

Boyle Street Education Centre

Report

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background

Boyle Street Education Centre (BSEC) is a charter school that serves the learning needs of 144 students completing their high school studies. BSEC was established in September 1996 out of the Boyle Street Co-op. In the fall of 2004, the charter school relocated to its current location.

BSEC's charter mandate is to successfully provide education for socially, economically and otherwise disadvantaged youth, aged 14 to 19, in Edmonton. Many of the school's students are impacted by intergenerational poverty and have experienced various and multiple social problems that include physical and sexual abuse, addictions, criminal involvement and frequent stays in institutional care. Most do not have supportive family structures or adequate financial resources. They are typically below the academic level appropriate for their age and have a tendency to withdraw or drop out of school when challenged.

Enrolment per instructional group as of March 7, 2018 was as follows:

School year	10	11	12	Total
2017-2018	49	50	45	144
FNMI (self-declared)	45	44	37	126

Foundational Statements

The essential elements of education as articulated in the BSEC Charter are:

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.

Mission

The purpose of the Boyle Street Education Centre is to inspire and support the educational success and social development of youth who have previously experienced interruptions in their formal learning.

Key Charter Elements

Boyle Street Education Centre recognizes that the majority of the youth it serves are survivors of trauma. The school accepts that issues like mental health challenges, racism, abuse, extended periods of unstable housing and other traumas substantially inhibit the success of the young people that live with them. The degree to which youth are supported through managing trauma is the single greatest determiner of their ability to thrive in school. Students who have experienced extreme traumas can learn and, with the correct supporting services and relationships, can positively connect and contribute to the world around them.

With this set of assumptions as the starting place for their work, BSEC is guided in the following ways by these seven principles of inspiring education:

- **Being learner-centred:** School develops an educational plan that accommodates each youth's unique needs and desires.
- **Sharing responsibility and accountability for results:** BSEC works to establish a circle of support for each student in which the Centre is just one of many success-enabling agents.
- **Creating and Sustaining Community:** Internal and external community resources are vital in ensuring relevant and accurate learning is available for all students.
- **Inclusivity of access:** Every learner enjoys fair, reasonable, and barrier-free access to the opportunities we offer.
- **Program flexibility:** Students enjoy a primarily self-paced learning environment that, with the guidance of the school staff, can include experiential, multidisciplinary, and community-based opportunities.
- **Sustainability:** Staff operate within a Professional Learning Community focused on deliberate and constant refinement of the learning opportunities throughout the Education Centre.
- **Innovation for excellence:** A priority of the school is to discover and deploy research-based innovations to serve the needs of students.

Charter Goal and Outcomes (from BSEC Combined 3YEP (17-20) & AERR (16-17))

Goal 1: Students will demonstrate social and emotional skills needed to manage the effects of trauma.

Outcome: Students, with outreach and support from school staff, will better manage the effects of trauma experiences.

The metrics for this goal are:

- Rate of attendance correlated with outreach efforts.
- Rate of student use of supports and services.
- Growth in 6-year Transition, Work Preparation and Citizenship rates.

Goal 2: Students will demonstrate the knowledge and competencies to successfully transition to post-secondary education and/or work.

Outcome: Students will improve their skill attainment and their ability to positively transition from our program.

The metrics for this goal are:

- Positive change in literacy/numeracy levels.
- Diploma exam results at the Acceptable level.
- Growth in 6-year Transition, Work Preparation and Citizenship rates.

Goal 3: Students will act as engaged agents of their own learning and thriving members of their communities.

Outcome: Students will access school and community supports in order to better manage their behaviour so that they are able to achieve their learning goals.

The metrics for this goal are:

- Severe behaviours will diminish over time.
- Rates of student use of services and supports.
- An increase in the number of students achieving IPP outcomes.
- Positive change in literacy and numeracy levels.

Previous Evaluation and Ministerial Expectations

The *Alberta Education BSEC Evaluation Report* of 2014 identified a number of commendations and eight recommendations for consideration and no required changes. In the 2015 charter renewal letter from the Minister of Education, the school was encouraged to develop school-level measures and work with Alberta Education to address concerns and support for BSEC's financial viability. The Minister indicated that the criterion related to consistently strong or improving student achievement was not sufficiently met.

Terms of Reference

The *Charter Schools Regulation* requires that all charter schools in the province be evaluated at least once in the term of their charter. There are a number of purposes for the evaluation of a charter school:

- To provide evidence to the Minister and the board that the charter school is in compliance with provincial requirements and the requirements of the Charter, inclusive of charter amendments, approved by the Minister.
- To report to staff, parents and the community on the success of the charter school and to identify areas of strength and areas that may require additional attention.
- To focus the attention of the board and staff on the goals and objectives of the Charter and the need to establish and confirm measurable outcomes and measures.

- To facilitate continuous improvement in the charter school consistent with the assurance requirements of the Ministry and with the local direction established by the charter school community and authorized by the board of directors.

The criteria by which the charter school is evaluated are as follows:

1. The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.
2. The school operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.
3. The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful.
4. The school is financially viable and responsible.
5. Student success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order (#001/2013).
6. Student achievement at the charter school is consistently strong or improving.
7. The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.
8. The charter school shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community.
9. The charter school reaches out beyond its walls to demonstrate broad and sustained community engagement.
10. The charter school is governed effectively.
11. The school is administered effectively.
12. The charter is committed to engaging students, teachers, parents and community members in a model of continuous improvement.

Evaluation Processes

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

1. The charter school was asked to develop and submit to Alberta Education a self-evaluation report based on the 12 criteria named above.
2. Alberta Education established a team of four individuals to review the self-evaluation report submitted by the school and to determine appropriate school site evaluation processes.
3. Focus group sessions were established to provide opportunities for the board, superintendent, principal, teachers, support staff, students, an Elder and parents to share insights about the school's successes and ideas about how the charter school might become even more effective.
 - Individual interviews were conducted with the superintendent, principal, vice-principal, board chair, Elder and secretary-treasurer.
 - One focus group of five teachers was conducted.
 - One focus group was held with parents.
 - One focus group was held with students.

4. Evaluation team members participated in classroom observations of grades 10-12 to observe instruction, the design of student learning activities and student engagement. While debriefing these classroom observations, many individual impromptu conversations were held with teachers.

II. EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS, COMMENDATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REQUIRED CHANGES:

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

BSEC has met the terms and conditions of its charter. Initially, the school's charter focused on developing engaged thinkers, ethical citizens with entrepreneurial spirit, but has shifted to trauma informed practice over the last few years, which more closely reflects student realities. The school serves students aged 14-19 who have left regular school programming and have experienced limited success in school. Most, if not all students, have survived trauma in their lives. Many students are living independently with meagre means to secure income. Boyle Street staff share a common vision that facilitates the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual growth of students that involves utilizing community resources. The school's holistic approach is unique in that school staff ensure that individual student's basic needs are met before delving into academics.

The school employs First Nation and Métis certificated teachers and support staff including an Elder, all of whom are role models.

An individual education plan is written for each student and social development is supported by providing group activities such as Christmas concerts, cultural events, and engaging students in work-related opportunities. Given this individualized, learner-centred approach and the fluctuation of students enrolling throughout the school year, the school has developed a number of local performance measures to fulfil the terms and conditions of its charter and to more accurately assess student achievement and trends over time.

Commendations

The creation of a data collection instrument to allow the collection of local data baselines has been established and trend data is being recorded, compiled and analyzed.

The welcoming and family-like environment is evident.

Recommendation

1. Continue to collect longitudinal data.
2. Confirm which strategies are most apt to lead to success and to inform the implementation of new strategies.

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

Based on the findings and evidence, BSEC 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. Regular monitoring of the school by Alberta Education staff confirms its coherence with Ministry expectations. The school complies with Alberta Education planning, reporting and funding requirements in providing complete and timely information

A coordinated approach to understanding First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives, culture and histories would be beneficial. Not only would it address the large First Nations, Métis and Inuit

population at the school, but would also fulfill the leadership quality standard requirement to apply foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

Commendations

There is a demonstrated willingness to work with Alberta Education staff to comply with Bill 24 requirements.

Alberta Education staff are invited on a regular basis to visit the school which facilitates opportunities for the exchange of ideas.

Recommendation

3. Engage in opportunities for whole staff professional development regarding First Nations, Metis and Inuit perspectives, culture and histories.
4. Weave First Nations, Metis and Inuit perspectives, culture and histories throughout the curriculum to enhance the teaching and learning process.
5. Complete an inventory to assess if there are sufficient resources at BSEC that promote First Nations, Metis and Inuit student identities.

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

Overall, students, parents and staff see BSEC as being effective and successful. There is strong community stakeholder support for the provision of a safe and caring environment at the school. Many of the students do not benefit from a supportive family environment, positive role models, stable living environments or adequate financial resources. The school accepts students where they are at and works to support the mental, physical, spiritual (e.g., participation in sweats) and emotional growth of the student to make them 'school ready'. The student services team tracks the number of services referred and services accessed by the students.

Commendations

Staff are implementing trauma-informed practices in their interactions with students.

The school's Elder contends that the school blends the westernized worldview with Indigenous perspectives.

Students appreciate the opportunity to receive supports as needed and that their education has included life skills and self-regulation strategies as well as academics.

Parents appreciated the family atmosphere, the wrap-around supports and the opportunities for students to participate in cultural events.

4. The school is financially viable and responsible.

BSEC serves a transient and “at risk” student population. In the past three school years, they have budgeted on modest enrolment numbers which are typically 140 students who enter and exit their school throughout a school year. In 2017, 99 percent (\$3.8 million) of the school’s revenue was from Alberta Education. In addition to funding provided through the funding framework, Alberta Education funds the building lease for BSEC which costs \$490,000 annually.

August 31, 2017 - Actual Expenses	\$3.8 million
August 31, 2018 - Budgeted Expenses	\$3.6 million
August 31, 2017 - Accumulated Surplus from Operations	\$2.1 million

Enrolment Data:

Year	Funded Students	FNMI Declared	Severely Disabled
2015-16	142	114	104
2016-17	139	123	112
2017-18	144	126	112

The financial viability of BSEC is very sensitive to changes in enrolment numbers. The current enrolment is 144 students and the school administration share that it is very difficult to predict the number of students for the 2018- 2019 school year. In addition to funding they receive based on enrolment data, the support of lease costs annually by Alberta Education sustains BSEC’s ability to operate.

The existing lease for the BSEC facility expires August 31, 2021, providing stable accommodation for 3 school years following the current year.

Recommendation

6. In late-2018 or early-2019, BSEC and Capital Planning should engage in preliminary discussions regarding future accommodations for BSEC.

5. Student Success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order (#001/2013)

The charter revised in 2015 was tied tightly to the Ministerial Order. While the charter goals have evolved over the last three years and focus now on best practices teaching students who have suffered trauma, staff are still very cognizant of the ‘3 Es’ and can articulate strategies that they use to develop engaged thinkers, ethical citizens and an entrepreneurial spirit.

The school’s Self Evaluation Report acknowledges the importance of engaging students in their own learning, and of building individualized learning plans for each student so that he/she can focus on and develop strengths. From the time a student registers at the school, students and

staff begin working on the exit plan so that he/she knows exactly what to do to reach his/her goals.

Commendations

Students demonstrate the characteristics of engaged learners (attendance, course completion), ethical citizens (respect, responsibility, striving to get a diploma so that they can be self-sufficient) and an entrepreneurial spirit (resiliency, life skills, setting and achieving goals).

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

The 2016-2017 Accountability Pillar results show Very High Achievement results in 7 of 13 published results:

- Safe and Caring
- Program of Studies
- Education Quality
- Students attaining Acceptable standard on Diploma exams
- Work Preparation
- Citizenship
- School Improvement

The results show that, overall, there have not been significant improvements or declines. Despite the school working diligently with each individual student to keep them engaged in school, and to re-engage students who stop attending the program, the Drop-Out rate declined significantly last year. The school invests a lot of energy in reaching out to students who leave the program and providing them with supports in the hope of enticing them back to the school environment.

The school continues to explore opportunities to improve the Drop Out Rate, High School Completion Rate, Diploma Excellence, Diploma Exam Participation Rate and the 6-Year Transition Rate which scored Very Low on the Accountability Pillar. It is difficult to expect significant improvements due to the nature of the struggles that its population faces. A population with limited literacy and numeracy skills will struggle to complete the onerous requirements for a High School Diploma or even a Certificate of High School Achievement.

The staff have focused on literacy and numeracy skills over the last few years. Students are assessed yearly through the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), allowing teachers and the learning facilitator to implement more strategic goals in the student's Individual Program Plan (IPP). The expectation is that a greater emphasis on improving the student's literacy and numeracy skills will lead to improved outcomes for the student and improved DIP achievement levels for the school.

The staff have increased student engagement by consciously integrating real-life problems into the students' learning. Project-based learning has been incorporated into many subject areas to promote relevancy and engagement. The Career and Life Management course integrates filling out taxes, sewing buttons, and other important skills for independent students. Where teachers see the opportunity, they integrate First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into these tasks and skills.

Staff motivate students by setting attendance or achievement thresholds, which trigger certain rewards: in-school rewards, events at West Edmonton Mall, outdoor education camps, and/or a YMCA Youth Exchange trip to Toronto.

The school measures and analyzes achievement and attendance data, number of credits earned by term, incidences of severe behaviour, the use of specialized services and the number of students returning after an extended absence from studies. The results are promising, but a small school population leads to small data sampling, which results in questionable reliability and validity. The school also tracks successful credits obtained.

Commendations

Students feel that they are achieving at a far greater level than ever before. Parents in the interview reported that their children have improved attendance compared to previous schools.

Staff are able to articulate examples of improvement in student achievement.

Recommendation

7. Articulate to stakeholders in a clear statement BSEC's definition of student success.
8. Continue to refine the collection of data that aligns with BSEC's definition of student success.
9. Analyze the longitudinal data that affirms successful learnings and informs possible new strategies.

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

The staff have been trained in trauma-informed practices. Parents report that the extra care and wrap-around services have been important prior to their child being able to focus on achievement and results. Parents appreciate a focus on First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural identity. A focus on transitions from regular schools to the charter school, and from Boyle Street Charter School to the post-secondary has led to greater success. Teacher communication with parents and parent participation in their child's education has been important in maintaining engagement for those students.

Staff have introduced seminar learning to provide students with opportunities for larger group learning in an environment where most students experience individualized learning.

Eighty eight percent of BSEC students self-identify as First Nations, Métis and Inuit. The school seeks a balance between the 'western' ways of thought and those which are closer to the 'Indigenous' ways of knowing in order to encourage greater engagement in learning. Some students have asked staff to facilitate Cree language instruction and traditional teachings that align with curriculum (e.g., beading, sweat lodge).

A student success coach works in concert with the school counselor to develop a real world approach to employment readiness and post-secondary preparation.

The school provides nutritious breakfasts and lunches, acknowledging that learning is more likely to occur when the body is nourished.

The school provides funds to allow staff to design their own individualized professional development program while aligning their learning within the school goals of teaching students through trauma-informed practice.

Commendations

Staff use trauma-informed research to guide their practice and to create an atmosphere of acceptance, respect, understanding and support for all students.

Research in the area of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) guides instructional decisions for those students who can benefit.

Recommendations

10. Continue to explore teaching practices and strategies informed by cognitive neuroscience using flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences.
11. Examine the implementation of the new Teaching Quality Standard that complements the learning already accomplished by BSEC's staff, and the continued improvement in practice that the school strives for.
12. Explore opportunities for students to participate in land-based learning experiences.

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

The focus for BSEC staff in this charter has been to acquire and hone strategies that are most effective for at-risk youth. Learning about trauma-informed strategies has been the starting point, and collaborative planning and learning has encouraged staff to incorporate engagement strategies to keep students focused on their studies and earning credits towards a high school credential. Staff embed curriculum outcomes in real-world learning. For example, students are asked to display their calculations on whiteboards and interactive displays as they prepare meals for dozens of students and staff. Math skills are further reinforced in the Construction and Fabrication shop area as they build furniture.

Since 2015, BSEC staff have presented at various events in the province and at the National At Risk Youth Conference in Savannah, Georgia, USA. Among the provincial events are charter school conferences, teacher conferences (Greater Edmonton Teachers' Conference and North Central Teachers' Convention) and the ULead Conference. School staff reach out to create awareness of the school's services at various centres in the Edmonton area that provide supports to youth at risk. Local schools have started to contact BSEC directly when they have students who might benefit from the charter school's programming.

BSEC is exploring a partnership with the University of Manitoba as researchers are exploring strategies for students diagnosed with FASD.

BSEC has expressed an interest in hosting pre-service teachers from the University of Alberta to provide them with skills and knowledge about the types of strategies most effective with at-risk youth and how to keep them engaged in school.

Commendations

School administration has presented at local, provincial, national and international conferences.

Recommendation

13. Collaborate with the University of Alberta to provide a pre-service teacher partnership opportunity.
14. Explore if the opportunity to collaborate and share best practices with Northland School Division on your inclusive, holistic approach to supporting First Nations, Métis and Inuit education is possible.

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

The school has several long-standing partnerships with private companies who see the benefit of creating a safe, caring and supportive learning environment for First Nations, Metis and Inuit learners. As well, student support staff (success coaches, counsellors, IPP coordinators) build relationships with individuals and agencies who have repeated contact with students and who can, through a better understanding of their reality, support them. Examples include members of the Edmonton Police Service, public defenders, prosecutors and judges, parole officers, food bank workers, the City of Edmonton, neighbours in adjacent condominiums, local business owners and health care providers. Through these contacts, the school has been able to assist students who are largely living independently with free bus passes, work experience contacts and Registered Apprenticeship Program placements, to name a few supports.

The school conducts an initial intake interview where students are asked what supports they need; they are then connected with the people and agencies that can supply those services.

Board members are recruited based on areas of need. Most have an understanding of, or experience working with, First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations. The board members have contacts and networks that can enhance the supports for the students at the school.

Commendations

Partnerships with a multitude of other agencies, services and individuals has resulted in a vast array of supports for students that can be individualized to meet their needs

10. The charter school is governed effectively.

Communication between the board, superintendent and staff is positive, regular and focused on the needs of the students. The board understands their role and feels that the development of clear and consistent policies and procedures is the best way that they can support all stakeholders.

The board members tend to be acclaimed; the current board chair cannot remember an actual election taking place. Therefore, when a board member decides to retire, the remaining board members discuss potential community members to approach. This past fall, they recruited three board members of First Nations and Métis heritage; one of whom is a former student at the school. Their perspectives and insights are highly valued.

The board members take pride in the fact that they are non-political. Their goal is to support students and to ensure there is a safe and nurturing environment in place.

Commendations

A clear delineation of roles and responsibilities is understood by the board, the superintendent, the school administration and the staff.

11. The school is administered effectively.

BSEC is being effectively administrated by a focused and committed administrative team including the principal, vice principal, and student services personnel. Team members reported high satisfaction with their working relationships. The school leadership team is committed to working with the students, staff and parents. All required documentation is submitted in a complete and timely manner. The administrative team follows the legislation, regulatory and policy requirements of Alberta Education and the Board.

Commendations

Staff and students expressed appreciation for the school administration and felt supported. The principal has high expectations and a focus on instructional leadership.

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

In the 2014 BSEC evaluation report there were seven recommendations and no required changes. Key recommendations from the 2014 evaluation report focused on the need for local measures to be created and used; an increase in the partnerships to support student transition from school; regular dialogue with Alberta Education to explore an alternative funding model; and, finally, an exploration of alternative facilities pending the lease expiration of its current location.

As stated in the eleven criteria for charter renewal, BSEC has made progress in the recommendations from the 2014 evaluation report.

BSEC has created and is using a number of local measures that are showing promise. The challenge at this point is that it is early and therefore difficult to identify trends with only two years of data. The recommendation to BSEC is to develop trend data to inform their work to support student success.

The expanded partnerships and increased student services supports have provided improved wrap-around support for students to allow greater readiness to learn and better transitioning from the school to the world of work.

The administration report that the funding model developed by Alberta Education for BSEC supports student success.

While the existing lease agreement was extended to 2021, BSEC will need to explore alternative facilities to its current location as market conditions in the downtown area evolve and may impact their lease arrangement.