

Report on ISD Hutterian Schools Improvement Planning Goals for 2015-16

Every year, the ISD Hutterian Schools come together to create a School Improvement Plan that will help staff focus on specific ways to improve student achievement. Our plan for 2015-16 has four areas of focus, all of which match the ISD Divisional Strategic Plan goals. The following outlines what our Hutterian Schools were focused on over the past year. The results represent statistics for all 243 ISD Hutterian students. Individual school's results may differ somewhat from those reported below, but it is very difficult to collect data for very small groups. For that reason, growth is measured for the group as a whole.

Literacy

We created literacy goals for students in grades 3-10 that targeted literacy growth, specifically in the areas of reading comprehension and critical thinking. Similar to last year, we chose strategies that would help students become better readers and, more importantly, better at understanding and communicating what they have read. These strategies addressed what we saw as the students' continuing struggle to making meaning and draw connections while reading, especially when they are faced with non-fiction texts.

Throughout the year, student performance on the RAD assessment of reading comprehension has grown significantly, making a gain from an average score of 1.86 out of 4, to 2.5 out of 4. Our SMART goal was to see an increase of 5% in the number of students receiving a 3 or 4 in the categories of communication and critical thinking. While we have not seen an increase equal to 5%, we have seen growth in our students and in our grading practices. We will continue with this goal next year, as teachers continue to implement the Optimal Learning Model to better support student literacy across the subject areas, and will intensify our focus on the reading and understanding of non-fiction text in all grades.

Numeracy

Our numeracy goals for students in grades 3-10 targeted improvement in student mathematical understanding, thinking, application and communication, and developing student confidence as math learners. This goal was a response to teachers identifying that our students have difficulty explaining mathematical thinking and applying isolated learning of skills to problem solving. We wanted to foster the use of language in math and make a shift from skill-based instruction to problem-based instruction. The importance of orally explaining math thinking and learning to listen thoughtfully to others' thinking were also changes to instructional practice this year. We have also identified that many students view themselves as being "not good at math", which is affecting effort and achievement. By teaching growth mindset principles and modelling good feedback and self-assessment practices, we have seen gains in our students' attitudes about themselves as math learners. While our goal of seeing a 5% increase in the number of 3s and 4s in all numeracy report card categories was not met at the grade 3-8 levels, our high school students showed substantial growth, with almost 60% of students achieving 70% or higher in grade 9 and 10 math courses.

Next year, teachers will continue to apply the Optimal Learning Model to support student learning. As well, four professional development sessions focused on "math talk" have been planned for 2016-17, along with modelling of problem-based math lessons and effective questioning skills for teachers. By continuing to improve instructional practices in numeracy, we are optimistic that student learning will benefit significantly over time.

Positive, Respectful Learning Environment

To ensure a positive, respectful learning environment in our schools, staff have intentionally modelled respectful behaviour for students and encouraged students to practice the THINK approach: Are your words True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary, Kind? Additionally, teachers were trained and began teaching the principles of restitution to students. Students also received instruction on understanding their emotions, self-regulating processes and mindfulness through the Mind Up program facilitated by our guidance teacher. The program also incorporated the foundational understandings of restitution and growth mindset.

Throughout the year, teachers in Hutterian schools have been consciously promoting self-discipline and respect amongst students and staff. The language of restitution is used throughout the school by students and staff and there is observable evidence of restitution learning in the building; needs surveys, "My Job, Your Job", belief statements. This was our goal for the year. There is also evidence that students understand the concepts of growth mindset and mindfulness, although in varying degrees.

School planning for next year has considered some the challenges around the implementation of restitution and we have ultimately determined what is needed to affect significant, long-term change is more time. Continuing to practice the strategies, modelling behaviours, taking time to teach the foundational beliefs and offering education to parents and communities will, we believe, lead to the desired result. In 2016-17 we will once again survey parents and students around positive, respectful learning environments to assess the impact of this approach.

Intellectual Engagement

Intellectual Engagement is all about a student's personal investment in learning. It is the level of interest students have in learning and the reasons why they do, or do not believe what they are doing in school is important. Teachers strive to nurture engagement by deliberately planning for student interests, learning preferences, and readiness levels. In Hutterian Schools, cultural considerations should also be reflected in all aspects of school life.

In general, we have made significant gains in this area. Our focus came out of our observations that there was a definite student disconnection from learning with regard to its purpose. Learning goals and success criteria, then, have been used to focus students so they have a clear understanding of what it is they should be learning, and why. Examples of student work have been provided to model what quality work look likes. Intentional instruction and practice of self-assessment was carried out in all classrooms. Teachers received professional development on giving actionable feedback, and students were also taught how to give effective feedback to each other. In addition to these strategies, we were aware of the cultural aspect in fostering student engagement, and made conscious connections to Hutterian culture and communities where ever possible. In doing so, we not only made learning more meaningful for students, we honoured the voice of the parents and community members who requested that schools be reflective of their experiences and norms.

Teachers and students will continue to work on giving and acting on feedback for improvement. Student participation in the construction of learning criteria will also be a priority. Student work examples will be used to show students what quality work looks like, and will include all types of writing, as well as math problem-solving. As well, schools will designate funds to be spent on culturally relevant reading material for their libraries. We hope to include parents and/or community members in the selection of these titles.

Moving into the 2016-17 school year, we will continue to work towards making school meaningful for all students, and finding ways that will help them see it as a place that provides interesting and valuable lessons for their future.