

Braided Journeys

Graduation Coach Model

Aboriginal Learning Services—Edmonton Catholic Schools





**Edmonton Catholic Schools
Braided Journeys
Graduation Coach Model
Program
Evaluation**

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Preface

Nurturing Capacity:

The *K-12 Indspire Institute* is focused on dramatically increasing high school completion rates among Indigenous students by building strong foundations in their K-12 education. Through various programs, resources and events, the *Institute* fosters collaboration between educators, communities, and others to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Indspire conducts research to identify and document educational best practices from across Canada and shares these successful practices through the *K-12 Indspire Institute*. Indspire also champions Indigenous approaches to education, those that honour Indigenous culture, values, and world views.

Methodology

Three established researchers with extensive education, evaluation, and community experience were consulted to recommend a documentation approach to explicating best practices. Together, these researchers brought experience in different areas, methods, analysis and reporting to the research, which proved to be a great strength.

The researchers participated in a variety of research team sessions to explicate a documentation approach that would represent the educational program in ethical and respectful ways. It was decided that the documentation process should be restrained to using the voices of its participants and stakeholders as much as possible.

Every attempt was made to approach the process from an ethical standpoint and to collect data in a variety of ways to help inform the audience about the various aspects of the programs that would be participating in research conversations. It was determined that documenting “best practice” should be conducted using an evaluability framework. Evaluation methodology is aptly suited for systematically examining program design, process and objectives. By borrowing from the evaluability framework, this research was able to document best practices based on the High School Graduation Coach Program (BRAIDED JOURNEYS) documentation and consultation with program participants and stakeholders. The research process utilized informed consent, re-iterative consultation, triangulated data collections, and the OCAP principles.

Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to acknowledge and thank the Edmonton Catholic School Board and the educators and youth who created a space to share and help us understand the good work that is taking place within the High School Graduation Coach Program. It is with the best of intentions that we tried to capture the spirit, the energy, and the good feelings of working alongside one another in this process of sharing educative wise practices.

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General Description of the Program

“Aboriginal people in Alberta are culturally diverse – from the Dene in the subarctic north to the Woodland Cree in the boreal forest and the Blackfoot of the southern plains and the Métis throughout the province. From time immemorial, First Peoples lived close to the land, and so it shaped each groups culture – the collection of beliefs, values, and knowledge they share”¹ (Aboriginal Peoples, p.2). In Canada and Alberta today First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) people represent a significant and growing demographic; specifically in Alberta, they make up approximately 6% of the population or about 240,000 people. Statistics Canada² (i.e. 2001, 2006, 2011) has released numerous studies describing the growing FNMI population in Canada, with almost half of this population reported to be under the age of 24 years. For Alberta, the 2001 census reported that 44.3% of FNMI people were under the age of 20 years. The increase in the general FNMI population implies that there is also a corresponding increase in the number of FNMI youth in secondary school systems.

Graduating from high school is a contributing factor to both economic success and quality of life. In 2009, when the High School Graduation Coach Program (BRAIDED JOURNEYS) was started in Edmonton, Alberta, the graduation rate of Indigenous students in Alberta was 31.4%, well below the general Alberta population graduation rate of 79%. The identification of this educational gap within FNMI student populations has had a profound effect and caused education stakeholders to take notice and prioritize identifying ways of increasing Indigenous high school graduation rates.

The Graduation Coach Model originated in the USA and introduced in Alberta through Edmonton Catholic Schools. The City of Edmonton is situated in the North Central Region of Alberta and has a population of approximately 800,000 people. Edmonton Catholic Schools is a school district that serves over 37,000 students, of which 8,897 are secondary students. The Graduation Coach Model was first implemented at St. Joseph High School in 2009. St. Josephs is located in North Central Edmonton, which is a geographic area with a large number of urban Indigenous families comprised of many linguistic and cultural groups.

While FNMI students come from cultural communities that are immersed in a variety of traditional languages and protocols (e.g. Cree and Dene), Edmonton Catholic Schools is situated in an urban setting where most programming takes place in English.

¹ Alberta Education (2013) Aboriginal Peoples of Alberta: Yesterday, today and tomorrow. Available from: <http://www.idmarch.org/document/%20Alberta/4H6K-show/Aboriginal%20Peoples%20of%20Alberta%20Yesterday,%20Today,%20and>. Retrieved: March, 2014

² Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>

³ The Edmonton Catholic School Board web page as well as the BRAIDED JOURNEYS summary (http://ideas.education.alberta.ca/media/78985/ecsd_abor_grad_coach_final_online.pdf) was used to access portions of this data.

Brief History of the Project

Graduation Coach Model has been implemented with success in a variety of contexts³. First founded in the state of Georgia, USA, the Grad Coach Model successfully increased the high school graduation rate of African-American students. The program was adapted to meet the needs of Indigenous students in Rapid City, South Dakota and then again to meet the needs of FNMI students in Edmonton.

In 2009, Edmonton Catholic Schools established the FNMI High School Graduation Coach Program at St. Joseph High School in North Central Edmonton. Prior to the implementation of this program, Edmonton Catholic Schools had created the Braided Journeys Program:

The Braided Journeys Program is intended to support FNMI youth to become leaders of character, vision, and action. FNMI youth are provided multi-component, culturally-based academic programs that challenge their creativity, build on their skill set, and increase their support network. In addition, youth have the opportunity to develop citizenship skills, thus, enhancing self-esteem and confidence while gaining valuable career related skills.

Graduation Coaches became a part of the Braided Journeys Program in 2009 and were able to leverage existing material and infrastructure resources, human resources, allowing for a smoother introduction. Due to the success of the model at St. Joseph High School, it was subsequently implemented at Archbishop Oscar Romero and St. Francis Xavier High Schools in 2012-2013, Archbishop O'Leary High School in 2013-2014, Westmount Outreach School, St. Nicholas Junior High, St. Elizabeth Seton Junior High and St. Alphonsus Junior High in 2015-2016.

Developmental Focus

Approximately 400 FNMI students per year receive graduation coach services through the Braided Journeys Rooms which are resource rooms with tables, chairs, computers, and kitchen areas. The Braided Journeys Rooms are staffed by a full-time graduation coach, part-time literacy coaches and part-time tutors. Students come and go freely. The rooms are simple and the number of staff employed is minimal; however, this innovative program provides comprehensive in-school support for FNMI students. The program offers students a home place in which they are able to feel a sense of belonging. The freedom to come and go as they please also enables them to take personal and social responsibility for their own learning. While the program offers a variety of supports, it has 6 specific areas of focus:

- Relationships and Mentoring;
- Transitions;
- Culture;
- Career Counselling;
- Academics; and
- Parental Engagement.

It is key to the program belief system to hire Indigenous staff with various educational and post-secondary experiences to serve as mentors and, in this case, graduation coaches.

Relationships and Mentoring

Every September the graduation coach meets with each FNMI student to exchange contact information, introduce the services of the graduation coach program, and start a career plan. At a minimum, there are monthly check-ins. The graduation coach monitors absences, late slips, behaviour referrals, class performance, and the number of graduation criteria met, as well as the participation of the student in school events. The mentoring motivates students, opens up exploration of possible careers, and supports all of the program activities that follow.

Transitions

For some students, the first step into a new school or a different classroom can be incredibly hard. It helps that one of the first faces FNMI students see upon entering school is that of their graduation coach. Because more FNMI students drop out in grade 10 than either grades 11 or 12, the graduation coach program focuses on the transition between junior and senior high. It starts in the first month of grade 9, with the graduation coach meeting with feeder schools to plan activities for the year. The coach visits the schools once a month thereafter. Over the year, grade 9 students become aware of the program; they ask their grad coach questions about high school and explore career aspirations through career inventories, goal setting and personal development activities.

Transition activity then moves to the high school and becomes more oriented to supporting peer interaction. It includes tours, social mixers, preparation classes, and summer school – including the Career and Life Management Program – which lets students experience high school classes and accumulate credits in July and August. There is also a Transition to Ten Summer School which focuses on relationship building and the development of leadership skills culminating in a campfire session where questions and concerns are anonymously submitted on paper, discussed by the group, and then offered to the Creator in a burning ceremony. Once school starts, transition support continues with special events – icebreakers, games, and social mixers for grade 10 students – as well as an orientation session for newcomers in the higher grades.

Transition support picks up again as students prepare for post-secondary study. Group tours are arranged with local institutions. Students have the opportunity to spend a day at post-secondary shadowing a program that interests them.

Cultural Activities

Cultural activities and student clubs serve to develop a sense of belonging and provide access to positive role models and peer support. Cultural activities include pow wow dancing, smudging, Elder visits, drumming, feasts, outdoor education camps, creative arts, and traditional ceremonies. The Rainbow Spirit Dance Troupe and Rainbow Spirit Drum Group practices weekly and are invited to perform at local conferences, community gatherings and events. Students also have access to artist-in-residency programs including traditional arts, drama and storytelling.

Career Counselling

The graduation coach asks students what they aspire to and helps them understand the paths that will lead them there. In addition to helping students sign up for the right courses, the coach keeps post-secondary school information on site, helps students get information that is not at hand and assists students to apply for scholarships, post-secondary assistance and band funding.

Academics

The graduation coach and other team members (e.g. literacy coaches, tutors) introduce themselves to all teachers at the first high school staff meeting. The team ensures the teachers understand the significance of Indigenous history and culture; they make classroom resources and workshops available as well as Indigenous professional development for staff. The graduation coach monitors student academic performance will discuss concerns with the student's parents. Tutoring is one of the most used services in the program, and is provided by the graduation coach and part-time tutors both during school hours and in after-school homework clubs.

Parental Engagement

Developing parental engagement is a significant part of the graduation coach's role. Many FNMI parents have negative associations with school, often as a result of family experience in residential schools. The graduation coach personally connects with parents each month to discuss their children's academic standing and the activities, services, and interventions accessed. After the first semester, the coach contacts all parents to discuss their children's success in the first semester. A newsletter keeps parents updated about program activities.

Graduation coach Elyse Wood says, "I find that once I have phoned home once or twice, the parents start calling me to raise their concerns, to seek community resources, and to update me on what's going on in the student's personal and family life. As a result, parents start to feel safe and the school starts to become a community hub" Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD).

The graduation coach program also encourages parental engagement through special events like "Bannock and Tea" during "Meet the Teacher" evenings. Each site hosts an FNMI Family Night which is one of the most effective means of bringing parents in for the first time, and it also attracts grade 9 families from feeder schools. A special grade 12 honouring ceremony is held in May involving students, parents, administration and local First Nations Chiefs to celebrate the accomplishments of students.

Documenting Best Practices with an Evaluability Framework

Methodology

Documenting “best practices” using an evaluability framework is an evidence-based methodological approach to accurately describe all of a program’s core components, processes, and goals that have a proven ability to achieve an intended effect.

The researchers used the evaluability assessment methodology to conduct a systematic, objective, and effective assessment of BRAIDED JOURNEYS. Using an evaluability approach developed by Rutman⁴ lends itself to evidence-based documentation of the best practices used by this program through four strategic steps:

1. Collect and assess all the written documentation that describes the program in terms used by the program administrators.
2. Develop a diagram of the program components and relationships between components in relation to the processes and goals outlined in a logic model.
3. Interview key stakeholders, program staff, and FNMI students to capture their experiences of BRAIDED JOURNEYS and to explore their perceptions and interpretation of the program diagram and logic model.
4. Validate the program structure, processes and goals to develop an accurate depiction and documentation of the Braided Journeys Program.

Program Document Analysis

Several unique Braided Journeys documents were analyzed, including brochures, webinars, and assorted materials. Each document was examined for factual references about the Braided Journeys structure, service relationships, processes, and goals. The recent development of this program meant that there was limited material available for analysis; however, we were able to develop a rudimentary program diagram and logic model. These documents were used in the interviews with stakeholders, program staff, and FNMI students (see Figures 1 & 2). The interviews were then used as a subsequent source of information for confirmation of the program diagram and logic model.

Participants and Procedures

The documentation of best practices with the program diagrams and logic model evaluation was conducted as an interview with several different stakeholders. Participants were asked to meet with the researcher to complete an interview based on a review of the Braided Journeys diagram and logic model and to explore experiential narratives describing the program. All participants were informed of their rights as participants and volunteered to participate. Following the interviews, a preliminary final document was created and reviewed by the Braided Journeys administrators to discuss and complete the program documentation.

⁴ Rutman, L. (1980). *Planning useful evaluations: Evaluability Assessment*. Beverly Hills, CA, USA: Sage Publications, Inc.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five stakeholders and several students to gather their experiences and opinions about the Braided Journeys as a way of collaborating the documented program. Each of the interviews was voice recorded and transcribed. Interview transcripts were probed for interim accounts that identify elements that speak to the process and success of the program. Then each researcher read the interim account to code more specific themes that became apparent. Nine distinct themes were identified from these interviews.

Interview Schedule

The consultation used a structured semi-qualitative interview procedure based on the Braided Journeys diagrams and logic model. Participants were guided through a step-by-step procedure that examined, first, the structure of Braided Journeys and, second, the processes and goals of the program outlined in the logic model. In both parts of this interview, the participants were queried about the accuracy and veracity of the program diagram, processes, and goals. Each participant was asked to confirm, add or make changes to these documents using their best understanding and experience of Braided Journeys, regardless of other's expectations. The information from the interviews was then integrated into a finalized comprehensive Braided Journeys diagram and logic model.

Final Document Preparation

The objective of the preliminary final document meeting was to confirm the main components of the Braided Journeys structure, processes, and goals and finalize any remaining inconsistencies that were found. A final version was generated and prepared for the Braided Journeys administrators and the Indspire Institute.

Program Structure

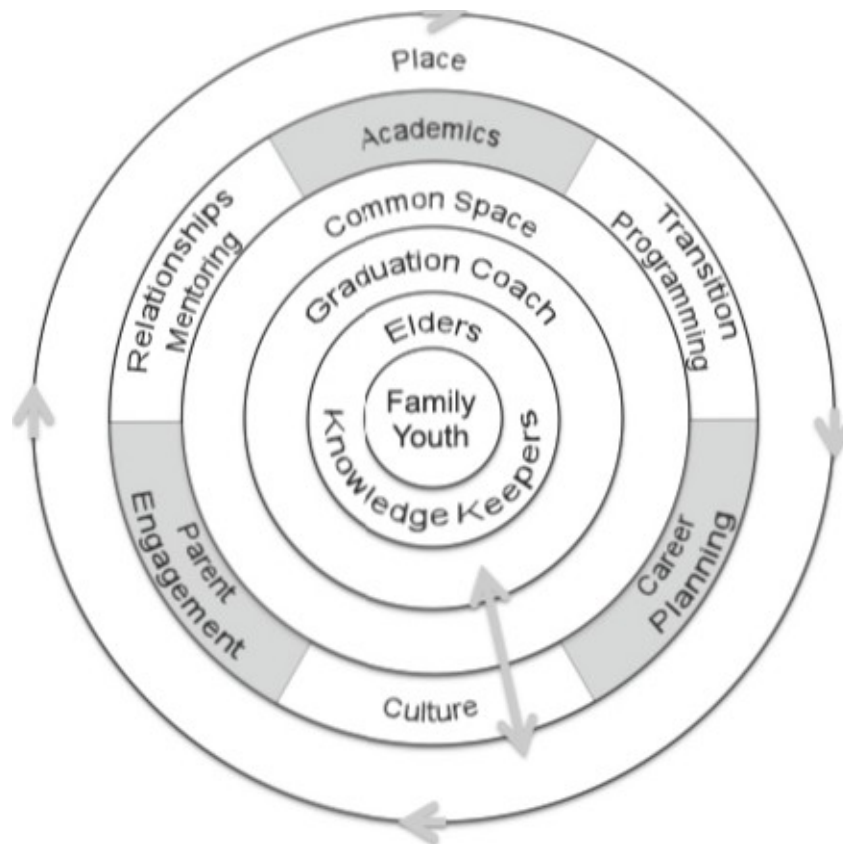
After analyzing Braided Journeys documents, an evaluation diagram was developed that mapped Braided Journeys structure, service, and service relationships (see Figure 2). In discussing the diagram with program participants and stakeholders, it was mentioned that the evaluation diagram could also be reshaped to acknowledge the multiplicity within Indigenous ways of knowing. In response to this feedback and co-constructed

process, another possible program diagram was created (see Figure 1). This diagram emphasizes the student and family at the centre of Braided Journeys with the support of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Graduation Coach and so forth. This diagram recognizes the interconnected Indigenous community as an important component of Braided Journeys. This diagram also recognizes the importance of reciprocity in research and relationships alongside educators, youth, and community members.

The evaluation model (see Figure 2) is also a representation of programming, organized in a hierarchical manner with the more impactful elements of the Braided Journeys Program at the top and the specific services and outputs arranged at the bottom. Services are grouped together under a central component to reflect their contribution to a major program activity or strategy. Seven major components of Braided Journeys were identified:

1. Career Planning;
2. Administration/Common Space;
3. Academics;
4. Transition Programming;
5. Relationships/Mentoring;
6. Parental Engagement; and
7. Culture.

Services are not component specific and may be related to other program activities, denoted by directional-lines that connect services across components (e.g. graduation coach is related to FNMI parents). To examine the performance indicators, short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes related to program components, please see the logic model.



Logic Model

The Braided Journeys logic model is a thorough expression of the current components, strategies, outputs, and outcomes based on program documents and stakeholder interviews. The information provided within the Braided Journeys logic model is an approximation of the current practices, not a precise and detailed description. The model was developed as a tool for documenting this program as a best practice for FNMI high school support. In this manner, the logic model is a comprehensive explanation of how the Braided Journeys administrators structured and focused their services to best meet their FNMI student needs and academic objectives.

Graduation Coach

Administration/ Facilities

Strategies / Major Activities:

- Full-time position, provide ongoing support, mentorship, and guidance to FNMI students.
- Connect with and coordinate activities with internal (e.g. teachers) and external stakeholders (e.g. parents, community).
- Advocate on behalf of students and educational issues related to students.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators:

- Establish a full-time presence in the Braided Journeys space that supports, mentors, and offers guidance to FNMI students, non-Indigenous students and staff.
- Develop and maintain ongoing activities with internal (e.g. teachers) and external stakeholders (e.g. parents, community).
- Provide support in improving awareness of FNMI student and educational issues.

Short-term Outcomes:

- Increase awareness of the graduation coach position with students and staff.
- Increase contact between the graduation coach, students and staff.
- Ensure the Braided Journeys space is a safe and conflict free space.
- Increase awareness of FNMI educational issues.
- Increase awareness of FNMI initiatives within the school.

Intermediate Outcomes:

- Increase the perceived importance, effectiveness and accessibility of the graduation coach has in facilitating FNMI learning and achievement.
- Increase the perception of the graduation coach as a knowledgeable person for support and guidance on FNMI issues.

Long-term Goals / Impact:

- Create a home at the school; a safe and comfortable place for FNMI students can express themselves, effectively learn, and socialize with everyone.

Graduation coach

Administration/ Facilities

Physical Location

- Group study space
- Kitchen with sink, fridge microwave
- Private office with windows overlooking study area

Strategies / Major Activities

- Provide a welcoming and culturally responsive space.
- Provide a space that is practical and equipped to facilitate learning.
- Provide a space that supports positive peer interactions and support.
- Provide an office space for graduation coach, administration.
- Provide an office space for private consultations, tutoring and literacy interventions

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Establish a welcoming and culturally responsive space that is used by FNMI students, non-Indigenous students and staff
- Establish a space that is used by FNMI students to work on course assignments.
- Establish a space that is used by FNMI students to socialize and support each other with school activities.
- Establish an office that is used by the graduation coach to run program and meet with students.
- Establish an office that FNMI students use for tutoring, private meetings and literacy interventions

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase the perception with FNMI, non-Indigenous students and staff that the Braided Journeys space is welcoming
- Increase the number of FNMI students that visit the space.
- Increase the number of FNMI students that access the space to use the resources and work on course assignments.
- Increase the use of the space for FNMI student socialization and peer support.
- Increase awareness of where to find the graduation coach.
- Increase awareness and use of the office for student tutoring and meetings.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the number of FNMI students benefiting academically from use of the common room and services.
- Increase the number of FNMI students benefiting socially from use of the common room and services.
- Increase the number of non-Indigenous students and staff who visit and use the common room and services.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Graduation coach

Administration/ Facilities

School resources and funding:

- Tutors
- Leadership workshops
- Professional fees/ honoraria
- Travel expenses
- Supplies equipment

Strategies / Major Activities

- Provide resources that facilitate learning and participation in classroom and school activities for students. Provide financial support for:
 - o Tutors to support academic learning
 - o Snacks/meals for effective learning
 - o Registration fees for FNMI students attending conferences & workshops.
 - o Professional fees and honoraria to respect Elders' and cultural instructors' support
 - o Field trips, post-secondary school visits and career conferences
- Workshop materials, classroom/office supplies, and computer stations for student and office use.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Identify and apply for funding that ensures that necessary activities can be offered to FNMI students, non-Indigenous students and staff
- Identify and supply the appropriate resources that can facilitate and enhance learning experiences for FNMI students, non-Indigenous students and staff

Short-term Outcomes

- Secure funding that ensures operational activities are supported
- Increase the sources applied to for funding
- Increase the number of resources available

Intermediate Outcomes

- Expand secure funding of Braided Journeys

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Graduation coach

Academics

Tutors & Literacy Coaches

Strategies / Major Activities

- Provide interventions on a daily basis for all courses that are needed by FNMI students.
- Provide postsecondary tutors for senior level classes related to core post-secondary courses.
- Support feeder schools with tutoring and literacy intervention sessions to grade 9 students.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Established regular tutoring sessions to keep students on track
- Provide exam prep workshops
- Provide time management, goal setting and study skill information
- Provide LLI training and materials for Literacy Coaches
- Maintain good relationships with post-secondary stakeholders to ensure ongoing support with post-secondary core courses for FNMI students

Short-term Outcomes

- Promote tutoring services to students and parents
- Increase the number and/or quality of tutors.
- Increase the number of FNMI students with need who access tutors.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase academic success of students accessing tutors.
- Increase year-to-year retention of students accessing tutors.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Increase in the number of FNMI students graduating
- Improved perception of FNMI educational attainment and success in and outside of school
- Increased FNMI graduation rates.

Graduation coach

Academics

Strategies / Major Activities

- Provide comprehensive, individual, in-school support to FNMI students.
- Creates individual career plans for academic success for each FNMI student (sets goals that are high, but attainable, and helps students figure out how to achieve the goals)
- Meets with each FNMI student at a minimum of once per month to check-in.
- Support school engagement throughout the school for FNMI students by ensuring quality student-teacher relationships and effective instruction (academic, emotional, social).
- Identifies and develops FNMI educational resources and workshops for FNMI students and to support course curriculum.
- Monitor FNMI students course progress and behaviour:
 - o Absences
 - o Late slips
 - o Behaviour referrals
 - o Class performance
 - o Tutoring supports
 - o Credit recovery
 - o Graduation criteria
 - o Participation in events
- Identify and connect with FNMI students experiencing difficulties achieving academically, socially, or personally and provide timely support.
- Contact and develop relationships with FNMI students' parents in order to discuss student progress: academic standing, activities, services and any needed interventions.
- Provides orientation to newcomers with planned activities, current student mentors, and introductions to instructors and staff.
- Support peer mentoring, role modelling, and socializing between FNMI students and non-Aboriginal students.
- Develops and manages after-school programming for career workshops, leadership clubs, tutoring and cultural activities.
- Meets with school admin, learning coaches and staff to maintain relationships and teach about FNMI educational issues and culture.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Comprehensive, individually tailored action plans and in-school support for all FNMI students.
- Connect with FNMI students frequently throughout the academic year.
- Ongoing engagement for positive student-teacher relationships using effective academic, emotional, and social instruction.
- Orientation is provided to all new FNMI students that prepares them for first day of classes and provides social support with other students, instructors and staff.
- Monitoring FNMI students' academic progress and behaviour leads to the identification of students experiencing difficulties and an intervention is provided.
- Relationships with FNMI students' parents helps to support student academic development and achievement.
- Peer-support that offers mentoring, role modelling and friendship is well established between FNMI students and non-Indigenous students.

- A diverse set of after-school programming is offered to support academic achievement, leadership development, community engagement, peer support and social activities.
- Well-developed relationships with instructors and staff who are knowledgeable about FNMI educational issues and culture.
- Ongoing development of FNMI educational resources and workshops to support students learning, in and out of the classroom.

Short-term Outcomes

- Successfully connect with all new and existing FNMI students
- Successful development of comprehensive, individually tailored career plans
- Increased provision of in-school support for all FNMI students.
- Increase the amount and frequency of contact with FNMI students throughout the year.
- Increased promotion of positive student-teacher relationships.
- Increase the number of senior students that act as peer-support (mentoring, role modelling) to younger or new FNMI students.
- Increase the amount of positive interactions between FNMI students and non-Indigenous students.
- Increase identification and development of after-school programming
- Increase awareness by instructors and staff about FNMI educational issues and culture.
- Increase number of FNMI educational resources and workshops offered to students and classroom curriculum.
- Maintain comprehensive and timely monitoring students' academic progress and behaviour.
- Increased earlier identification of students experiencing difficulties.
- Increased ability to provide timely and effective interventions to students experiencing difficulties.
- Increase number and quality of relationships with FNMI students' parents.
- Increase involvement of FNMI parents' support for academic development and achievement.
- Increase instructor and staff knowledge of effective academic, emotional, and social instruction with FNMI students.
- Increase satisfaction with the orientation that is provided to all FNMI newcomers.
- Increase preparedness for first day of classes for new students.
- Increase peer social support with senior FNMI students for new students.
- Increase familiarity with teachers and school environment for new students.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increased academic achievement by FNMI students.
- Increased involvement in Braided Journeys Programs
- Increased sense of belonging at school
- Increased retention of students from year to year.
- Increased academic knowledge and skills needed for academic success.
- Well-used in-school academic and peer support activities.
- Increase success and reduce attrition of students accessing tutors

- Decrease in the number of FNMI students with academic difficulties.
- Increase in the number of educational difficulties that are solvable by Braided Journeys services.
- Increase the number of academic resources available for FNMI students.
- High rate of parental knowledge and involvement in Braided Journeys services.
- Inclusive use of Indigenous cultural knowledge in school activities and classroom curriculum.
- FNMI students felt knowledgeable and prepared for their transition to high school
- FNMI students feel that they are part of a strong and well-accepted FNMI community
- FNMI students have strong and accessible relationships with their instructors and staff
- High rate of FNMI student involvement in extra-curricular activities.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Graduation coach

Workshops/ Camps

Strategies / Major Activities

- Identify and provide workshops that support academic learning and success
- Leadership skills and social justice activities
- Community programs, post-secondary and career opportunities
- Academic skills and exam prep

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Provide structured learning workshops to improve academic and personal skills that lead to academic achievement.

Short-term Outcomes

- Increased identification and development of workshops needed by FNMI students.
- Increase of participation of FNMI students in workshops and knowledge of community opportunities

Intermediate Outcomes

- Improved access to workshops that improves the overall academic success of FNMI students.
- Improved course grades by FNMI students accessing workshops.
- Improved social and personal skills leading to improved self-esteem for FNMI students.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Graduation coach

Relationships / Mentoring

Strategies / Major Activities

- Provides ongoing mentorship to all FNMI students.
- Actively engages with all FNMI students to develop a strong understanding of the unique characteristics and needs of each student.
- Promotes FNMI students engage with other students to develop strong supportive social networks.
- Promotes FNMI families get involved in student school and social activities to improve support for academic success.
- Develop alternative supports and options for curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of FNMI students at risk.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- As a primary responsibility, the graduation coach purposely develops close relationships with all FNMI students and engages these students in actively developing their academic skills and academic success.
- Offers an assortment of academic, cultural and leadership activities to help FNMI students engage with each other students to develop strong supportive social networks.
- Invites the outside community (i.e., parents, community stakeholders) school and student activities to improve opportunities for mentoring and support.
- Works with teachers and administrators to develop credit recovery and alternative options and to adapt curriculum and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of identified at risk students

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase the number of relationships with FNMI students.
- Increase familiarity with FNMI students' unique qualities and academic ambitions.
- Increase the number and type of activities that promote FNMI peer engagement and support.
- Increase the number of FNMI students who participate in social learning activities.
- Increase the satisfaction FNMI students have for activities that develop their academic skills.
- Increase the satisfaction FNMI students have for peer-support activities.
- Increase the number of outside community that participate in Braided Journeys activities.
- Decrease the number of students who are at-risk of failing or dropping out by improving course supports.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the first year retention rates.
- Increase sense of belonging
- Increase the level of self-reliance or reliance on peer support.
- Increase the awareness of the amount of outside community support available to FNMI students.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Graduation coach

Relationships / Mentoring – Graduation Coach

Strategies / Major Activities

- Provides ongoing mentorship to all FNMI students.
- Actively engages with all FNMI students to develop a strong understanding of the unique characteristics and needs of each student.
- Promotes FNMI students engage with other students to develop strong supportive social networks.
- Promotes FNMI families get involved in student school and social activities to improve support for academic success.
- Develop alternative supports and options for curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of FNMI students at risk.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- As a primary responsibility, the graduation coach purposely develops close relationships with all FNMI students and engages these students in actively developing their academic skills and academic success.
- Offers an assortment of social and learning activities to help FNMI students engage with each other students to develop strong supportive social networks.
- Invites the outside community (i.e., parents, community stakeholders) school and student activities to improve opportunities for mentoring and support.
- Works with teachers and administrators to develop credit recovery and alternative options and to adapt curriculum and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of identified at risk students

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase the number of relationships with FNMI students.
- Increase familiarity with FNMI students' unique qualities and academic ambitions.
- Increase the number and type of activities that promote FNMI peer engagement and support.
- Increase the number of FNMI students who participate in social learning activities.
- Increase the satisfaction FNMI students have for activities that develop their academic skills.
- Increase the satisfaction FNMI students have for peer-support activities.
- Increase the number of outside community that participate in Braided Journeys activities.
- Decrease the number of students who are at-risk of failing or dropping out by improving course supports.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the first year retention rates.
- Increase sense of belonging
- Increase the level of self-reliance or reliance on peer support.
- Increase the awareness of the amount of outside community support available to FNMI students.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Graduation coach

Relationships / Mentoring – Peer-supported Mentoring

Strategies / Major Activities

- Support the development of peer-mentoring opportunities between senior and younger FNMI students.
- Develop opportunities for FNMI students to develop leadership skills.
- Provide opportunities for FNMI students to contribute to their community and model leadership in the areas of economic and social development.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Provide ongoing opportunities for FNMI students to build a positive peer community
- Established structured activities that promote multi-grade peer interactions leading to positive peer relationships and mentorship.
- FNMI students utilize their leadership skills through participation in activities including facilitating the Blanket Exercise for school classes and teacher PD sessions, volunteering at community agencies such as the Edmonton Food Bank, delivering literacy mentoring at elementary schools and organizing awareness campaigns such as the issue of missing and murdered woman and contaminated waters.

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase in the number of peer supports and leadership activities available to FNMI students.
- Increase the effectiveness of peer-support activities at engaging FNMI students to network.
- Increase in the number of FNMI students accessing peers or social activities.
- Increase in the size/number of FNMI student's social networks.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the sense of belonging experience by FNMI students.
- Increase the sense of overall support for FNMI academic achievement
- Maintain peer-support mechanisms across all grades for FNMI students.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Graduation coach

Relationships / Mentoring – Community Engagement

Strategies / Major Activities

- Promote relationship with feeder schools and postsecondary institutions.
- Promote mentorship opportunities with professionals from different industries.
- Promote activities with FNMI communities near or around Edmonton.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Graduation coaches deliver monthly workshops at feeder schools.
- Graduation coaches coordinate visits to campuses to learn more about careers and programs
- Post-secondary tutors engage with FNMI students at homework clubs and literacy programs
- Host “Meet & Mentor” and “Lunch & Learn” sessions where community members come to discuss their careers, activities and offer guidance to interested FNMI students.
- Industry partners host career mentoring programs (Engineering Futures at Enbridge)
- Coaches coordinate and host FNMI summer school in partnership with MacEwan, U of A and Norquest providing opportunities for community leaders to engage with students

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase the number of workshops at feeder schools
- Increase the number of students to attend transition activities.
- Increase the number of FNMI students who attend post-secondary community activities.
- Increase the number of post-secondary workshops and tutor sessions.
- Increase the number of post-secondary representatives who become mentors to FNMI students.
- Increase the number and variety of community member career presentations.
- Increase the number and variety of community members who become mentors

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the awareness and knowledge that potential FNMI students have for Braided Journeys.
- Increase the awareness and knowledge that FNMI students have of post-secondary opportunities.
- Increase the awareness of community support for FNMI students.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Transitions Programming

Senior High School Transition program

Strategies / Major Activities

- Support the transition of FNMI students from high school to post-secondary school.
- Provide FNMI students who want attend post-secondary school with knowledge and support to explore and prepare to attend a post-secondary institution.
- Ensure that FNMI students obtain the correct requirements to be able to apply and compete for post-secondary acceptance.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Monitor and encourage FNMI students to achieve the requirements needed to attend a post-secondary institution.
- FNMI students are provided with opportunities to take post-secondary tours to ask questions and get familiar with the campus (e.g. Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, Grant MacEwan, University of Alberta, and Norquest College)
- FNMI students are supported in attending post-secondary student for a day shadows to get familiar with different aspects of the environment, expectations, and skills needed to succeed.
- Career planning provided to FNMI students to clearly identify ways to achieve future career aspirations.

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase attractiveness of post-secondary education for FNMI students.
- Increase the number of FNMI students who achieve the requirements to apply for post-secondary
- Increase the number of FNMI students who consider and apply to post-secondary education.
- Increase the number of FNMI students who attend post-secondary student for a day shadows
- Increase the knowledge and relationships that FNMI students have with post-secondary communities.
- Increase awareness of scholarships and bursaries available to FNMI students
- Increase scholarships and bursaries.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the acceptance rate for FNMI students at post-secondary schools.
- Increase the number of FNMI students who successfully transition to post-secondary schools.
- Increase the number of FNMI students who are role models for younger students.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Increase in the number of FNMI students graduating on time (3 years)
- Increase the value placed on high school and post-secondary education by FNMI students and their communities.

Transitional Programming

Transition to Ten

Strategies / Major Activities

- Develop transitioning that addresses the high dropout rate FNMI students between grades 9 and 10.
- Deliver monthly workshops at feeder schools to increase awareness, answer questions, and explore career aspirations (e.g. vision boards, career inventories).
- Host feeder schools for tours and classroom demos (science labs, intro to drama, cosmo etc)
- Senior FNMI students host incoming students at FNMI open house; build relationships, teach about expectations, courses, and school.
- Involve parents; building relationships and develop communication
- Transition to Ten Summer School to earn high school credits and build leadership skills
- Organize special events at the start of grade 10: icebreakers, games, and social mixers.
- Facilitate Fall Leadership Camp to encourage early group bonding and personal development

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- FNMI students in grade 9 and their parents are aware and knowledgeable about the high school graduation requirements and programs
- Establish high expectations of high school graduation in FNMI students
- Encourage and support successful transition for FNMI students in grade 9 into and through first year in high school
- Provide support for educating FNMI students about transition issues and actionable steps to reach career goals.
- Provide tutor and literacy interventions to feeder elementary schools to increase academic skills and achievement needed for grade 10.
- Establish a strong relationship with the graduation coach before first day of classes.
- Feel prepared for high school classes and the rigour of academic programs

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase contact with prospective FNMI students and their parents.
- Increase awareness of Braided Journeys services for incoming FNMI students and parents.
- Increase attendance of FNMI student and parents at transition activities.
- Increase knowledge of FNMI student transition issues.
- Increase peer-support and social network between FNMI students.
- Increase relationships with Braided Journeys staff and instructors.
- Increase attendance of incoming FNMI students in grade 10.
- Increase academic success of incoming FNMI students in grade 10.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the transition of FNMI students from junior high into high school.
- Increase academic success of FNMI students in grade 9.
- Decrease in transition issue behaviours, such as absences, late slips, and behaviour referrals.
- Increase in FNMI students in grade 10 who participate in academic and school activities.
- Increase in the retention of FNMI students who transition to grade 10.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Transitional Programming

New students (not from grade 9 feeder schools)

Strategies / Major Activities

- FNMI students see the graduation coach as soon as they register.
- Orientation session for new FNMI students who come in after grade 10.
- Graduation coach works with students to develop an action plan and to engage with other FNMI students.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- New FNMI students meet the graduation coach and are immediately supported with structured activities and peer support.

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase attendance of new FNMI students.
- Increase attendance of new FNMI students in activities.
- Increase peer-support and social network with new FNMI students.
- Increase the frequency that new FNMI students have contact with Braided Journeys staff and instructors.
- Increase academic success for new FNMI students.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase academic success in FNMI students.
- Decrease in transition issue behaviours, such as absences, late slips, and behaviour referrals.
- Increased participation and support for BRAIDED JOURNEYS academic and social activities.
- Increase in the retention of FNMI students.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Transitions Programming

Transition to Seven

Strategies /Major Activities

- Deliver monthly workshops at feeder schools to improve academic and social skills for grade six students
- Host feeder schools for tours and classroom demos (phys ed class, art project etc)
- Senior FNMI students host incoming students at FNMI open house; build relationships, teach about expectations, courses, and school.
- Involve parents; building relationships and develop communication
- Host Summer Literacy Camp to build literacy skills and knowledge of junior high
- Organize special events at the start of grade 7: icebreakers, games, and social mixers.
- Facilitate Fall Leadership Retreat to encourage early group bonding and personal development

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- FNMI students in grade 6 and their parents are aware and knowledgeable of FNMI supports.
- Encourage and support successful transition for FNMI students in grade 6 into and through first year in junior high school
- Provide support for educating FNMI students about transition issues and actionable steps for career aspirations.
- Provide tutor and literacy interventions to feeder schools to increase academic skills and achievement needed for grade 7.
- Establish a strong relationship with the graduation coach before first day of classes.
- Feel prepared for the rigors of junior high

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase contact with prospective FNMI students and their parents.
- Increase awareness of services for incoming FNMI students and parents.
- Increase attendance of FNMI student and parents at transition activities.
- Increase knowledge of FNMI student transition issues.
- Increase peer-support and social network between FNMI students.
- Increase relationships with teachers and admin
- Increase attendance of incoming FNMI students in grade 7.
- Increase academic success of incoming FNMI students in grade 7.

Career Planning

Workshops

Strategies / Major Activities

- Provide FNMI students with opportunities to learn about different career options, the skills and requirements needed for different career options, and workshops to begin learning job skills.
- Provide individual meet and mentor sessions to develop career action plan, complete skills assessments, interest profiles and research options

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Community members present about careers at information sessions (Lunch & Learn)
- Preparatory workshops for developing academic skills to assist with high school and post-secondary course (e.g., study skills, budgeting, communication skills, life choices, career planning, and cultural teachings)

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase the number and diversity of professionals who offer presentations to FNMI students.
- Increase the number of students who attend career presentations.
- Increase the number of community mentors that support FNMI students.
- Increase the number of workshops offered to FNMI students.
- Increase the number of students who attend workshops.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the amount of awareness that FNMI students have about their career options.
- Increase the motivation and dedication of FNMI students for their chosen career aspirations.
- Increase the level of academic competency and success of FNMI students.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Career Planning

Graduation Action Plans

Strategies / Major Activities

- Expose FNMI students to career possibilities and develop an actionable plan to help students achieve these career aspirations. Career action plans include career assessments, career profiles, resumes and job training plans

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Support each FNMI student in their pursuit of a career aspiration by:
- Clarifying their goals
- Developing a paths to their goal
- Guidance with right courses, experiences, post-secondary school
- Support applying for school, scholarships and Band funding

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase the support for and understanding of FNMI students' action plans.
- Increase the FNMI students' achievement of their action plans.
- Increase the number of supports that can be used in action plans for FNMI student success.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase academic achievement for FNMI students in relation to their career aspirations.
- Increase sense of support and satisfaction for the use of action plans for FNMI students.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Culture

Cultural Ceremonies / Traditions

Strategies / Major Activities

- Support FNMI culture and cultural knowledge by offering all students opportunities to participate in cultural ceremonies and traditions.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- FNMI and non-Indigenous students actively participate in cultural activities throughout the year; such as, pow wow dancing, smudging, Elder teachings, smudging, drumming, feasts, outdoor education camps, creative arts, and traditional ceremonies.

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase the number of opportunities that FNMI students have to participate in and learn about cultural ceremonies/ traditions.
- Increase the knowledge that FNMI students have of FNMI culture.
- Increase the sense of pride that FNMI students have for their culture.
- Increase the number and quality of the relationships that FNMI students have with FNMI knowledge keepers and Elders.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Develop a deeper understanding of FNMI culture and cultural identity for FNMI students.
- Model FNMI holistic learning as a valuable component of education for FNMI students.
- Increase the visibility and positive impact that FNMI culture has within the school

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Develop FNMI students' sense of belonging
- Develop a sense that FNMI culture belongs and contributes to educational experiences.
- Provide educational experiences that resonate with traditional FNMI culture; where adults and FNMI role models provide friendship, guidance and support to youth.
- Increase the value of education for and with FNMI communities.

Culture

Annual Fall Leadership Camp

Strategies / Major Activities

- Promote FNMI culture outside of the classroom and in a setting that best reflects FNMI teaching and learning.
- Develop positive relationships with FNMI communities by inviting FNMI students to participate in their community activities and learning experiences.
- Develop leadership and peer support among FNMI students.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- FNMI students and non-Indigenous students participate in several days of activities that exemplify FNMI culture

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase the number of FNMI students who attend camp.
- Increase the number of FNMI community members who get involved in camp as role models and mentors.
- Increase the number positive FNMI culture learning opportunities that are offered
- Increase the number of positive mentoring and peers support activities.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Develop a deeper understanding of FNMI culture and cultural identity for FNMI students.
- Model FNMI holistic learning as a valuable component of education for FNMI students.
- Develop stronger relationships between FNMI students and their communities.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Culture

Student Clubs

Strategies / Major Activities

- Support the experiential learning of FNMI students through their participation in student clubs in an out of school.
- Grad Coach directly supports student clubs related to FNMI culture and community.
- Program supports community-building activities that create mentor, role models, and peer support with and for FNMI students.

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- FNMI students participate in student clubs related to FNMI culture.
- FNMI students provide support to FNMI communities through the Literacy Mentorship Program, Rainbow Spirit Dance Troupe and Rainbow Spirit Drum Group.
- FNMI students meet and learn from an artist-in-residence.

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase the number of students who participate in extracurricular activities.
- Increase the number of cultural extracurricular activities that are available to FNMI students.
- Increase the number of FNMI students who act as mentors and receive mentorship.
- Increase the number of opportunities for FNMI students to be mentors or role models in the community.
- Increase the number of opportunities for FNMI students to learn from their communities.
- Increase the number of activities and support offered to FNMI communities.
- Increase the number of culture knowledge keepers who teach and mentor FNMI students.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the holistic learning and development of FNMI students.
- Develop FNMI leaders who can give back to their communities.
- Develop lasting relationships with FNMI communities and students.
- Increase the sense of strength and resource that FNMI communities have for and from students.
- Increase the transfer of cultural knowledge to FNMI youth.

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Same as above

Parental Engagement

FNMI Parents

Strategies / Major Activities

- Graduation coach introduces parents to the Braided Journeys Program
- Graduation coach enlists parent support in assisting with their child's academic success.
- Graduation coach maintains ongoing communication with parents about their child's progress
- Graduation coach involves parents in school activities to help support them and their child, while offering increased appreciation for education. Early September, meet all FNMI students

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Parents are actively communicated with through emails, phone calls, and semester newsletters.
- Attempt to make at least one check-in per month.
- Parents are invited to schools for:
 - Bannock & Tea at Meet the Teacher Night (September)
 - Family Nights & Resource Fair (February)
 - Bannock & Tea at Open House (March)
 - FNMI Honouring Ceremony (May)

Short-term Outcomes

- Increase FNMI parents' awareness of the school programs and curriculum.
- Increase the amount of parents to communicate with the graduation coach about their child's progress.
- Increase the number of parents who actively support their child's academic achievements.
- Increase the number of parents who attend school activities.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increase the positive influence of FNMI parents' in the general school environment
- Increase FNMI student achievement as a result of their parents' active support.
- Improve the perception of the school community by FNMI parents and students

Long-term Goals / Impact

- Restore the social and cultural systems that once guided youth to FNMI students.
- Increase the perception that FNMI students are part of an inclusive society
Grad Coach encourages parents to become active participants in FNMI students' education.
- Grad Coach facilitates and maintains an open dialogue with parents and their children, and between parents and the school.
- Grad Coach encourages parents actively to visit and participate in school activities

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Grad Coach actively contacts parents through emails, newsletters and phone calls to discuss student progress, academic performance, behaviour issues, and community resources.
- Grad Coach works with parents to ensure that their children have the support and resources to achieve academic success.
- Parents engage with school and their child's education by participating in different activities hosted by Braided Journeys Leadership students and the grad coach

Documented Program Success

Measures of Success

- Increased FNMI high school graduation rates
- From 2008 through 2011, the program has increased FNMI graduation rates from 14.9% to 60.4% at St. Joseph, compared to:
 - o 71.2% for other students at St. Joseph;
 - o 48.8% for FNMI students and 81.4% for others students at Edmonton Catholic Schools; and
 - o 43.9% for FNMI students and 74.8% for other students in Alberta.
- Estimated retention rate for the 2012-2013 academic years is 85% (approximately).

Stakeholder Interviews and Assessment

Two school site visits were conducted to speak with stakeholders (i.e. program manager, graduation coaches, tutor and students).

Pamela Sparklingeyes (Program Manager of Aboriginal Services)

Program philosophy and details:

"We needed to shift from the mentality of schools with part-time liaison workers who helicopter in once or twice a week to put out fires and then move on to the next crisis. This is a proactive program and intentional supports. Academics, career counselling and leadership development are what makes a difference to build resilience and hope in our students."

"Our success is because we have dedicated full-time staff who have the passion and skills to develop relationships with students, teachers, parents, administrators and community. This job is about relationship building. It is intertwined... relationship should be throughout all components of the program."

"This grad coach position provides a structure for the community to get involved...space...time and opportunity. This is a safe place."

Vision for future

"My ultimate goal would be to have a graduation coach in every school in Alberta. I speak at events and share the model as much as possible to help make this happen. If this program is a best practice then we need to share it."

⁵ Each of the semi-structured interviews was voice recorded, transcribed and coded by the researchers to identify important themes.

What is the importance of a designated physical space within schools?

"Having Indigenous space is a similar models in post-secondary schools. If post-secondary institutions across Canada feel it is important to have a place for Indigenous learners to gather then our schools should adopt a model that works. We need to think outside the box. Space gives us a place to just be. And feel safe. That's the sense of belonging that Dr. Martin Brokenleg speaks to...belonging and having one caring adult to make a difference."

What do you look for in a High School Graduation Coach when tasked with hiring?

"I typically look for people with a strong education background. Ability to provide academic supports is crucial to help students who need to catch-up after a long-term absence and get back on track. The junior high coaches spend a good part of their time working with students who need literacy help. We have after-school homework clubs too. But really the job is quite complicated as there are many components. It takes a special person."

What are the roles of Administrators and Counsellors in relation to the High School Graduation Coach position?

"We are connected very closely with the student services in schools. We have very strong communication with administrators, student services and literacy programs. We have to have dynamic people within this job as communicators. We need synergy. We need the administrator on side to keep with the philosophy in the program..."

Tracking the data

"Some (students) might only want minimal contact but we have a process that is implemented at each site to ensure all students are engaged and supported. We have an accountability piece and we do monthly reports to be accountable. We have clear reporting and accountability tools. Monthly reports are shared with the program admin and the school admin. Communication is key. We keep data on all our activities. Data is important to track and use too advocate for funding and continued space."

Donita Large (High School Graduation Coach)

Experiences as a High School Graduation Coach

"Our job is not just a 9-5 job it is so much more than that. We spend lunch and afterschool with the youth because we have to do so much more to build relationships. We (Graduation Coaches) do things as a team, we have to help each other out. We come together and support each other in this way. We do it together. When the team shows up we support the youth; parent nights, celebrations, we support the youth and community beyond 9-5. Everyone pitches in this gives us strength. We are a family."

"We have 65 self-identified FNMI students in this school. There is a total of 1600 students. In years past the school has a small room for a part time liaison. It was welcoming but not the same level of support."

Program Details

"The model for the High School Graduation Coach is based on an American model, an adapted model made for schools. There is no prescription for what works, each site is different we have a basic plan but each place is different."

"One on One time with students is critical. Teachers want you to connect with students at the end of each block (class). I try to meet 2-3 students for one to one session each day. We do not take traditional lunch because students need time at lunch and a space to connect. Communication is key and coordination is important".

Tracking the data

"If I were to work with a student at this school I would look at Power school (Online School information system) to look at a student profile as it tells me a student's attendance, current marks and missed assignments. When I meet with a student I go over their progress. I do attendance checks, ongoing not daily. Academically I get to know youth...look at each one of them differently and identify needs. I try to meet students once a month but some students you need to meet often. We look at time management, academics, post-secondary, any obstacle keeping them from success."

Process...

"This year at the beginning I started with grade 10s, then 11s and 12s... this semester I am working with Grade 12's as they are preparing for graduation. For contacting students sometimes I use texts, Remind 101 app, call classes. I use Powerschool to contact parents. I keep track of parent contacts and one to one sessions on spread sheets.

We also use a monthly activity report. A one to one mentoring session is when I spend more than 15 minutes with a student. We also keep track of attendance of every organized activity we put on, meetings we have with staff, parent contacts, tutoring sessions, youth leadership (volunteer) activities. The activity reports help us keep track."

On Transition to Post-secondary, resumes and an evolving speakers' series

"We try to help the youth get grounded...help them with funding...help them with connecting. We help youth look at identity. It is important to sit with them and have these new conversations about where we come from...these conversations also change the family conversations at home and in communities." We help out with post-secondary transitions and help students with resumes. We bring in guest speakers to help the youth think about these opportunities that they have".

Student Conversations

In-between classes, we had small opportunities to speak to students about their experiences within the program, which provided another lens into how participants were experiencing the program. Below are small excerpts from these conversations.

What does the BRAIDED JOURNEYS do for you as a student and specifically how does having a place within a school shape your school experiences?

Student #1 – Jade

"I had experiences with aboriginal liaisons...programs...people. In elementary much of the aboriginal programming was random. In this program there are always people here to help with school and life".

Student #2 – Anonymous

"I was failing English and I got some help with tutoring in this room. I want to be an electrician. If this program was not here I would not graduate this year. I needed help with my English and tutoring. I learn a lot about my culture and about myself. I am embracing my culture and teachings and lessons...my eyes are opening. This is the one place in school where we can be ourselves."

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

During our analysis of the research conversations, common themes about lessons learned began to emerge. These conversations added contextualization to how the program was organized, a glimpse into the experiences of those involved in the program, and the important elements that contribute to its success. Furthermore, these participant descriptions of the project provided us with convergent support for the logic model. We present their ideas below in a narrative way that will allow us to elaborate on how the space felt, how students came and went, and how we made sense of this space.

Theme 1 - Importance of Relationships

This is where it all begins. You will see in each of the themes below that without relationships this program would be impossible to run. This is not easy work and we know from our own experiences that building relationships with high school youth is difficult, time consuming, and at times subsuming. But this grass roots work alongside youth and community is the work that, from our opinion, has made this program successful. From the graduation coaches, to the program coordinators, to the administrators, to the students, to the tutors, to the parents and to the community, we see the groundwork being undertaken to ensure that students are supported in the ways they need. While we could elaborate on this extensively, we see this theme as being a part of each theme that follows.

Theme 2 - A Full-Time Person

We see in the participants' words above that a full-time point person is of utmost importance to this program. Of course not just any person will do; rather, this person needs to have a background in education, experience working with Indigenous youth, and a knack for building relationships with not only the students, but parents and the community. The program administrator emphasized, without a full-time person, the program becomes like many other one off programs that lack relational capabilities and a context for not only the in-school life of the students but also their out-of-school life.

Theme 3 - Structure of the program

The structure and organization of the program also seems to be a key for both students and facilitators. It seems that this structure allowed facilitators to keep track of students. Not in an authoritative way, but in a way that enabled them to see when students were making progress or when perhaps more support was needed. The fact that there are attendance checks, academic checks, and a reporting of these check-ins by the graduation coaches shows that there is a process-oriented paper trail of how students may or may not be progressing. In many ways, this becomes a formative assessment from which both students and facilitators can learn and that can shape program delivery.

While these structures may be seen as accountability measures, we see them as much more than that. In some ways, it seems that the students saw these structures as valuing that their interactions were important. The structure upholds high expectations, and allows students a 'touch stone' space where they know they can go if help is needed. In the words, it is clear that the students had not experienced this type of structure prior to the Braided Journeys. In previous program opportunities, the students talked about people stopping by once in a while to help out, but not feeling like the people were truly invested in the youth.

We also picked up on the fact that although the program has specific criteria, it is not a one size fits all, canned program. The relational aspects of the program allow for graduation coaches to conduct a needs assessment on what types of support may be needed. While some students may utilize the program once a semester, others are engaged on a daily basis. The fact that this program accounts for the contexts and lives of the students involved is a major strength in our eyes.

Theme 4 – A Physical Gathering Space

A welcoming, inviting space may be seen as simply an additive to a successful program. This does not seem to be the case here. A place to call home within the school provides an opportunity for students to engage in their identities, who they are and are becoming, in a safe, informative, and comfortable environment. Having a place to come home to, a touch stone place, a place for connecting, enhances the relational aspects between students and staff. The practical application of this space affords the resources to complete school work, engage in tutoring, and interact with other students.

Theme 5 – Awake to Identity/Culture

Identity was a word that came up often during our conversations with both staff and students. While the ceremonies and conversations were opportunities to gain knowledge about FNMI culture, they also seemed to be an opportunity for students to feel pride about their cultural heritage, ancestors, and identities. Identity was central to each specific place and could be seen through the physical art on the walls, posters, and messages that are both hopeful and forward-looking for Indigenous youth as they negotiate the school landscape. Identity is a theme that is also re-visited in the practices, including transition camps and engaging with youth at the junior high level to ease the transition and identity-making process in high school. Paying particular attention to identity within the youth is a theoretical underpinning of the program.

Theme 6 – Connections to Community

The connections made between community organizations, members, and Braided Journeys also became important in strengthening not only the current status of the program, but the sustainability of the program. Connecting with community organizations afforded students opportunities to see successful FNMI role models within their own community. These connections also allowed students opportunities to participate in events that would not have been available to them had they not been involved in the program. These connections and partnerships are an important aspect of the future sustainability of this program.

Theme 7 – Preventative not reactionary

This program is exceptional because it spends energy, time, and resources on responsive engagement strategies for FNMI students within schools. This program has taken the task of sustaining FNMI learners within schools as opposed to reactionary measures. While this may seem simple, if we take a quick glance at the educational change literature, we unfortunately see that change is often reactionary and not preventative or responsive. Each of the themes above plays a role in why this preventative program is helping us to gain knowledge and understanding about how we might prevent FNMI students from leaving high school early, and sustaining them in meaningful and educative ways while they are in school.

Theme 8 – Transitions

This program is attentive to the transitions of FNMI youth. The people involved are aware of how difficult the transition to grade 9 can be; therefore, they have aspects in place that allow for the high school graduation coach to connect on deep levels with students early and often. We also heard conversations about the outdoor school experiences that allow the students to see the staff members in a different light, as non-teachers perhaps. This focus on building relationships early and often seems to be a strength of this program. While the program could merely focus on graduating as many FNMI youth as possible, the transitions beyond high school are also important components. Providing the youth with opportunities to be engaged in university settings, vocational settings, and work experiences enables what we see as a smoother transition out of high school. While at this time we are not aware of data that tracks where the youth go when they leave high school and the program, it is clear that this transition beyond the program is important.

Theme 9 - Creating a forward looking story – changing the story

The last theme is perhaps the most important. To the researchers, this program, and more importantly the people working within it, are shifting the stories of the youth with whom they work. They are not only changing the present stories, the stories for now, but they are changing the future imagined stories of who the youth can and will become. While the stereotypes and dominant stories of FNMI youth are systemic, this program offers glimmers of hope, glimmers of disrupting not only the stories of the FNMI youth but the stories *for* FNMI youth as they move forward into a life as a high school graduate and, within this, a journey that is filled with hopeful and optimistic trajectories.

Final Reflection

At the completion of one of the researcher's conversations, he left feeling hopeful and optimistic about the great work being done alongside Indigenous youth and families in schools. The Braided Journeys provides consistency and a home, in a sense, for FNMI youth as they negotiate the urban school landscape. Words such as identity, culture, sustaining, and forward-looking crossed his mind as he thought about the importance of safe places within schools for both youth and staff. These connecting places are what is so important to consider in this work that is being done in schools. Below is a narrative highlighting an experience within the program, as the researcher engaged in semi-structured interviews.

Honouring a shared process

Within each school setting, a certain rhythm evolves guiding the research process and conversational relationship. It is different each time and within each place. In this particular school the graduation coach initially greeted me with a welcoming handshake and invited me in for a tour of the school and a cup of tea, as we considered how the research conversations might take place. The grad coach has a quiet and welcoming presence, creating a space for sharing and listening to experiences between us.

The significant marker within this conversational relationship is the ongoing student presence that shaped and reshaped the research conversations around programming on this day. Students and family members often entered the room and the conversation with ease and a sense of place...adding thoughtful commentary and sharing their stories that are connected to the High School Graduation Coach Program. The thoughtful words and ideas from several students and in particular through the guidance of the grad coach I was hopeful in my attempt to captivate the spirit and energy within a highly effective program where youth and family are central to the commitments of educative programming.

Through the transcription process certain parts of the research conversation stand alone and stay with me as I listened to the conversations from this day...these words are the embodiment of the program...they stand alone. I reflect carefully on the words and notes etched within my journal...the words that emerge prominently are from a young man named Tim, who has participated in the High School Graduation Coach Program alongside his grad coach. The young man's words and his voice reverberate throughout the research conversations and they weave their way throughout the careful documentation process that I am engaging in.

I recall the moment when Tim walked slowly up to the table where I sat with the staff as we were discussing ideas around the philosophy and principles of the Braided Journeys program. Tim sat down and shook my hand as we were introduced to each other. I asked Tim, "Tell me...tell me what is the best thing about this program? Tim carefully thought about his response as it was marked by the silence between us. He then started to share and explained to me as he looked across the table carefully sharing his words.

"I didn't have a life before this place. I wanted to give up. This changed everything for me. They changed my school story. I was going to leave...this changed everything for me".

The words of Tim and the relationship that has evolved over time between him and the staff is not lost on me as I write up findings from these research conversations. The significance of a young person explaining to me in articulate and passionate words about how a person and a place can change his story is relevant and continues to guide my writing process. The words he shared tell the story of how the program he participates in is a place of connecting, a place of belonging, a place of identity making for Indigenous youth and their families as they negotiate the school landscape. I do believe as I write these final words on the Braided Journeys Program that Tim says it best when he shares with me his inner most thoughts: "this changed everything for me...this changed everything for me."

Appendix

Coaching program boosts Edmonton Catholic First Nations grad rate



[Janet French](#)

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Haley Bayne used to stand, agonizing, outside the door of Archbishop O’Leary High School’s graduation coach.

“Should I go in, or should I not go in?” the Grade 12 student wondered, all too aware of passing students’ glances.

Hearing her classmates’ racist jokes, she didn’t want them to know about her indigenous roots.

“I felt like I was dirty. I felt like I shouldn’t be native,” said 17-year-old Haley.

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Now, on track to convocate and hoping to be a pediatric nurse, she says graduation coach Donita Large was instrumental in her success.

“She’s definitely like a mom.”

Since its introduction in 2009, the [Braided Journeys](#) graduation coach program has kept more indigenous kids in school and helped drive up Edmonton Catholic Schools’ graduation rate for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

In 2010, when more than three-quarters of Edmonton Catholic high school students were graduating within three years of starting Grade 10, just 28 per cent of indigenous students were earning a diploma on time.

Now offered in three high schools and three junior highs, plus an outreach program in Westmount, 40 per cent of indigenous students are donning a cap and gown within three years, and nearly 58 per cent have a diploma in hand after four years of high school. Slowly, the gap between indigenous students and non-aboriginals is narrowing.

“We needed to do something differently. What we were doing wasn’t working,” said Pamela Sparklingeyes, the school division’s program manager of aboriginal learning services.

Braided Journeys began at St. Joseph High School in 2009, then expanded to St. Francis Xavier, Blessed Oscar Romero and Archbishop O’Leary in the next few years. (St. Joseph’s program has since changed.)

Last September, the school division added coaches to three northeast junior high schools.

Unlike other programs aimed at winning the interest of struggling teens, graduation coaches make a full-time job of catching students at risk of drifting away from school.

“Some teachers, they just slap a textbook on your desk and say, ‘Learn this,’ and walk away,” Hayley said.

Once a storage room, O’Leary’s Braided Journeys room has morphed into a student lounge of sorts, with computers, tables, a fridge and microwave, and board games like Pow-Wow-Opoly. Large checks up on how students are doing in their classes, talks to them about their career plans, and helps them choose courses the courses they’ll need as prerequisites. Once a social worker and a residential schools adviser for a law firm, Large also helps teachers include lessons about colonization and treaties into their classes. She keeps sage handy for smudge ceremonies. She also invites students to cultural and community events, and encourages them to volunteer. Most importantly of all, she’s just there to talk.

“I needed a job that brought me some hope,” Large said. “I love this job.”

Students say their classmates in the program feel like a family — and not just for indigenous students.

In the 2013-14 school year, 96 per cent of the students who saw a grad coach stayed in school.

Students and graduation coach Donita Large (third from left) in the Braided Journeys program hang out in the program room at Archbishop O’Leary High School. Students get school and career counselling, participate in volunteer and cultural programs, find comfort, and make friends through the program.

Sixteen-year-old Tori Costa, who is Portuguese, said she was drawn to the welcoming environment and the chance to volunteer — reading to elementary school students, sorting donations at the food bank, and serving Christmas dinner to people in poverty. Keisha Laboucan found a sense of belonging she craved. After moving to Edmonton in Grade 11 from High Prairie, she felt lost, misunderstood, and overwhelmed. The room was a quiet place where she could focus on her schoolwork. She overcame her self-doubt and graduated last fall. Laboucan is preparing to enrol in business administration or management at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. She feels like people will take her more seriously when she has a diploma or a degree.

“I do strongly believe if I hadn’t found this program, I would have struggled a lot more to get my graduation diploma.”

