as these are inextricably part of their experience.
- In a whole school approach staff members develop programming that engages students' interest, celebrates students' successes, and eliminates barriers to participation and learning.
- Instructional planning begins with the students and their needs and interests. Programs are developed to not only meet the needs of the curriculum but also to meet the specific needs of the individual learner.
- Conversation is an important tool in a whole school approach. New students need to be engaged in intensive conversations to explore what they are dealing with in their life and what they are hoping to achieve. The goal is to design a program that is based on the student's strengths, along with the supports that are needed for the student to be successful.
- Students have a role in designing their timetable, based on the classes they want, that are necessary, and that are a challenge. The optimum class time is one hour—based on students' ability to focus and concentrate.
- School staff recognize that to attend and be present in the classroom, students need to be healthy at home, at school, and in the community. If a student is struggling emotionally or academically, school staff look for the appropriate supports to help them succeed.

Strategies and practices to support a whole school approach

Key understandings (cont.):

- School staff work to create an atmosphere of mutual respect, using a strength-based and relationship-based approach. For example, staff make an effort to greet students at the beginning of class as part of creating a welcoming and safe environment.
- A whole school approach often uses a mediation process for conflict resolution. This involves a conversation around what happened, why it happened, and how the student was feeling when it happened. Through this collaborative and restorative process both students and staff have an opportunity to grow and move forward.
- A whole school approach builds networks of support for students, often accessing expertise in the community. This includes accessing everything from student housing to food, legal supports or after-school care.
- One of the core beliefs of a whole school approach is that students can always begin again. A conversation or situation can be revisited, or the student can come back again and again until they succeed.
- There are many tools to support student achievement and create a strong sense of school community including wellness conferences, seminars and sharing circles.
- A whole school approach relies on teamwork and shared leadership.
- A whole school approach is data-informed and staff collects various types of data into student behaviour and services accessed. This data can be used in many ways, from identifying specific behaviour strategies to developing school-wide improvement plans.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- After watching this video, how would you define a whole school approach?
- What are some examples of how student interests can be used as a starting point for instruction and learning activities?
- What would it mean if students in your school or school authority had an opportunity to 'always begin again'? How would this change current thinking and practice about how students are supported?

For more information:

- Alberta Education's website provides information on a [whole school approach](#), and related information on [restorative practices](#).