

# First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education

## *Eliminating Achievement Gaps*

### **Hillside Community School: A Safe and Welcoming Place for Students and Parents Alike**

If you happen to be at Hillside Community School in Grande Prairie in the morning or at the end of the school day, you will see a large number of parents dropping off or picking up their children. They are greeted by staff and surrounded by information and positive messages at the entry points. It is well known that moms traditionally take an active role in schools. More and more Hillside dads are positively involved in every aspect of their child's education.

Principal Cynthia Matthews and her team of dedicated staff have deliberately and strategically worked to ensure the school is a safe and welcoming place for students and parents alike.

There are 15 or more family events during the school year, including evening dances, movie nights and celebratory dinners. As well, there are countless opportunities during the school day for parents to participate or volunteer.

Hillside has partnerships with Breakfast for Learning, City of Grande Prairie, Indigo Adopt a



School, Tim Horton Children's Foundation, Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Salvation Army, the Grand Prairie Fire Department, Big Country Toy Box, Cute as a Bug's Ear (local children's clothing store) and private sponsors to ensure that families have clothing for their children, gifts to give at Christmas, and daily snacks for all students. As Cynthia Matthews states, "We are here to take care of each other." She feels that if she can ensure the students are fed, warm and at school, her staff can focus on teaching. Parents know they can call the school and receive support; no apologies needed, no judgement given.



Hillside is a culturally diverse school with students from approximately 11 different countries. A large percentage of the students are First Nations, Métis or Inuit. All of the children know that their history, culture and ethnicity are a cause for celebration. Winona, a local Elder, visits the school regularly and shares her wisdom through story telling. As well, the staff have invited former students and First Nations residents who have overcome

Over the last three years, APORI results have improved dramatically, especially in the areas of Safe and Caring, Citizenship and School Improvement. Parents know they are welcome at the school any time, that they are important contributors, and that school staff, like them, want what is best for their children.

challenges and hardships to speak to the students about perseverance and the importance of goal setting.



Another reason that the students are so well served at Hillside is that Grande Prairie Public School District intentionally houses many of the division's student and staff support personnel at the school. From psychologists to instructional coaches to inclusion specialists, students and staff can access expert support and advice on a daily basis.



Hillside staff members realize that the best way to reach students is by connecting with their parents and working as a team. They have created a warm and welcoming community of families who view the school as central to their well-being.

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### **Discussion Starters:**

1. Discuss ways in which your school is a “warm and welcoming community of families who view the school as central to their well-being.” How do you know your school is warm and welcoming to First Nations, Métis and Inuit families and communities?
2. The importance of perseverance and goal setting is reflected in many of Alberta’s competencies, and specifically in the Personal Growth and Well-Being Competency. Discuss the link between attitudes and skills such as perseverance and goal setting and closing the achievement gap. Who, in your school or First Nations, Métis and Inuit community, could share with students their personal stories?
3. In what ways does your school celebrate First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories and cultures beyond a one-time school or classroom event; e.g., as part of day-to-day practices?

### **For more information:**

- [Hosting a Family Night: Engaging First Nation, Metis and Inuit Families](#) Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium
- [Learning Through Competencies Overview](#) Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium
- [Working Collaboratively with FNMI Parents, Families and Community](#) Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium
- [The Importance of Storytelling](#) Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium

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