

Penticton Christian School - Independent Year 2

Leadership Team:

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School Context/Community:

Penticton Christian School, an independent, Group 1, K-12 school is located in the sunny South Okanagan, between Summerland and Okanagan Falls. The school serves 94 students, offering regular and special education programming to students and their families who desire a Christ-centered education. PCS has completed phase 1 of its new school building, planning to serve up to 120 students in the upcoming school year. School goals include a focus on the ongoing development of an excellent preK-12 Christian educational program, increasing parent participation at all levels of our Christian school community, as well as strengthening ties with local area churches and other service providers.

School Inquiry and Action: HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Question:

Teacher-directed instruction vs. peer-led instruction – which is more effective in the curricular areas of healthy nutrition and active living?

Strategies:

Teachers and their classes (K-12) chose an experiment/idea, dealing with a health aspect such as healthy nutrition and/or active living. They then “performed” the experiment, with teachers being the instructional leaders. Classes, on rubrics developed by their teachers and, in some cases the students themselves, assessed and evaluated the effectiveness of the experiments and teachers “teaching the idea”. A few students from each class then took their experiments/ideas to the grade level immediately below them, e.g. 4/5 students “taught” the experiment to the 2/3 class. The lower grade levels assessed and evaluated the effectiveness of the experiments and the students “teaching the idea”, using the original rubrics. Students and teachers had fun doing this! Rubrics were not long or complicated; they consisted of simple questions such as “how interesting was this experience/experiment to you?”. Students responded by circling numbers between 1 and 5, 1 being “not at all” and 5 being “very”. The school was basically interested in two things:

1. Students having fun learning about some aspect of healthy living.
2. Whether or not student-directed learning in this area of education would have a greater impact on student choices than teacher-taught material.

Focus on Formative Assessment:

The learning intentions of this project included a. students making healthy choices and b. students leading active lifestyles. Teaching staff members wanted to see a reduction in the consumption of less-than-healthy foods as well as an increase in the (voluntary) participation in physical activity among the school's students. Midway questions included the following: a. is our teaching making a difference? and b. will students accept (or prefer) peer-led instruction in these areas of study?. Great emphasis was placed on classes/students teaching other classes/students about their area of study/learning. Learner ownership included a focus on students making better choices (on their own). Overall, from K-12, students have benefited from formative assessment strategies, as they allow them to internalize and apply their learning.

School Findings: K-12

Primary - “Fruity Favorites” and “How much sugar is there in popular drinks students drink?”:

- Students in K/1 liked it better when a teacher taught the experiment to them (70%); 100% of students wish to make changes to their diets as a result of this experience.
- Students in grades 2 and 3 welcomed the presentation by the students in 4/5, expressing a strong desire to change their eating habits: 86% stated that they would change some of their food choices.

Intermediates - “Food Groups”:

- Students at the intermediate level indicated that they would make their choices independent of who presents the information to them.
- 56% thought that they might change some of their food choices. About half of them found the exercise interesting.

Middle School - “Personal Fitness” and “Eating Healthy”:

- There was no significant change in the students' perception of their learning, whether it was student- or teacher-led.
- 92% of students in grades 6/7 indicated that they would now exercise more.
- At the 8/9 level, 44% of students indicated that they were indifferent about making changes to their lunches.

High School - “Healthy Living”:

- There was no significant change in the students' perception of their learning, whether it was student- or teacher-led.
- 60% enjoyed learning about some aspect of healthy living.
- High school students received “instruction” from several K/1 students – we are not sure about the learning aspect in this case, but can reasonably state that fun was had by all. ☺

School Plans for 2008-2009:

The school's “Healthy Nutrition Policy” provides direction to the school with regards to proper nutrition, vending machine contents, etc. The “Healthy School Plan” focuses on the ongoing development of healthy lunches, healthy “hot lunch” options, and high school students taking the “Food Safe” course as part of their course of study (if enrolled in a foods-related course such as Home Ec. 10: General). In addition, the school wishes to continue developing its PE program, with the addition of a new gym/multipurpose hall in the near future. Further, the school hopes to continue to increase the number and quality of working relationships with representatives from service providers such as Interior Health (e.g. the public health nurse and the community nutritionist, to name a few). Finally, the school will strive to increase awareness of medical alerts and conditions among all school groups as time progresses.

Reflections:

Overall, students participated well in this project. They indicated either a preference for teacher-led instruction or that it did not matter to them who taught them regarding healthy living. A majority of students stated that the learning experiences provided to them, both through them as well as through the teachers, would lead them to making positive changes to their lifestyles and nutrition choices.

PCS is pleased to have been a participant in the Healthy Schools Network. We acknowledge that this year's project/question was work-intensive and perhaps a bit complex. However, we also believe that students and staff have benefited from this exercise and that awareness levels have been raised. Student responses have been mostly positive, giving us the necessary motivation to continue next school year.