

## **Elders in the Schools Program**

Jurisdiction: Yukon  
Level: Adult Learning

Contact: Tina Jules  
Theme: Teacher Training Programs

### Description of Practice:

The Elders in the School Program increases Elder involvement in the school and establishes a stronger cultural presence in the school; provides individual teachers with cultural expertise on-site; may provide students with a counsellor that is sensitive to their First Nation ancestry; and may provide school-wide cultural activities or classroom-based cultural activities. This program is currently operating in Carcross, Teslin, Ross River, Old Crow, Mayo and Kluane Lake and an expansion is underway for the program to be offered to all Yukon First Nation communities.

### Background:

First Nations students are the majority population in most rural Yukon schools and comprise a large proportion in the Whitehorse schools as well. Elder involvement in the school establishes a cultural presence and role model for all students. Elders also provide authentic and valid cultural perspectives and content to students and teachers on a school-wide basis or at the classroom level. The Elders also provide the teachers with instructions so as to ensure that traditional practices and laws are respected.

### Development:

The practice of "Elder in the School" was established in response to a request from an individual Yukon First Nation community. The program has since expanded based on being a model program proven to increase the levels of satisfaction of the First Nation community and school staff.

### Evidence:

This program has been in operation since 2001 and was first established in Watson Lake. Over the years up to June 2006, the program was offered in six Yukon schools. In the 2006/07 school year it will be offered to all 14 Yukon First Nation communities.

### Adaptability:

Suggestions for adapting the practice in other jurisdictions: Ensure that the program is adequately funded to allow for an Elder to be in school as well as have access to resources and materials for teaching cultural skills. First Nations suggest that Elders be used to offer formal in-class instruction, however it is important that the classroom teacher assist with the planning and preparation needed.

Key lessons learned: It is important that the Elder in the School program and activities are developed with a collaborative team. The principal, First Nation education staff and the School Council should be involved. This will help to ensure that the Elder in the

School is fully utilized and that a full range of authentic cultural activities is offered to the students, teachers and the school overall.

Cautions for interested jurisdictions: Provide teachers with training so they understand the culture of the Elder and how to interact respectfully and according to protocol.

Further information:

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