

**BOYLE STREET EDUCATION CENTRE
CHARTER SCHOOL**

**EVALUATION REPORT
May 2014**

**Evaluation Team Members:
Margaretha Ebbers, Abinash Mishra
Bill Hoppins**

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A. INTRODUCTION

Background

Boyle Street Education Centre (BSEC) has been in operation since 1995 is located in downtown Edmonton. The student population varies between 90 and 125 students and is currently 115 students. Boyle Street Education Centre (BSEC) is open to students aged 14 – 19 who have left other school programs, have had limited success in regular school programs, or have inner city life and street experience. The lives of BSEC students reflect the impact of intergenerational poverty and oppression. The students have experienced multiple social problems including histories of physical and sexual abuse, addictions, criminal involvement and frequent stays in institutional care. Many do not have supportive families, positive adult role models, stable living environments or adequate financial resources. The absence of such support systems makes it difficult to maintain continuous involvement in education. As a result, they are typically below the academic level appropriate for their age and have a tendency to withdraw or drop out of school when challenged. As of September 2013, 89% of the students have self identified as First Nation, Metis or Inuit (FNMI) students.

Mission

The purpose of the Boyle Street Education Centre (BSEC) is to inspire and support the educational success and social development of high-risk youth and / or youth who have previously experienced interruptions in their formal learning.

Vision

Our vision is to be an inclusive and holistic education centre that facilitates the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual growth of students who have experienced interruptions to their learning. Graduates of the Boyle Street Education Centre will be:

- Engaged thinkers,
- Ethical citizens, and
- Entrepreneurial in their approach to post-secondary learning, career path and employment.

Charter Goals

The charter goals for BSEC are that:

- Formerly out of school students will be engaged in formal education.
- Overall school attendance will be maintained at an acceptable level.
- Student literacy and numeracy skills improve.
- Students' progress towards provincial graduation requirements.

B. EVALUATION PROCESSES

The findings of the evaluation were established using the following processes:

1. A self-evaluation prepared by the school and reviewed by a team from Alberta Education.
2. A tour through the school and subsequent walk-throughs to engage students and instructors in conversations regarding their immediate activities.
3. An onsite visit that included focused conversations with:

- The principal and vice principal,
 - The superintendent
 - The secretary treasurer
 - The longtime board member
 - Teachers (4)
 - Student Support Team (4)
 - Students (9)
4. The following artifacts were reviewed:
- Self Evaluation
 - Three Year Education Plan (2013-2016) and the Annual Education Results Report (AERR 2102-2013)
 - Charter Agreement, Revised 2011
 - Boyle Street Education Centre Charter School Evaluation Report (2009)

C. EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and evidence obtained throughout the evaluation process, BSEC Charter School meets the evaluation criteria on the eleven essential questions of a Charter School Evaluation. The specific conclusions are as follows:

1. **The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.**

Yes

As outlined above, the school has four charter goals which are being met by the school. Those interviewed provided substantive evidence to demonstrate the degree to which each goal is achieved. The school leadership team and student support team reported that the school continues to serve youth ages 14-19 who have not been successful in regular school programs. Students indicated that they had not been successful in other programs. Student in general felt safe and cared for at the schools. Students comments were: “I tried lots of different schools” and “I had nowhere else to go” and “we are like a family. The school attendance average over a four year period is 45% which is acceptable given the challenges faced by the students and laudable considering that previous to being at Boyle Street many of these students were non-attenders. The school has several strategies to reach out to those students for who attendance becomes unsatisfactory.

BSEC demonstrates net gains in the literacy and numeracy rates of its students. Many students double the number of credits earned before leaving the school. After the last school evaluation in 2009, the school updated its charter to reflect current language that is consistent with *Inspiring Education*. Stakeholders reported that the staff has a shared and deep understanding of the charter. Those interviewed believe that over time the staff has become more effective in engaging the students and meeting the terms and conditions of the charter. Since the charter revision the school has formed a Professional Learning Community (PLC) which focuses on the three Es (Engaging, Entrepreneurial and Ethical) of *Inspiring Education* that helped better their understanding of the charter.

2. **The school operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.**

Yes

Based on the findings and evidence, BSEC Charter School meets the provincial requirements of the *Charter Schools Regulation (Alberta Regulation 212/2002)* and the *School Act*. The school follows the *Alberta Programs of Study* and provides the required amount of instructional time. Students participate in Diploma Examinations as appropriate. The school complies with Alberta Education planning, reporting and funding requirements in providing complete and timely information.

3. The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful.

Yes

There is strong stakeholder support for all areas of the school operation including the delivery of a personalized instructional program. A very high percentage of stakeholders consider the school program to be successful according to the Accountability Pillar measures: Safe and Caring (93%), School Improvement (98%) and the Education Quality (84%).

Students and staff see the school as being effective and successful. Typically, students come to the school because they have heard about the school from other students and family members.

Students reported that the teachers are able to form strong relationships with the students as well as provide appropriate and engaging learning experiences for each one. Students seek out academic help as well as help in their personal lives. Many students indicated that teachers go above and beyond the call of duty to make sure the students attend and have a positive experience at school.

Other indicators of the positive climate and successful programming at the school are the low teacher attrition rate and the high return rate for students. Students leave the program when they either “age out” or finish the program. As one of the teachers indicated, “The doors aren’t open or closed; they are revolving”. Students might leave for a time but they always come back. Former students have a standing invitation to visit the school on Friday and join the school community for lunch.

The longer students are in school, the greater the rate of attendance. Students indicated that they do not have enough time to meet all the goals they have identified since coming to Boyle.

One of the challenges is to engage the parents of the school. Each year the school holds three events (Fall Open House, Spring Strawberry Tea and Graduation) to which parents and caregivers are invited, along with stakeholders and neighbours of the school.

4. The school is financially viable and responsible.

Yes

Based on a review of financial information for 2010-2013, BSEC has been in a healthy and viable financial position and is able to support its programming since the last evaluation. BSEC has been compliant with all financial reporting requirements. In this current year, student enrollment unexpectedly dropped from a projected 145 student to 86 students. This resulted in a current operating deficit of about \$600,000 as reported in the *Combined 3YEP/AERR (2013-2016)*. In December 2013, the school reduced its staff by five. The projected deficit for next school year is \$10,000. The senior leadership team expressed concern with the current funding model with an enrolment count date of September 30. In the 2013-2014 school year, the school received funding for 86 students. After September 30 the school registered 63 students, 43 of which had not registered with any other school authority. At the time of the evaluation, the school was working with 115 students. The school leadership team has been in consultation with Alberta Education to explore other funding models.

5. The charter school shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community.

Yes

The school has created a unique school culture and many innovative practices which have led to meeting the intended learning outcomes as described in the charter goals. The school's innovative approach is based on a study conducted by Mavis Averill in 2008. This study describes the BSEC students as survivors of extreme trauma which impacts the student's ability to learn. Averill identifies seven practices which the BSEC staff incorporates into their teaching pedagogy and the personalized student programming.

As recommended in the last evaluation, BSEC has greatly increased the amount of academic research being conducted; the number of speaking engagements its staff members offer; and the number of district-level sharing opportunities in which it participates. BSEC staff members have also acted as organizational consultants to other schools in the areas of instructional leadership and student inclusion. The following are examples of ways that BSEC has reached out to the greater community:

- Academic research and presentations (individual and organizational)
- Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) research and presentations
- Visits from international schools seeking to adopt a model of inclusion
- Leadership and Governance roles in the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) initiative
- School shares practices with the First Nation school Atikameg

BSEC is currently participating in a University of Alberta research project which explores the impact of BSEC's work with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) youth. Staff members will be co-presenting the results of the study at upcoming conferences.

In the last two years, there has been a concerted effort to increase the support for transitioning students to other programs. A weekly class is dedicated to helping the students develop high school portfolios for post-secondary work or study. Exit meetings are held with students that help the students frame the areas of support they need to move forward.

All teaching staff are part of the school's professional learning community (PLC); these were initiated after the last charter school evaluation. The PLC has demonstration days where learnings are shared. Some of the staff formed a learning group to increase their understanding of the Knowledge and Employability curriculum and its applicability to inquiry based learning.

6. The charter school is governed effectively.

Yes

The school is effectively governed by a group of committed Board of Directors. Communication among the charter board, superintendent and staff is effective, regular, and focused on the best outcomes for youth. This is a marked change from the communication pattern identified in the previous evaluation (Alberta Education, 2008). Comments from staff members and Board directors since changes to the school-based administration have shown that the communication flow amongst stakeholders has improved and that the tone has become very constructive. In anticipation of the Education Act being proclaimed in September 2016, the school is considering changing its mandate to serve students from ages 14-21. The board is also exploring moving to another facility at the time of the charter

renewal. The board chair member and senior administration expressed many challenges in moving to another facility and the need for support from Alberta Education to make the transition financially feasible.

7. The school is administered effectively.

Yes

The school is being administered effectively by a focused and dedicated administrative team (superintendent, principal, and vice principal) who are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in regards to the safe and effective management of the school's operations. The administrators and staff have a comprehensive understanding of the charter and exercise open communication within the context of positive professional relationships. Each member of the leadership team has a clear mandate and enjoys the confidence of the school community. With the support of the staff, the principal and vice principal ensure that the students' voice is strongly considered in school decision making. Students have influence on the day to day operations of the school.

8. Student achievement at the charter school is consistently strong or improving.

Yes

The BSEC staff monitors student achievement very closely to ensure student success. Using the commonly accepted metric for student achievement (i.e. Diploma Examination results) is problematic for BSEC. While 67% of BSEC students who write Diploma Examinations achieve the acceptable standard, the number of students writing Diploma exams is decreasing. For the majority of BSEC students, writing a diploma exam is a major accomplishment and this fact must be considered when examining the data. As part of the intake process the functional level of the student is assessed and an appropriate program and learning plan is developed. The staff interviewed indicated that the learning plans are reviewed on a regular basis. The results of these reviews indicated that the students are being successful in meeting the goals outlined in their learning plan. The school has developed some local metrics that provide evidence the students are achieving considerable success at the school.

9. The charter school is committed to engaging students, teachers, parents and community members in a model of continuous improvement.

Yes

The entire school community demonstrates great energy and passion for the work they are doing. The commitment of the staff to provide the best possible education results in a culture of shared responsibility and a social/emotional environment, characterized by hope, which is engaging to students. The staff is consistently reflecting on what is working or not, and providing input on ways to improve. Since the last evaluation, the Accountability Pillar results indicate that 92% stakeholders believe the school has improved. The growth in this area is best attributed to the fact that BSEC clarified its organizational structure to formalize discussions around constant improvement and ever greater financial and fiscal accountability. Specifically, shifting the organization to focus on goals as a Professional Learning Community has resulted in staff members talking about and acting in areas where change is collectively perceived to be required. Evidence of continuous improvement includes:

- Increased graduation rates and course completion. Based on student feedback, the development of “drop in” student interest courses that use group instruction were implemented.
- The board financially supports individual teacher professional development and involvement with Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) specialty councils.
- The school block scheduling was changed from 80 minutes to 60 minutes to accommodate the impacts of trauma, FASD and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) that affect many of the students.

10. The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.

Yes

BSEC has produced research related to its population since its inception. While a number of different pieces of academic work have been completed, the seminal study on the student population was conducted by Averill (2008). This study serves as the most prescient tool for understanding how best to work with students that are survivors of extreme trauma which impacts the student’s ability to learn. Averill identifies seven practices which the BSEC staff incorporates into their teaching pedagogy and the individualized student programming. The seven practices are: set clear standards, established focused goals, set challenging tasks, protect students from negativity, affirm their performance, provide novelty and variety and provide choice. These seven practices are consistent with the seven principles described in *Inspiring Education*. The school has supported several staff members in their graduate studies related to the work that goes on in the school (resulting in one Ph.D. dissertation, several Master’s theses, scholarly journal articles, numerous conference presentations and a book). Currently, BSEC is a co-researching institution as part of a Community/University of Alberta Partnership study into the impact the school has on adolescents living with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD).

The school’s PLC goals have been related to increasing the positivity of experiences for students. Specifically, the three goal areas leading to their 3Es vision have been to increase: a) good spirit in the school, b) student-to-student connections around learning, and c) hands-on opportunities to learn. In the last four years, this has led to several improvements in class offerings and scheduling and has even led to the development of a student-led drop-in class structure (where students who are at school in a given day can choose to either go to a scheduled class or, if they can demonstrate progress there, attend a drop-in session like Yoga, Improv Drama, co-ed phys-ed, experiential “fun” science and music).

11. The charter school reaches out beyond its walls to demonstrate broad and sustained levels of community engagement.

Yes

There is clear evidence that the school is doing an excellent job of being a high functioning learning organization with a strong desire to build sharing partnerships with other educational authorities. The school has several partners. The following are a few of the organizations that have some form of partnership with the school:

- University of Alberta (specifically The Community University Partnership in the Faculty of Extension)

- Native Counseling Services of Alberta
- Alberta Learner's Benefits (managed by Prospects)
- YouCan Edmonton
- Urban Systems

Inter-organizational relationships have been developed by various members of the staff as necessary by virtue of their jobs. Occasionally, those relationships have evolved from the individual professional level to the total organizational level.

Whenever possible, the Board of Directors has supported research projects that contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about the school's work to the greater educational community. At present, examples of this support are to be found in:

- Ample support for professional development (particularly in the area of graduate studies) for instructional staff;
- The Community-University Partnership study related to the impacts of the school on FASD adolescents.

Connecting with parents remains a problem because most of the students do not live with their parents. Despite this fact, the school continues to reach out to parents, the student's home community or nation. The school works directly with a number of community agencies to provide support to the students. Some of these agencies are:

- Native Counseling Services of Alberta
- Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
- Ben Calf Robe School
- Youth Empowerment Services Society
- The Aboriginal Commission for the Edmonton Police Service

Each of these agencies offers its own set of services specifically for FNMI youth or works with a majority of youth from the school community.

Final Conclusion

As a result of our evaluation processes, the team is satisfied that Boyle Street Education Centre is meeting the current requirements of legislation and regulations for charter schools and the 11 evaluation criteria of this evaluation.

D. COMMENDATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, REQUIREMENTS

The review team provides the following commendations, recommendations and required changes as part of continuous improvement.

Boyle Street Education Centre has many areas of strength with a number of areas that deserve special commendations:

Welcoming, Positive and Student Centered Culture

BSEC is to be commended for the welcoming, positive and supportive school culture that has been established. The students interviewed were extremely complimentary about how comfortable they feel at school. For some, the school is family.

Continuous Improvement

The staff, including the school's leaders, is to be commended for the implementation of innovative practices and a continuous improvement approach. The staff utilizes an excellent body of research along with participation in activities and conferences that assist teachers to develop more in their work with high risk students. The school has taken significant steps to implement the recommendations and required changes from the previous evaluation.

Variety of Personalized Programming and Partnerships

BSEC is to be commended for the extent to which it has individualized, personalized programming for each student. This approach has certainly engaged the students. Also, the variety of programming options for students and the creativity of the staff to ensure that students have the opportunity for unique learning experiences is outstanding.

Commitment to the Charter

There is a strong awareness of the charter in the school: engage high risk students who have not previously been successful. There is clear evidence, such as the establishment of a professional learning community that the school is working hard to develop a shared and deep understanding of the charter and how its teaching pedagogy is impacting student success. The school recognizes that the charter goals are evolving and continuous enhancements are being made, including being consistent with *Inspiring Education* and its associated components.

Snack and Hot Lunch Program

The school is commended for providing a free breakfast and hot lunch program for every student every day. This creates a positive learning environment in the school and prepares students to focus on learning. The school has a fully equipped kitchen with a chef and student helpers.

Safe and Caring

The school operates in a safe and caring environment. The principal, students and staff work together to keep the school clean, safe and caring at all times. During our interview with students they expressed great appreciation for the deeply caring nature of their teachers, principal and all staff members. In fact many students indicated that the attention and care they receive at the school is one of the primary reasons for them to be at the Boyle Street Education Centre.

Student Support

The school is commended for the number of supports it provides to students. The Student Services Team coordinates these supports and provides strong leadership to engage all staff in supporting students.

Sharing of Innovative Practice.

BSEC is exemplary in the degree to which it has shared its innovative practices, establishes partners and engages the community to provide the best possible education for its students.

Board of Directors and Senior Leadership

The board, superintendent and secretary-treasurer have been proactive and forward thinking in its deliberations on financial and facility issues. Once the financial challenges emerging from the enrolment decrease emerged, the superintendent took appropriate action. The board is modeling effective governance by anticipating future challenges such as changes to the *School Act* and facility challenges.

Recommendations for Consideration

Assessing Student Achievement

Assessing student achievement on a school wide basis at BSEC is a challenge. With such a small student population that participates in the Diploma Examinations, it is difficult to draw conclusions from the standardized measures. The school has developed some metrics such as numeracy and literacy measures and the calculation of the average number of credits earned by students while enrolled at BSEC. In order to give a more comprehensive set of metrics to determine the degree of student achievement and success, it is recommended that the school continue to develop local metrics. For example, a systematic review of the Individualized Program Plans (IPPs) and student learning plans to determine the degree to which students met their learning goals.

Student Support and Community Engagement

The school has developed many partners and engages the community in support of the school. The Student Support Team has indicated that their work includes providing support to mentor and sponsor students. This work is in addition to the counseling services, assessment and program planning work provided by the team. It is recommended that the school explore the feasibility of expanding their partnerships to include a mentorship and sponsorship program as a means of student support. This program would supplement the work of the Student Support Team and help students in their transition from the school.

Connect with Alberta Education

During the interviews of staff it became known that some of the Alberta Education pilot programs, such as the High School ReDesign and Inclusive Education were not known by the staff. Through the liaison manager, it is recommended that BSEC contact Alberta Education to explore the possibility of the school becoming involved in Alberta Education pilots.

Networking

BSEC has many partners and shares their innovative practices. However, at this point the school's connections are not strong with the neighbouring school jurisdictions. It is recommended that the school explore networking opportunities with their neighborhood jurisdiction and FNMI school authorities for professional learning and mutual sharing of best practices.

Sharing the Good News

The testimony of the students during the interview process was inspirational. It is recommended that the school explore the possibility of providing the students the opportunity to share their success in their learning such as with preservice teachers at the local universities.

Funding Model

The September 30 enrolment count date for funding purposes is not effective in funding the school. The school's leadership has been in consultation with Alberta Education to explore alternative funding models that recognize the transient nature of the school's student population. It is recommended that the school continue its dialogue with Alberta Education that will result in a more appropriate funding model.

Facilities

The board has been exploring alternative facilities to its current location. It is recognized that changing facilities is a major initiative for the school. It is recommended that the school continue its explorations and work collaboratively with Alberta Education to ensure a smooth transition to a new facility.

Connecting with Urban First Nations and Metis Organizations:

Given that a significant majority of BSEC students are First Nations and/or Metis, it is recommended that the BSEC continue to explore the possibility of connecting with Aboriginal organizations in Edmonton and surrounding areas in order to provide better support and services to its students and staff by sharing and disseminating information, research, innovation and best practices including opening up newer avenues of collaboration and partnerships. Many of them also provide funding, bursaries, scholarships etc. including educational projects and training programs for Aboriginal students. Some of these organizations include:

- City of Edmonton Aboriginal Relations Office (Phone: 780-944-7602)
- Wicihitowin – Circle of Shared Responsibility and Stewardship (Phone: 780-809-2192)
- Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative (MAEI) Contact: Dr. Carlana Lindeman, Education Program Director, Phone: (514) 982-3911
- Metis Nation of Alberta (MNA) Contact: Metis Education Foundation, Phone: 780-455-2200
- Confederacy of Treaty Six Office (Treaty Six First Nations of Alberta) Phone: 780-944-0334
- Treaty 8 Education Commission (Treaty Eight First Nations of Alberta) Phone: 780-444-9366

These organizations have education division to support education of Aboriginal people.

Required Changes

None