



Individual Learning Centre Review Report November 2016

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School Principal: Blaise Shilleto, Team Leader

Date of Review: November 16-17, 2016

School Review Team:

Judy Arnold, Deputy Minister, Yukon Education

Simon Blakesley, Director, Student Achievement/System Accountability, Yukon Education

Lenora Minet, Education Support Worker, Teslin Tlingit Council

Benita Parkkari, Counsellor, F.H. Collins Secondary School

Greg Storey, Superintendent, Area 1, Yukon Education

Meetings with the School included:

- Students
- ILC Elder
- Teaching Staff
- Team Leader
- Substitute teacher
- Administrative assistant

School Context

Context:

The Individual Learning Center (ILC) is located at Suite 500, 4120-4th Ave. in downtown Whitehorse. The space is leased from Northern Vision Development. The ILC had 169 students on the register in 2015-2016 School Year, though this number frequently changes as enrollment is continuous throughout the year.

The ILC staff has classified 115 students as actively engaged and 54 as presently inactive. A disproportionate number of students who are enrolled at the ILC program have social, economic, emotional and/or demanding cognitive needs.

The ILC has undergone substantial changes since the 2012 review: the ILC has moved from Black Street to an updated, modern location designed to better meet the needs of students. A new Team Leader and further emphasis on the inclusion of First Nations experiential and on-the-land activities have expanded learning opportunities for students, supported attendance, and reinforced student relationships to the ILC.

Vision Statement

The Individual Learning Centre offers a multitude of programming choices for students of varying abilities and learning rates, through self-paced continuous courses, in a safe and respectful environment, while providing opportunity for graduation, lifelong learning, and good citizenship.

Philosophy

The unique relationships built between staff and students greatly contribute to the success of the students at the ILC. The number one philosophical goal for the ILC remains “to establish a relationship with every student and to continue to engage with this student”.

It takes a lot of courage for a student to re-engage in their educational journey and inquire about the possibility of completing high school. To support students who are continuing with their education, the ILC has adopted flexible hours, curriculum and module based programming allowing students to complete courses at their own pace.

The purpose of the Individual Learning Center is to re-engage students in an educational setting that provides the opportunity for each student to complete their high school graduation requirements. It is the philosophy of the staff, office administration, and team leader that every student who enters the ILC has the ability to complete their academic graduation requirements.

The mission of the ILC is to remove as many barriers as possible by creating an environment of acceptance, understanding and support allowing for academic achievement to follow. Due to the unique needs of our students, the Staff works beyond the traditional role of the classroom teacher in their duties. The importance of relationship building is reinforced through the quote: “If we do not establish a significant relationship with each and every student we will not have success.” (Bill Bennett, Team Leader ILC 2004-2015).

Who does the ILC serve?

The ILC’s mandate is to serve not only the disenfranchised learners who have demonstrated a lack of success in the traditional education system but to also provide a genuine academic alternative with flexibility and quality one-on-one instruction for all learners.

The majority of ILC students have dropped out of the regular school system, have had minimal success in completing academic course work within the traditional expectations and academic settings and in addition have had poor attendance throughout most of their formal schooling. There are also students who have engaged in the program to take a specific course for college entrance or to upgrade a single course for college entrance.

The ILC has identified the social and emotional well-being of students as the most important component to increasing their attendance and achieving their academic goals.

Norms and Culture:

Characteristics:

Continuously improving schools are socially and culturally inclusive with high expectations for each learner. A focus on continuous improvement is evident.

Observations of the Team:

- At the ILC the review team observed a safe, welcoming, flexible, and caring environment that is accepting of all students. The positive atmosphere is reinforced by the laughter, fun, and compassion that is clearly evident as the ILC staff help their students with the many facets of their lives
- The team heard and felt from many students that the ILC is a second home for them. Students are respected and supported in many ways in order to support their physical, cultural and emotional well-being. Programs and support are individualized and customized to meet the needs of each student. These views were supported by the ILC Elder, who observed that students are treated with respect and cared about by the ILC staff
- In relation to the above point, ILC staff commented that the new location has a more “business-like” tone or culture that is focused on learning. In support of this, the new location has more opportunity for students to “carve-out” individualized learning spaces for themselves
- Teamwork, collaboration, and personal and professional respect is clearly modelled by the staff, as is a willingness to experiment and “think outside the box”. All adults who work at the ILC bring a diversity of unique strengths and are role models for students through the manner in which they work together. Staff and students both reflected that the staff (and their dedication) are a central strength of the ILC
- The leadership model at the ILC can be best described as a distributed one, and based on a philosophy of servant leadership. The review team noted many examples where the team leader employs a collaborative, participatory, and shared leadership model that is focused on the growth and well-being of individuals. Staff greatly appreciate the team leader, who they see as a supportive, connected, caring, and communicative educational leader
- The team heard multiple times of the workload investment and the emotional nature of their work when working with students who may have endured significant trauma. Staff members identified that coping with and working through the challenges students face, at times, be difficult for them

- Multiple, varied efforts are made to reflect First Nations Language and Culture at the ILC. This is readily apparent in the student-created artwork displayed proudly, Elders visiting and beading with students, the introduction of on-the-land experiences (i.e. the upcoming Bison Hunt), and the inclusion of wild game in the meals shared with students. These activities are also used to weave and integrate culture into academic pursuits
- The importance of on the land and cultural activities was affirmed by the ILC Elder: their observation was that were it not for the efforts of the ILC staff to expand the range of experiential activities offered, some students may not get to experience on-the-land learning during their teenage years
- In the previous 2012 review, it was remarked that the ILC conveyed a “family feel”. During the 2016 review, the team heard that this ambiance could now be described as an “extended family feel”- a view supported by the ILC Elder- given the way that the ILC has grown in both size and the expanded ways in which learning is influenced and supported.
- In reference to the above observations, the team heard from students that the distinct characteristics and setting of the ILC serve to lower the strong feelings of anxiety and inattention elicited by the regular school environment which distract or obstruct learning for them
- Healthy food, food preparation, and the sharing of food together is an integral piece which forms a cornerstone to the supportive culture of the ILC

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue to utilize both ILC-situated and on-the-land experiences and hunting trips as a way to maintain and reinforce culture, language, and positive student attendance. Continue to seek ways in which academic credit may be received for participation in these activities
- Be cognizant of the staff’s well-being and identify supports that may be helpful to staff to look after themselves while concurrently working in an, at times, intense environment
- Seek resources that can help students to find skills/tools/connections to deal with the anxiety they experience in their lives and when returning to the mainstream school environment

- Explore approaches through which the vision, mission, and mandate of the ILC could be revisited given the expanded size, diversity of student needs, and range of learning services the ILC offers

School and Community

Characteristics: In continuously improving schools build a shared commitment to success for each learner. The school collaborates with parents, students, school council, First Nations and community to support student learning. Ongoing parent/community involvement is embedded in school culture and the school communicates about progress and challenges in multiple ways.

Observations of the Team:

- An interagency approach is clearly deployed in support of students at the ILC. Collaboration is ongoing with other educational allies and schools, health and wellness agencies, First Nations partners, and local businesses. These various organizations' resources are utilized by ILC staff in support of the ILC students to help ensure their success
- In order to expand learning opportunities for students, the ILC engages with the Canada Games Centre, Arts Underground, Splintered Craft, the Skookum Jim Centre, YuConstruct, Youth of Today Society, the Odd Job Squad, Kwanlin Coyotes, and others community allies. Traditional medicine, sewing, and beading workshops are also held every Thursday for students who wish to attend and learn more from local resources
- As a result of the various collaborations mentioned above, pathways of learning that lead to graduation are customized to meet the individual needs of each student. A flexible, open-minded approach to teaching, learning, and completion leading to post-secondary education and/or employment is clearly evident
- In order to “fit” both within the bounds of community agencies and the needs of students, the ILC employs open, flexible hours and arrangements to provide maximized access
- Some staff shared their perception that the ILC's connections to Yukon First Nations communities had, perhaps, diminished since the last review. This was suggested, in part, to be as a result of the previous, very well-connected team leader leaving the ILC in 2014
- The team heard that parent, grandparent, and extended family visitations to the ILC is on the increase, and that it is very positive for students to see this heightened level of support of their learning
- The endorsement of the Yukon Government's Integrated Supports for Yukon Youth (ISYY) by the staff was felt to be very strong. The team heard numerous times that this

new service centre was very helpful for providing an array of services for ILC students in an accessible manner

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue the efforts currently underway to locate and employ Elders in a ‘resident Elder’ model that sees Elders regularly and consistently attending the ILC in support and encouragement of students and their learning
- Continue the excellent efforts to work with and integrate community agencies/allies and their services in order to continue providing a web of support for ILC students
- Continue the dedicated, focused efforts to increase the quantity and quality of cultural and on-the-land activities for students as a means of fostering cultural connections and promote academic engagement and improve attendance at the ILC
- Given the ILC’s observation that linkages to First Nations resource-persons may have diminished due to the loss of staff with connections, seek ways to foster increased connections and foster renewed relationships with First Nations allies

School Organization

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools organize structures, actions, and interventions to ensure success for each learner. Work in the school is coherent and aligned to focus on improvement. Actions and interventions include effectively differentiating resources, time and professional development to get results. The Department supports the school and makes connections across the Territory to build capacity.

Observations of the Team:

- In order to meet student needs and foster success, the ILC builds a customized learning plan for each student that ensures they are on the path to graduation and know what courses are required to successfully graduate with a high school diploma
- The staff at the ILC organize in innovative ways to support student success. As one example, the team heard that a Math Camp was recently held at cabins outside of Whitehorse. This created an environment where students were immersed in Math for many hours without distraction and were able to complete major portions (or all) of a Math course. Both students and staff identified this to be an excellent learning approach that may lend itself well to other subjects in future

- The new location and space at the ILC has been capitalized upon in ways that respond to the 2012 school review. For example, a work-out and gym space has been created which appears appreciated and well-utilized. Students can develop fitness plans and use their time in the weight room to earn Physical Education credits
- In order to meet the personal needs of students, a washer, dryer, and shower space has been created for staff and students' use. The team heard that having this facility is greatly appreciated by all who wish to use it
- Students shared with the team that the organization of the ILC contributes to their success. The open nature of the ILC, the modular curriculum materials, and the ability to learn at your own pace were identified by students as strengths. Student perceptions of peer pressure were felt to be lower, with less 'drama' or an 'edge' to the learning atmosphere when compared to the mainstream high school environment
- Some students shared with the team that the ILC could benefit from having behavioural guidelines for students that would help preserve the positive learning atmosphere and limit distractions created by some students
- To assist some students with organization, the ILC is starting to offer some set classes or learning blocks that offer a mini-focus session for some subjects while still striving to offer a 1:1 delivery model for students who require it
- In order to assist with student intake and provide more structure/boundaries for students considering leaving high school to attend the ILC, the ILC is reviewing the possibility and implications of moving to four to six defined student intake dates during the year rather than the current ongoing enrollment model
- As a result of being more responsive with scheduling, the review team heard of the success of the ILC being open during spring break to allow students to continue with their learning rather than having to stop for two weeks
- Related to space utilization, the team heard that staff work hard in the attempt to match learning activities and student learning styles to spaces currently available. For example, some students who require quiet spaces in which to study and do their work may be in the main room at the same time as there may be an active learning session (e.g. cooking) underway
- The Team heard clearly from ILC staff members and the ILC Elder that they are approaching a point where student registrations at the ILC is becoming an issue and there

are concerns about the ability to meet student needs in the future. This was explained in two ways:

- The numbers of students wishing to enrol is increasing
- The average age of the students wishing to enrol is decreasing

A situation is thus emerging where staff spend a disproportionate amount of time assisting younger 15-16 year-old students who are less able to self-control, focus, work independently, and need reminders regarding appropriate behaviour. Low organization skills in an environment where there is less structure than in the mainstream school setting appears problematic

- In relation to size and accessibility, the team also heard that students in the 20-50 age range are coming to the ILC to explore options in light of access to college-situated upgrading being limited
- The team heard that the transition to the new building has been a successful one overall. Many positives were shared with regards to how the new space facilitates learning. This said, as a result of the aforementioned factors increasing the ILC's enrolment and attendance, the size and capacity of the new building to meet both present and future needs has surfaced again, as it did at during the 2012 ILC review at the Black Street location
- An addition of teaching staff was suggested as required by current staff, based on the increase of student numbers and enlargement of their learning needs

Recommendations for moving forward:

- With the Area Superintendent, review the utilization of the currently leased space to ensure that usage is optimized in support of student learning. Given the diversity of learning styles, increasing enrolment, and the changing student population, review whether the current location appears suited to meet the evolving needs of the ILC
- Continue to seek additional avenues of support from community agencies for vulnerable students with respect to physical, mental, and sexual health issues
- As a staff, discuss the behavioural expectations that may need to be communicated to younger students in order to maintain the integrity of a learning environment where distractions are minimized and student focus is promoted

- Discuss with the other Whitehorse high schools the ramifications of having four to six defined ILC entry intakes throughout the school year
- Discuss with the Area Superintendent the opportunity for the ILC team leader to attend the “Tri-high” meetings in order to continue strengthening connections to the other Whitehorse high schools and share the ILCs contributions to supporting high school students to graduate
- Develop in September a profile for the previous school year that displays the number of course completions and graduations as a means to show the successes of the ILC and assist in justifying/advocating staffing needs

School Processes and Progress

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools take responsibility for improving outcomes for students. They use evidence to guide decisions and actions and have processes in place to collectively monitor progress and make adjustments in key areas of their work. They demonstrate improvement over time – for individual students, groups of students, and the school.

Observations of the Team:

- The review team heard that ILC staff are tracking attendance, course completions, and graduation rates for their students, understanding that the instructional model may not align particularly well with the current student information system at its present stage of implementation
- With respect to attendance, the ILC has made a concerted effort to create activities which promote student attendance over the longer term. These include accessing the Victoria Gold Every Student Every Day Attendance initiative fund to support engaging on-the-land and experiential activities for students
- The above activities are clearly aligned with and in support of the attendance goal specified in the ILC’s School Growth Plan. As a result, daily attendance is growing and at times can reach 50 students per day
- In order to learn more about their students, the team heard that ILC staff are exploring the deployment of an intake and semester-end survey for students
- The staff at the ILC take an approach to assessment and evaluation that is on-going, open-ended, and reflects where a student is currently “at” in their path to graduation

- In support of students, the ILC has strengthened connections with the high schools in Whitehorse and their counsellors in order to better communicate regarding students and their well-being and academic success. Since the last review, the team heard that cross-enrolling of students has now been instituted to help students complete their graduation program
- During meetings with the School Growth Planning team and individual staff members, it was clearly evident to the review team that the ILC staff think beyond themselves and what they do as they strive to examine and understand the underlying factors that result in students opting out of attending mainstream schools and attending the ILC. This reflection is done not as an abstract activity but as a means to pragmatically identify causal factors and their effects, and to develop strategies to address them
- The ILC counsellor conducts a “two-minute sweep” each day in order to be attuned and responsive to the level of social-emotional well-being and the needs of students. The team felt that this was an important strategy given the number of students who shared with the team that anxiety was of concern to them
- The team heard clearly that the current Proactive curriculum, while highly beneficial to students given its modular, paper-based format, is becoming outdated. ILC staff wish to keep the modular format but would like to find an updated resource to offer students

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Explore ways in which continued supports/workshops/tools might be made available to assist students cope with and overcome the strong feelings of anxiety that they may be dealing with in their lives
- Continue the work collecting and analyzing data/evidence already being done to help articulate and communicate the successes of the ILC, such as the aforementioned development of a profile each September based on the previous year
- As a staff, work to develop a small number of foundational behavioural guidelines/expectations for student behavior that can be clearly communicated to new students. Consider including students in this work in order to ensure that these are adopted by the ILC student community as their own guidelines

In conclusion

The Review Team enjoyed and appreciated its visitation to the ILC. It was a pleasure to observe how the ILC has adapted and grown into its new location and crafted a new environment that is supportive of student learning and well-being. With the move has come new opportunities to take positive elements from the former ILC location and further build upon previous successes.

The pride in the ILC on the part of staff and students was abundantly obvious to the team. In the words of one Grade 11 student, “Were it not for the ILC, I wouldn’t be going to school”.

With respect to learning more about the many achievement of the ILC, the Team became cognizant of additional outcomes accompanying the successes realized to date. An enhanced reputation of the ILC since the last review, combined with the effects of an increased focus on attendance has resulted in burgeoning student numbers and a widening age-range of students that extends both downwards and upwards.

On these points, the team wondered the extent to which the ILC’s dedicated and positive efforts to help student achieve success were drivers of the growth now being observed. Paraphrasing one staff member, the ILC has now grown from a family to an “extended family”.

Given this expansion, the review team concurs with the reflections of the staff that after 13 years in operation, the ILC is at an appropriate point in its history where the vision, mission, and mandate of the Centre is due for re-visitation and review. This should not be done by the ILC alone, and would be an important exercise to ensure maintenance of current strengths while charting a defined course for the future.

Practices to share

- The Math Camp approach which sees students going to a remote site and completely immersing themselves in an academic subject in order to complete a substantial portion of the course. This is an approach which could potentially be applied to other academic subjects
- The culture of thoughtful experimentation that exists at the ILC resulting in innovative approaches
- The open, flexible learning environment that promotes overcoming barriers and promotes student success
- The integrated, collaborative approach taken with community agencies to support student learning and well-being

Considerations for Yukon Education

- Work with the City of Whitehorse to more clearly define and identify clear crosswalks, school speed zones and parking areas in order to ensure student safety. The team heard that there have been numerous “near-misses” between students and vehicles
- Related to the above, support the ILC with the installation of a bike rack near the front entrance
- Review with Property Management and the ILC team leader the outstanding issues with heating and temperature, ventilation, and plumbing with an emphasis on finding resolutions to these problems
- Commission the removal of the sign from the old ILC and have the new ILC location clearly identified by modern, appropriate signage
- Designate a smoking area for students that is accessible and helps the ILC to be a good neighbour. A design consideration could be the smoking sheds utilized in the Yukon College parking lot
- Re-assess the current effectiveness of use of the leased space with future programming and purpose in mind
- Re-visit the pre-existing ILC advisory committee structure and composition as a means of guiding and informing future growth and directions of the ILC