



# Miyo Wahkohtowin Education (MWE) Restorative Practices

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**Researcher: Dr. Shauna Bruno**

**Nurturing Capacity  
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## Preface

### Nurturing Capacity: Building Community Success

Indspire supports communities to improve educational outcomes through the documentation and evaluation of their innovative practices. This community-led process is supported by an Indspire-funded Indigenous scholar, who works with programs on the ground to provide training on data collection and evaluation methodology.

For more info, please contact [nurturingcapacity@indspire.ca](mailto:nurturingcapacity@indspire.ca) | 1.855.463.7747 x230

## Project Abstract

The objective of this project is to document the restorative community based practices of Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Authority (MWE). It is located in Treaty 6 territory, within the Ermineskin Cree Nation which is one of the four bands that collectively make up Maskwacis Cree in central Alberta.

There is evidence of successful Indigenous educational practices in MWE, particularly the strengths of the restorative practices that identify strong cultural connections that honour local Indigenous knowledge systems. These include but are not limited to: restorative justice circles, a family advocate, *Leader in Me*, hot lunch program, and equine therapy.

## Project Holder

### Miyo Wahkohtowin Education (MWE)

Contact person: Brian Wildcat, Superintendent

Address P.O. Box 248 Maskwacis, AB T0C 1N0

Telephone: 780.585.2118 Fax: 780.585.2116

Email: [Brian\\_Wildcat@miyo.ca](mailto:Brian_Wildcat@miyo.ca)

Website: <http://www.miyo.ca/alternate>

## Project Lead

Brian Wildcat, Superintendent

Email: [Brian\\_Wildcat@miyo.ca](mailto:Brian_Wildcat@miyo.ca)

Telephone: 780.585. 2118

**Additional Contact:** Mrs. Wendy Solland, Director of Instruction and School Leadership

Email: [wendy\\_solland@miyo.ca](mailto:wendy_solland@miyo.ca)

Telephone: 780.585.2118

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## Executive Summary

The objective of this project is to document the restorative community based practices of Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Authority (MWE). MWE is located in Treaty 6 territory and within the Ermineskin Cree Nation which is one of the four bands that collectively make up Maskwacis Cree in central Alberta. The Maskwacis Cree territory serves four First Nations: Ermineskin, Samson, Montana, Louis Bull. MWE has a seven member and two councillor board structure. It operates four schools, Ermineskin Kindergarten, Elementary, Junior Senior High, and Ehpewapahk Alternate. There are approximately 1018 number of students attending the four schools, with an 83.6% attendance rate. Approximately 90% of students attending are from the Ermineskin Cree Nation. All students are from the Maskwacis community.

What is Restorative Practice? Restorative practices has evolved from restorative justice. Restorative practice is considered “a new field of study that has the potential to positively influence human behavior and strengthen civil society around the world. Restorative practices build healthy communities, increases social capital, reduces the impact of crime, decreases antisocial behavior, repairs harm and restores relationships.”<sup>1</sup>

There is evidence of successful Indigenous educational practices in MWE, particularly the strengths of the restorative practices that identify strong cultural connections that honour local Indigenous knowledge systems. The data and narratives show clear evidence that MWE have made a difference in the lives of learners and families. MWE has adopted restorative practices that have been difference making. Restorative justice circles, a family advocate, *Leader in Me*, hot lunch program, and equine therapy are some of the MWE practices that are highlighted in this report.

A core strategy in MWE has been to indigenize their education system. Maskwacis Cree language and traditional practice have been embedded into MWE and the Maskwacis community, to sustain language, cultural values, and beliefs. The quality of relationships and sense of belonging became top priority. MWE attends to 100% of the basic needs of their students. As the quality of student - teacher relationships improved, and with the integration of restorative practices, there was a noted increase in attendance and completion rates.

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<sup>1</sup> International Institute for Restorative Practices: <http://www.iirp.edu/what-we-do/what-is-restorative-practices>

## Miyo Wahkohtowin Education (MWE): Restorative Practices

### Context of the Project

Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Authority (MWE) is located in Treaty 6 territory and within the Ermineskin Cree Nation of central Alberta which is one of the four bands that collectively make up Maskwacis Cree in central Alberta. The Maskwacis Cree territory serves four First Nations: Ermineskin, Samson, Montana, Louis Bull. Ermineskin Cree Nation was once home to the Ermineskin Indian Residential School and the Day School in the early 1900s. The Maskwacis community, formerly known as Hobbema, reclaimed the original territorial name of the area, Maskwacis (Cree for Bear Hills) on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014. The name “Hobbema” is a Dutch surname, named after a landscape artist who was admired by the President of the Canadian Pacific Railroad during the time the railway line was built in the area. The community was called Hobbema from 1891 to 2013. The reclamation of the traditional name has inspired a process of reclaiming Maskwacis identity. The name is a better reflection of the heritage of the area.

In 1991 Ermineskin Cree Nation created Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Authority (MWE) to achieve local administrative control of schools, part of Indian control of Indian Education in 1972. This policy was part of the transferring control of schooling to First Nations. A First Nations managed system, MWE has a seven member and two councillor board structure. It operates four schools: Ermineskin Kindergarten, Elementary, Junior Senior High, and Ehpewapahk Alternate. Approximately 1018 number of students attend the four schools with an 83.6% attendance rate. All students attending these schools are Indigenous primarily from the Maskwacis community. The majority of the students attending MWE schools are from the Ermineskin Cree Nation.

Maskwacis has experienced high suicide rates and unemployment rates. Issues of poverty and housing concerns continue to plague the community. The community has attracted national media attention related to gang crime and gang activity. Despite the harsh realities, the community strives to excel in cultural, educational and economic initiatives. In 2016, the Chiefs from all four Nations signed a Maskwacis Nehiyawewin Declaration, which officially recognized Cree as the official language of the Maskwacis territory. Community members have often referred to this as a process of *reclaiming* and *declaring* Cree as the official language in the area.

The need for solutions to concerns about indiscipline, violence, attendance problems, retention concerns encouraged MWE to explore practices to improve school ethos in order to strengthen relationships with students and establish a sense of community-based on student needs. This was enthused by a philosophical shift within MWE towards adopting an Indigenous way of dealing with conflict and resolution. The Restorative practices that have been difference making within MWE include restorative justice circles, a family advocate, *Leader in Me*, hot lunch program, and equine therapy.

The Superintendent of MWE, Brian Wildcat, has described their restorative approach as a process and a practice. This can be further understood with this quote from the International Institute for Restorative Practices:

*“The fundamental unifying hypothesis of restorative practices is that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them.”<sup>2</sup>*

The data and narratives show evidence of Indigenous educational practices in MWE schools as difference making in the lives of learners and families. These practices integrate Indigenous and Western knowledge and holistic learning; demonstrate learning as a communal activity. As a result, the restorative practices framework fulfills the following educational guiding principles identified by Indspire:

- **Principle 1:** Indigenous peoples have the right to retain shared responsibilities for the education and well-being of their children.
- **Principle 3:** Indigenous Knowledges (ways of being, knowing, valuing and doing), which convey our responsibilities and relationships to all life is valued and foundations aspect of the learning program for all children and youth.
- **Principle 7:** Recognizing the legacy of the colonial histories of Indigenous peoples, education is also a process of decolonization, which seeks to strengthen, enhance and strengthen and embrace Indigenous Knowledge and experience through various strategies including but not limited to anti-racist, anti-oppressive pedagogies and Indigenous pedagogies.

### **Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Schools<sup>3</sup>**

Miyo Kindergarten offers a K4 and K5 experience and serves well over 100 students. The Ermineskin Elementary School serves approximately 500 students from Grades 1 – 6. The Elementary school motto is “Kids come first at our school”. In every essence, the school identifies themselves as a “Cree Community School.”

It is the goal of Ermineskin Elementary School to provide a quality education that is fueled by quality instruction and sound methodology to ensure Cree culture and language is the foundation in everything they do.

Some of the programs and supports they offer: cultural arts program; cultural activities; extensive counseling program, hot lunch program; early literacy support; leadership opportunities for all students; Cree as a second language; *Leader in Me*; full capacity library; special education program; speech and language support; Breakfast of Learning (morning snack).

Ermineskin Elementary School is a *Leader in Me* School. All staff and students practice living the 7 habits of highly effective people by Steven Covey. It is their goal to create opportunities for all students to be in a leadership role and to become responsible, proactive Cree citizens. In addition, the school applies the Eagles program which is an adaptive program for students, with special education needs, who require

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iirp.edu/what-we-do/what-is-restorative-practices/defining-restorative/13-social-discipline-window>

<sup>3</sup> Descriptions of each school can be found on the website: <http://www.miyo.ca>

individual programming as identified in their individual program plan. The program encompasses the academic needs of the students, focusing mainly on language arts and math. However, the Eagles Program is uniquely designed to also address the personal growth of students by including life skills, social skills, and a wide array of outside classroom experiences. The intent of this program is to identify strength in the students, develop positive self-concept, and provide opportunities for students to experience success in their educational experiences and to also prepare them for the world in which they live.

The Ermineskin Junior Senior High School serves approximately 326 students from Grades 7 - 12. The vision and mission of the Ermineskin Junior Senior High is as follows:

*Ermineskin High School graduates are responsible thinking and caring First Nations people. They are ready to continue learning or enter the workforce, with the skills and abilities they need to fulfill their own expectations. They will speak Cree and have a strong knowledge of the Maskwacis history and Cree culture. They are ready to participate actively and positively in their communities and in shaping the future of their province, their country and the global community. EJSB students take action to contribute to a safe, healthy, and vibrant schools and local community. Their mission is to foster Miyo Wahkohtowin so that Ermineskin Junior Senior High School is a safe, happy, and caring place, where every student is encouraged, supported, and appropriately challenged in his or her learning. To deliver high quality educational programming that integrates and reflects the Plains Cree perspective. To use restorative practices to promote respect, responsibility, and student autonomy.*

Ehpewapahk Alternative School, named for the Nehiyaw [Cree] word, *the bright morning sun*, provides an environment where students are able to work on improving literacy and math skills, personal wellness, employment preparation and life skills. The program does not offer high school credits but is consistent with Alberta Education curriculum. Students have the opportunity to work with community agencies to increase awareness of different career paths and assist in transitioning from school to post-secondary or the workforce. This is a school for students who are having difficulty in their personal and academic life and cannot perform in mainstream high school according to provincial standards. Students are placed in individualized programs. Cree language and culture is also one of Ehpewapahk's priorities. One-third of staff are fluent Cree speakers and they work diligently to teach the Cree language to students and staff. Ehpewapahk has an onsite sweat lodge. An Elder in the school also has the role and responsibility of an Educational Assistant. The Elder also assumes the role in teaching the language, ceremony, and traditions, as part of a process in "reminding them who they are" and in developing a "trust relationship" with the students<sup>4</sup>. The staff are responsive to language and cultural practices. Some of the ways this is reflected in the curriculum and daily lessons can include: daily smudging and prayer; smoking meat; setting up a tipi; various craft projects such as beadwork; rattle and drum-making; studying treaties; reviewing historical and current government and First Nations relationships; attending cultural camps; offering equine therapy; and restorative justice circles. The school embodies language and culture and as a result students and staff being and living together in that environment live out and enact language and culture in their daily life. This results in the school successfully offering a program that provides the skills and confidence needed for students to transition back into high school or post-secondary or enter the workforce. There are approximately 45 - 50 students on average enrolled at Ehpewapahk every year.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Betty Soosay, on-site Elder, September 7, 2016

## Brief History of the Project:

The conversations around restorative practices began in 2008. The Board began looking at their practices in school programs and encouraged administration to explore Indigenous approaches to managing conflict and resolution within the schools and to build a bridge between the community and the school.

The restorative approach started with the Ehpewapahk Alternate School which was established in 2001. However, the idea of an alternate/outreach program had its early beginnings in MWE Junior High School classroom<sup>5</sup>. The Board recognized they were missing a population of students who were not getting served properly in the regular academic route. This led to the early beginnings of Ehpewapahk which began as a classroom program, in the Junior High School, that focused primarily on attendance and behavior. The program continued in this space for up to two years. It became evident that the program was not effective in the school environment and required a separate facility in order to help the students thrive and enhance the program. In 1999, the program moved into a trailer facility a few miles from the Junior High School. During these early years, the program continued to struggle with retention of students and poor behaviors as an outreach program model. For example, the program would typically start with 40 students and only retain approximately 6 students by the end of the school year. Initially the school developed the reputation as a “dumping ground” for students no one knew what to do with, and the High School would send them over to Ehpewapahk. Over the years, different versions of the program were implemented and tried, but although more components were added to the program and school environment, MWE was still not seeing the intended results they hoped for.

Miyo Wahkohtowin Education began asking the fundamental question: What is happening here?

MWE realized the program wasn't matching up to the students' needs. In 2008, the Board and Superintendent, Mr. Brian Wildcat, effected philosophical and fundamental changes that ultimately lead to encouraging turning points. The restorative practices approach became an outcome of this philosophical and fundamental shift.

Administration entered into in-depth conversations with students and staff that revealed enthusiasm for MWE and provided a clear understanding of the many challenges facing the students that challenged their learning opportunities. Challenges included: household in crisis; trauma; extreme poverty; grief; addictions; teen parents; anger concerns; illiteracy; no identification cards; no work experience; grew up in-care; no connection to Elders; no connection to community; and never participated in ceremonies. These challenges became the focus and determined four ultimate goals of Ehpewapahk: 1) to improve literacy and numeracy skills; 2) personal wellness; 3) employment preparation; and 4) life skills.

In order to achieve these goals, Ehpewapahk created a family environment. The quality of relationships and sense of belonging became top priority. The focus was attending to the basic needs of the students including their spiritual and emotional needs. Staff spent time getting to know the students and established a sense of family in that space. Most staff are trained in grief recovery and as a result help students understand trauma. In 2009 – 2010, there was increase in attendance and completion in the course of one year once the program changed. The average daily attendance increased to 65 – 70 %

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<sup>5</sup> Currently referred to as the Junior Senior High School



compared to past attendance numbers that were below 50%. Out of approximately 50 students starting the school year, retention numbers increased from 6 in previous years to now between 30 – 35 students completing the school year.

The fundamental practices and processes that are valued and essential in fostering the success of MWE students that began with Ehpewapahk can now be found in all four schools. The restorative practices include:

- Restorative Justice Circles;
- Family Advocate;
- *Leader in Me*;
- Hot Lunch Program; and
- Equine Therapy.

An overview of each are listed later in the report.

### Connecting Educational Guiding Principles Identified by Indspire and Miyo Wahkohtowin Education

- **Principle 1:** Indigenous peoples have the right to retain shared responsibilities for the education and well-being of their children.

Part of MWE core beliefs states, “We believe that the education of students is a shared responsibility and partnership between home, school and community.” It is also emphasized in MWE Policy 3460 student code of conduct, the Board believes, “It is a shared responsibility of parents, teachers and the community to support the development of the whole child.” MWE has a family advocate who makes frequent home visits. In addition, MWE created a restorative practices coordinator position.

- **Principle 3:** Indigenous Knowledges (ways of being, knowing, valuing and doing), which convey our responsibilities and relationships to all life is valued and foundations aspect of the learning program for all children and youth.

The central vision of Miyo Wahkohtowin Education is developing Cree identity as a people and individuals. Building that identity and sense of belonging has been difference making in the lives of students and families.


- **Principle 7:** Recognizing the legacy of the colonial histories of Indigenous peoples, education is also a process of decolonization, which seeks to strengthen, enhance and strengthen and embrace Indigenous Knowledge and experience through various strategies including but not limited to anti-racist, anti-oppressive pedagogies and Indigenous pedagogies.

Adopting restorative practice was established to attend this principle. This approach is to create positive connections with students and to connect the community and the school to engage families with education.

## Activities Accomplished

This section recognizes elements of the restorative practices embedded in Miyo Wahkohtowin Schools that nurtures the successful outcomes of First Nations students. In particular, the following are examples of successful practices that are responsive to both the aspirations and needs of the students. Many of the practices are embedded in the philosophy and daily actions of the school. The following practices highlighted in this report are not to be considered a fully detailed list of all the undertakings.

The restorative practices and processes are driven by MWE Vision, Mission, Values, and Core Beliefs. See below. For further information visit: <http://www.miyo.ca>.



Miyo Wahkohtowin Education  
**MIYO**

Vision & Mission	MWE Core Values	MWE Core Beliefs
<p><b>MWE Vision</b> Cree speaking students, who are academically successful, live a healthy lifestyle, are confident, resilient, and know their history and culture.</p> <p><b>MWE Mission</b> To deliver an excellent Ermineskin Cree Nation K - 12 education system that engages students to learn and inspires them to graduate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Respect</b> - We are fair in all of our decisions. We treat everyone with dignity and respect and hold students, staff and parents in the highest regard and value their opinions and feedback.</li> <li>▪ <b>Caring</b> - We ensure that every member of the MWE community has the right to a safe and caring learning environment.</li> <li>▪ <b>Courage</b> - We collectively deal with adversities and overcome obstacles that will compromise Maskwacis Cree treaty rights to education and the academic success of our students.</li> <li>▪ <b>Trust</b> - We are accountable, transparent and responsible for the delivery of an exemplary K-12 school program in partnership with our staff and parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We believe the Creator gives every person a <b>special gift</b> that should be honored and shared to make the world a better place.</li> <li>▪ We believe in the need to inspire all with a sense of <b>hope</b>.</li> <li>▪ We believe that the education of students is a shared responsibility and <b>partnership</b> between home, school and community.</li> <li>▪ We believe in promoting and <b>recognizing excellence and innovation</b> amongst our students, staff and board members</li> <li>▪ We believe in maintaining the <b>highest standards and expectations</b>.</li> <li>▪ We believe in <b>teamwork</b>, where everyone knows and understands their role and works effectively to achieve the best results.</li> <li>▪ We believe in maintaining a <b>positive attitude</b>.</li> <li>▪ We believe in <b>honest and open communication</b>.</li> </ul>

Restorative practices embedded within Miyo Wahkohtowin Education schools are adapted from the framework established by the International Institute for Restorative Practices in Canada (IIRP). The IIRP introduces a broad application that “describes four basic approaches to maintaining social norms and behavioral boundaries. The four are represented as different combinations of high or low control and high or low support. The restorative domain combines both high control and high support and is characterized by doing things **with** people, rather than **to** them or **for** them.”<sup>6</sup> This is referred to as the social discipline window (See Figure 2). Rather than shame and punish who is most likely to commit violence or crime, the thinking behind this restorative approach is to reintegrate those wrongdoers back into community and work with them so they are unlikely to reoffend.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.iirp.edu/what-we-do/what-is-restorative-practices/defining-restorative/13-social-discipline-window>

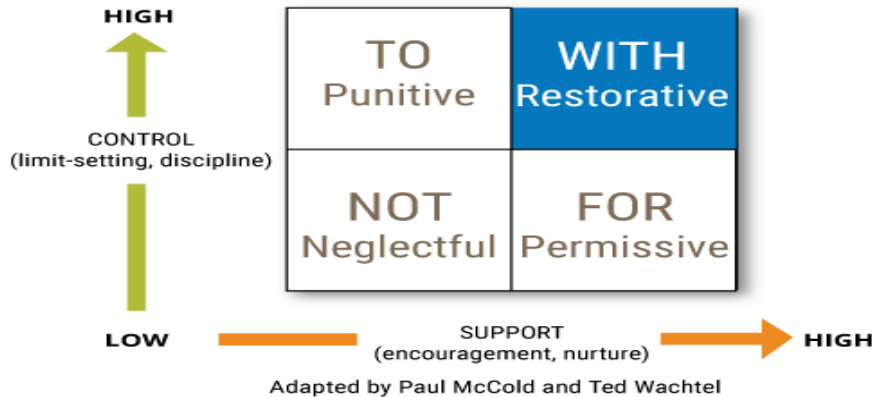


Figure 2. Social Discipline Window

Restorative practices range from informal to formal and may fall along this continuum at any given time (See Figure 3). The aim of restorative practices is to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships. This statement identifies both proactive (building relationships and developing community) and reactive (repairing harm and restoring relationships) approaches.

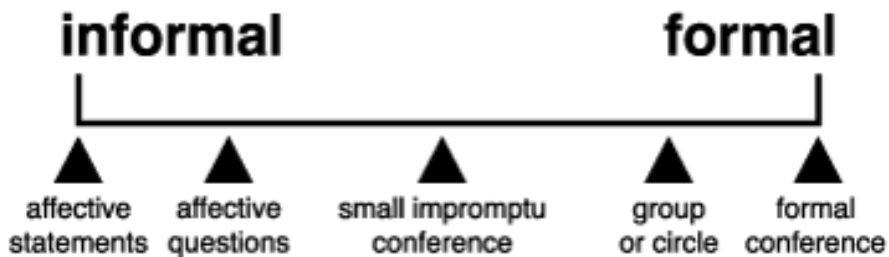


Figure 3. Restorative Practice Continuum

### Overview of Restorative Practices in MWE

Restorative practices are driven by the MWE Vision, Mission, Values, and Core Beliefs. These are foundational to the following overview of the model delivered. It is not to be considered an all-encompassing exhaustive description of the current practices and delivery in MWE. As quoted by the Superintendent,

*“MWE will strengthen relationships with students and establish a sense of community based on student needs. This will include using restorative justice practices and may include mentoring programs, career counseling, school liaison workers, student engagement projects, health and career management, anti-bullying prevention strategies, club/sports/teams, creating and*

*supporting successful transitions (i.e. between classrooms, programs, grades, schools and graduation). This will provide a strong foundation for students to enter the work force or pursue post-secondary education and become active, responsible Cree citizens in the community”*

Outcomes of restorative practices:

- Develop positive connection with students;
- Building the bridge between the community and school; and
- Engaging families with education.

## Strategies

The five strategies listed below are conducted in a way that engages all participants with their cultural traditions. The goal is to create a safe and inviting space where youth feel that they can be themselves without judgment or criticism. There is a focus on relationship building with the students. There is a family environment that fosters positive student – teacher relationship. The results have been encouraging from ensuring to establish student expectations and communication on a daily basis.

MWE Student Expectations:

- Students follow the Cree way.
- Students will behave in a considerate, courteous and respectful manner.
- Students will follow standard rules of common sense and safety at all times.
- Students are committed to a safe school environment free from weapons, alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Students treat all school property with care and respect.
- Students will use positive, verbal and non-verbal language.
- Students are responsible to attend school regularly, on time, and committed to completing assignments.
- Students maintain the learning environment for themselves and their fellow students.
- Students work hard to achieve the expectations established by school, teachers, family and community

### 1. Restorative Justice Circles

Restorative justice circles, is defined by the International Institute for Restorative Practices in Canada (IIRP) as “a circle is a versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships and build community or reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts and problems. Circles give people an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, decorum and equality.... The circle process allows people to tell their stories and offer their own perspectives. The circle has a wide variety of purposes: conflict resolution, healing, support, decision making, information exchange and relationship development. Circles offer an alternative to contemporary meeting processes that often rely on hierarchy, win-lose positioning and argument.”<sup>7</sup>

Every MWE circle begins with smudging and prayer. All the key stakeholders are invited and, depending on the circumstance, can include: the students, parents, significant adult in their life, Elder, RCMP, child welfare, teacher, and/or counselor.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.iirp.edu>

## **2. Family Advocate**

The family advocate role helps students return to school by providing support to parents. They help parents come alongside the system. The family advocate offers a program that is culturally based with Cree protocols. The program helps re-connect and rebuild relationships with families in order to have a better relationship with the school.

- If all avenues have been exhausted; letters sent out, phone calls made, then the family advocate is involved. This role is to bridge that gap between parent, student and school.
- The goal is to get the student back into school.

## **3. Leader in Me**

Following the seven principles for success based on Stephen Covey's *The Leader in Me* model of school transformation process. The 7 habits are strategies that each student can use in their daily lives to create healthy habits. Students learn from their teacher about each habit and how they can apply the strategy to achieve their goals in life.

*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* are:

- Be proactive;
- Begin with the end in mind;
- Put first things first;
- Think win-win;
- Seek first to understand, then be understood;
- Synergize; and
- Sharpen the saw.

## **4. Hot Breakfast / Lunch Program**

Free hot breakfast and lunch program run at all four Ermineskin schools

## **5. Equine Therapy**

Equine therapy in MWE is a 4-week program that is offered 2 days a week at the local Ermineskin arena. Partnerships are created with local programs and community members who own the horses.

- Equine therapy is to reach the students who are having difficulties, have behavior or attendance concerns, or need help with confidence and self-esteem and can benefit building a bond with the horse.
- Equine therapy offers experiential learning
- Benefits of equine therapy include improvements in social, psychological, educational, and physical well-being.

## **Logic Model Used for the Project**

The logic model (Appendix I) highlights a list of resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes that were created to offer a different approach – an Indigenous based approach, in order to develop positive connection with students, engage families with education, and connect the community and school.

The logic model articulates the innovative practices used by the exceptional staff in the schools; it is not to be considered an all-encompassing and exhaustive description of the current programming and delivery of educational services.

### **Performance Indicator and Measures**

The data presented below reflects positive trends in Miyo Wahkohtowin Education schools as a result of implementing restorative practices.

It is important to acknowledge there are a number of combined indicators that support the achieved outcomes beyond the scope of restorative practices not identified in this report. For example:

- The increase in Miyo parent's satisfaction of the overall quality of education in the past three years has improved.
- Miyo Wahkohtowin Education is recognized as one of the top ten education authority in Canada (Muskrat Magazine Ontario).
- Student retention rates continue to show positive trends.
- Enhanced Maskwacis Cree identity - understanding of the Cree way and speaking Cree.
- Increase in student success.
- Increase in safe and caring schools: building Maskwacis Cree citizens and a positive school culture.
- Excellent and responsible Neyaskweyahk organization.

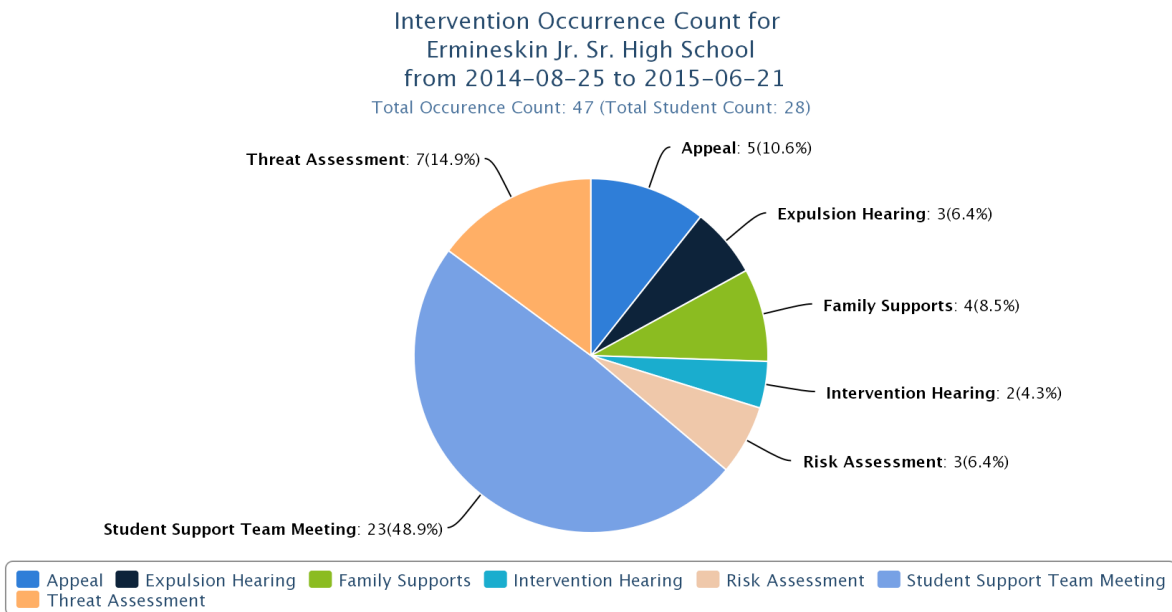
The following chart was created by the restorative practice coordinator to identify if the position was making an impact. As a result, the overall trend shows appeals have gone up which means parents and students are more aware of what their options are. The number of intervention hearings have decreased. The number of support team meeting have decreased as a result of teachers talking to students restoratively. Joline Wood, Ermineskin Junior-Senior High School Assistant Principal, former restorative practice coordinator said, "Is it working? Yes! ... We follow the circle – that's how we do things. Everything we do is a circle so natural we follow the same format in our processes and practices."

### Impact of Restorative Practices Coordinator Position

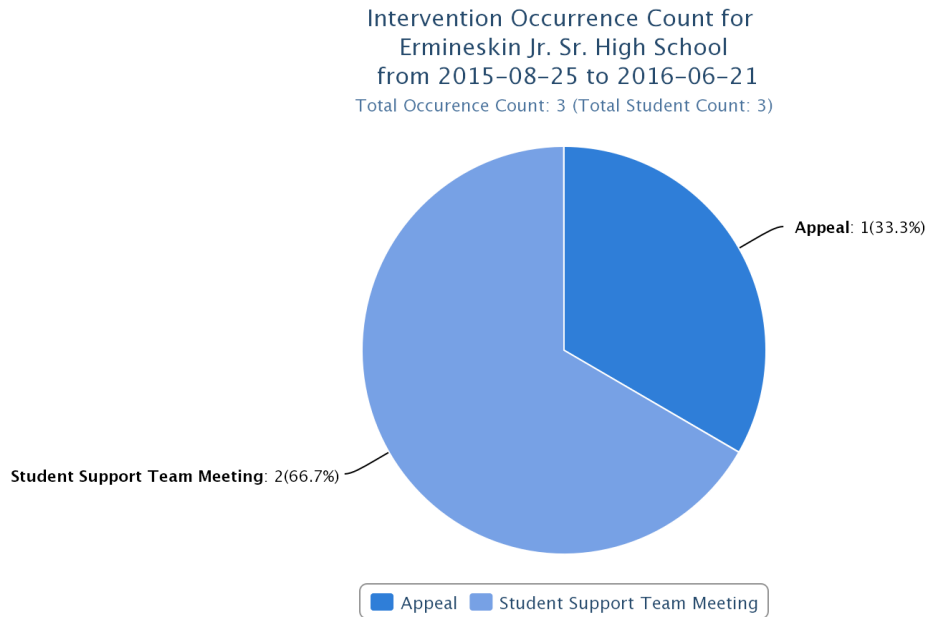
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Appeal	0	0	2	2	5
Expulsion	1	9	10	4	3
Restorative Justice Circles	0	0	0	3	14
Intervention Hearings	13	8	6	7	2
Student Support Team	22	23	58	59	23
Threat Assessment	0	6	6	3	7

### Intervention Occurrence Count for Ermineskin Junior Senior High School

- Below are two charts that when compared demonstrate the impact of restorative practices. In the 2014 – 2015 academic year the total occurrence count: 47 (total student count: 28).



- Significant shift to the 2015 – 2016 academic year. The total occurrence count 3 (total student count 3):



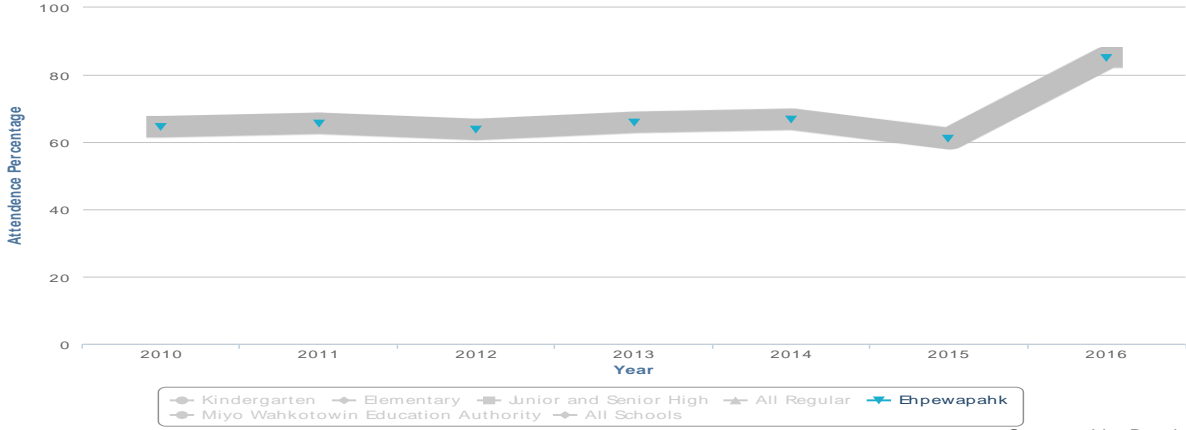
The data trends from Miyo Wahkohtowin Education was gathered for Ehpewapahk and the Junior Senior High School. This includes: increase in attendance, increase in enrollment, and increase in graduation results. See charts below:

#### Increased Attendance

- Ehpewapahk School experienced 83.6% attendance increase
- Junior Senior High School experienced an increase in attendance average

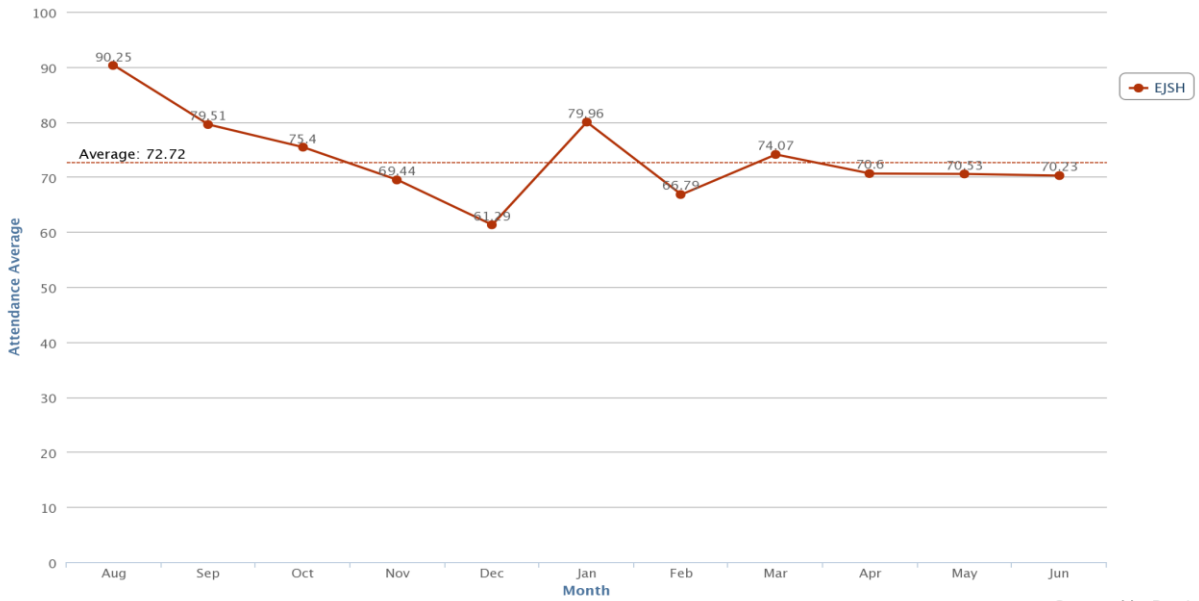


**Historical Attendance Trends (Yearly)**  
Miyo Wahkotowin Education Authority



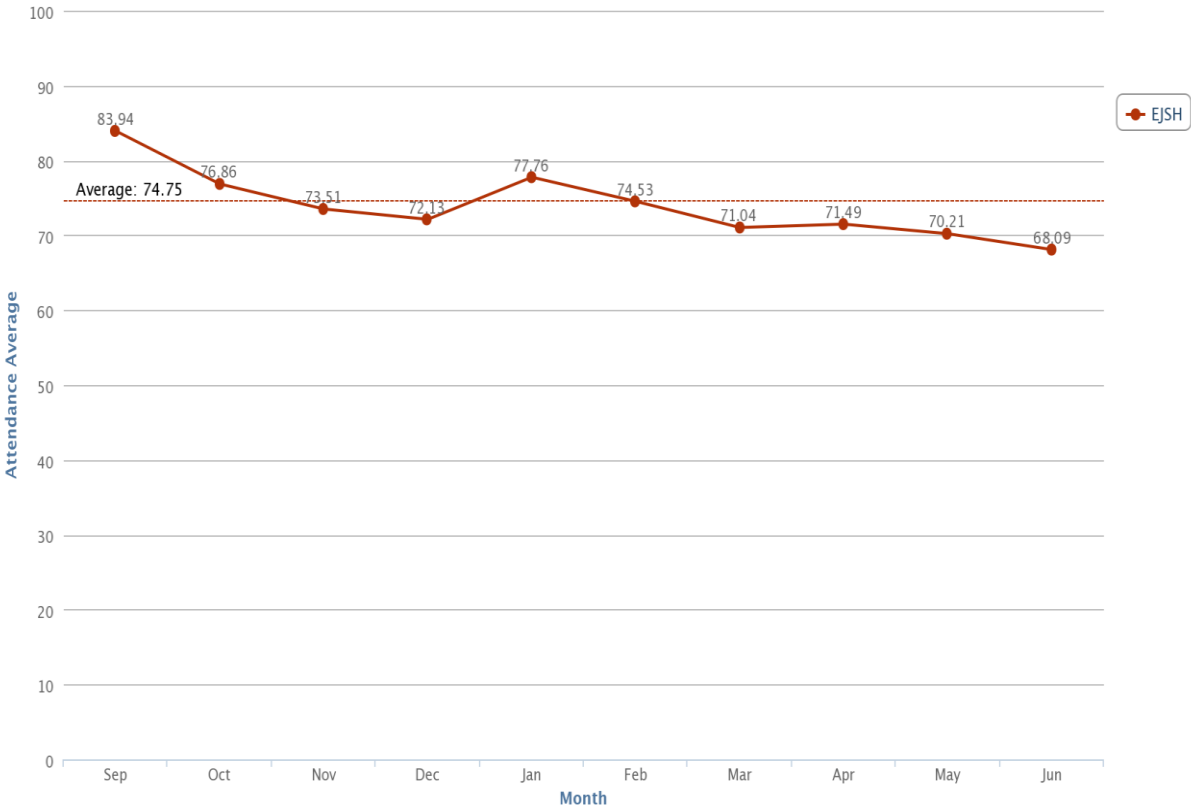
Generated by Dossier

**Attendance Summary (2013 - 2014)**  
Ermineskin Junior and Senior High



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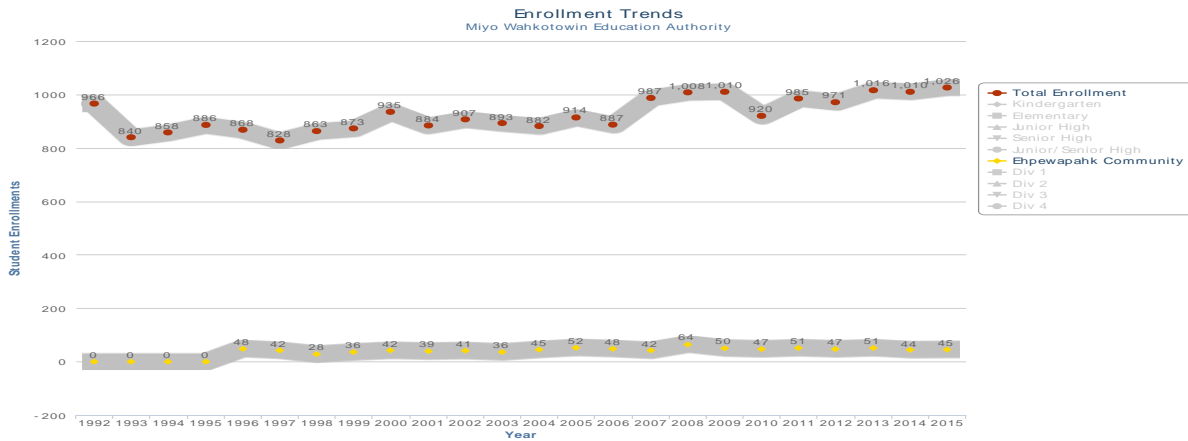
Attendance Summary (2015 - 2016)  
Ermineskin Junior and Senior High



Generated by Dossier

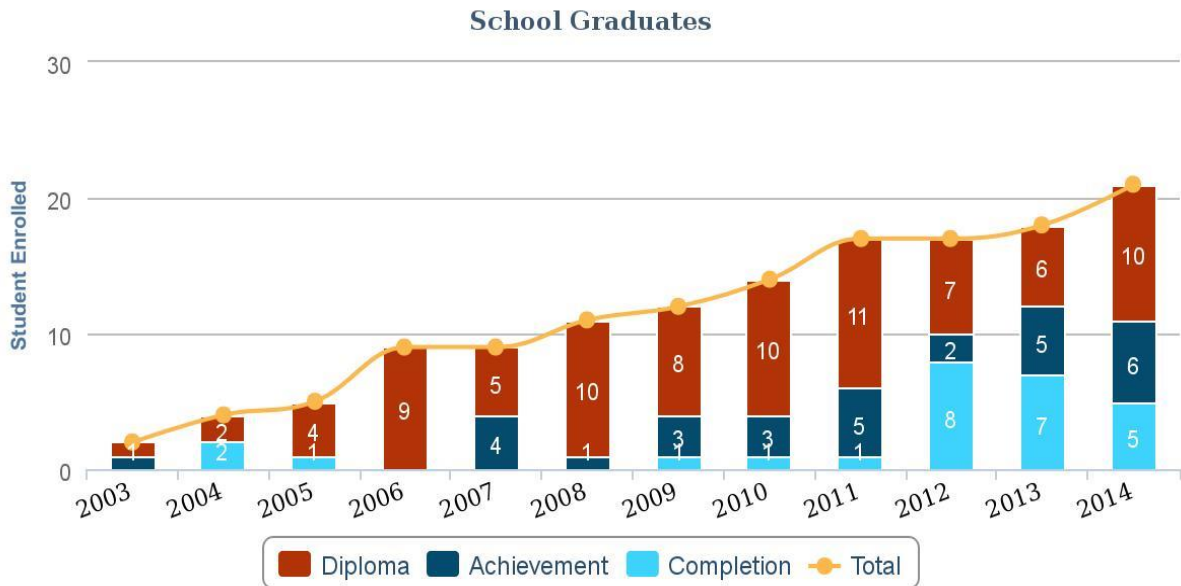
## Increased Enrollment Trends

- There has been a gradual increase in enrollment overall in MWE schools. It was not until Ehpewapahk changed their philosophy and strategy in 2008 that the school has now sustained above 80% retention rate.



## Graduation Rates

- Increase in the number of Ehpewapahk and Junior Senior High School graduates.



Generated by Dossier

## Evaluation

This section forms part of the project “story”. The following is based on the data collected throughout the interview process and is summarized in narrative threads that reverberated throughout the conversations. Threads are pulled to highlight a narrative evaluation on the program’s success. Numerous conversations were organized to conduct semi-structured interviews with MWE administration, Junior Senior High School Assistant Principal (former Restorative Justice Coordinator), staff, teachers, and students. Below are a few selected examples of those narratives.

### Joline Wood – Ermineskin Junior-Senior High School Assistant Principal

We are here to make a difference. Brad’s success story is an outcome of restorative practices. It’s an approach where there is ‘no victim’.

#### Brad’s Story:

He came to our school in Grade 8 and in his early years with us he was in and out of the office constantly. He had no connection to the staff. Lots of connection to office staff because of the number of visits he made to the office. A lot of in school and out of school suspensions. Over the years, we worked hard to connect him with our staff members and to build positive relationships. To build Wahkohtowin with him. His visits to the office became less and less. He

would come into our office and we would talk about sports, his baby, his family. Over time we got to know each other very well. We were so proud when he graduated. On the day he graduated he walked into my office and when he turned to me I instantly began crying because we all worked so hard to ensure he completed. It took him 4 years of high school to complete. I was so proud he finished. He worked really hard. He was happy he achieved his goal. His story is an example of how building the connections, following all restorative practices and building relationships, all of those things, work in how we see success.

*Q: What are some of the practices staff did in working with Brad?*

I think he struggled a lot in the [mainstream] programming. Brad graduated with a Knowledge and Employability Certificate of completion versus a diploma. In Grade 8 he struggled academically so [it] was a call for help. When he struggled academically his behavior coincided with that. We put him in a different stream to suit his learning that would benefit him. He was able to develop relationships [by] being with the same teachers throughout his K&E experience... We worked with his interests. He was very good with foods. We connected him with the basketball team. Overall, this experience helped him make connections with staff and with programming... With Brad, we just wrapped our arms around him. We were his biggest cheerleaders.

*Q: What about the personal. Was there counselling? Circle work?*

He did one circle with me. There was an incident where he was involved in a yelling match in the hallway. And we did a restorative circle with him before it escalated. When doing a restorative circle, it's about – what happened? How you going to repair the relationship? When you're sitting in the circle it's such a powerful process. People who participate have to be honest; you have to listen, and your hope is to repair the relationship. He did participate in one circle. From then on, he became a role model and other students looked up to him and said, "well he's doing it, he's got a job, he's going to school and he's still here every day." He is someone the kids can look up to.

*Q: What are some additional practices?*

We feed our students a hot breakfast 3 times / week and the other 2 days they'll be fed a cold breakfast. Our hot lunch program is one of the best. We have a hot lunch which is entirely prepared by our staff and students and they fed our entire school plus the primary school. Our kitchen staff and students do this every single day. Breakfast and lunch.

A lot of home visits. A lot of phone calls. We've called parents in for meetings to share good and bad news. I have an open-door policy.

The school is living Wahkohtowin.

I can't even pin point exactly what we did differently for Brad.

It takes a community to raise a child. Our staff follows that mind set and is always helpful and always wanting to help out kids.

Restorative practices are definitely a mindset we've adopted at our school. The fact that we're so supportive to all our students and able to offer a variety of classes they can take. In the past, students who were stronger academically would attend the public schools because of the programming because they could offer higher academic classes. But now we can offer the same classes here at the high school and we're starting to see a great interest in these classes by our students. That's another change for us. We have more students on the path towards post-secondary. As a result, we have a higher number of students graduating. This year our graduating class is 27 this year. Graduation rate is going up and increase in the retention rate.

Another success ... One of our probation officers tells us she has the least amount of youth clientele from Ermineskin and she contributes that to all the things we do in our community and in our school.

Another practice we do that is working ... Every day the Junior Senior High pray together (flag song) every single day as a group. We used to do it in our own classrooms but we switched that over a year ago and now every day we do that in the gathering room as a big group. That sets the tone for our day. We go through our morning assemble. We review our expectations. We review our Cree words with them. We review important safety procedures. We have an assembly every day.

Every classroom has their own guidelines. If you went into any classroom you would see their expectations. They're always posted.

A lot of circles I've done have been in response to violence, bullying, attendance concerns. Those are big issues at our school and they were in the beginning but not many this year in terms of bullying and physical altercations ... we know suspensions and expulsions don't work. I think there are situations that would merit suspensions and expulsions but if we're proactive restorative practices will work and there will be no need for it to get to that point. Restorative practices work!

### **Sandra – Educational Assistant**

After graduation at Ehpewapahk, Sandra, a former student was invited back the same year to work as a substitute. She was hired by the Principal of Ehpewapahk.

*Q: What helped you as a student?*

I received a lot of counseling as a student. I had a young child and was going through a lot. The Principal at the time, Wendy, would stay late with me and offered me her time.... Wendy did not want to see me fail. Failing was not an option. She wanted me to be the best I could be. I also had the support of the school counselor. In fact, all staff were very supportive. Great staff works here.

I found the school worked for my learning style. I wasn't built to learn the way of the regular high school stream.

*Q: What does support look like to you?*

Getting you to where you need to be. Getting you to where you want to do something in life and not stay on the sidelines. Staff staying late just for me. There is a great sense of a big family feel here at this school. A big family to make sure you don't fail. To get to your starting point. To get to where you need to be.

*Q: Tell me about restorative justice circles?*

Restorative justice circles offer a peaceful way to resolve conflict. Everyone walks away feeling good, feeling heard.

It's not always about discipline. It's geared towards making positive changes. Embedded in the process are *Leader in me* habits. It's a win-win for everyone. The circle helps everyone hear from one another. It's not all about punishment. We have to have empathy.

**Ramona, Teacher**, has said, "We encourage circles because they resolve issues. What comes out of it is an agreement. Where students agree to, for example, 'I am not going to bring any gang activity to school'... etc. This agreement has to be clear before you leave the circle. If the students don't live up to the expectations, they know the consequences."

**Warren, Teacher**, has said, "the circle give them an extra chance... it's a process to let them know we are going to support them. It's a process to eliminate the negative in their life. The ultimate goal is to make sure they're listened to, to tell their sides of story, that they have a voice. They need to be truthful and be able to speak from their heart and not be reactive. I do a lot of mini circles as a teacher because I work with them all the time. I do a lot of discipline myself but it's about building a relationship and giving them an extra chance. They want to hear, 'I'm going to support you on this, we need to make a change.' We want to make going to the office a good thing and not always a negative experience. We want to hear good things about you and not always negative ... The students want change and it's them that makes us successful. It helps us put the right things in place to help them be successful.

**Betty, Elder**, has said, "Restorative justice circles are fair, everybody gets to share express their ideas of how to restore the relationship."

### **Wendy - Director of Instruction and School Leadership**

*Q: How do you know Restorative justice circles are successful?*

Its two-fold. At that end of it there's no victim. Because everyone has re-built their relationship and the person impacted also realizes the impact of their actions. [The person is] less likely to re-offend.

This past year we had three full fledged circles ... There are a lot of mini conferences that happen. Small circles.

If they're not willing to take part in the circle than you know the circle is not going to work. So, if they say, "no way, I'm not going to do that" then it's not going to work.

The person who has done the offending needs to be willing to make amends.

During our training in restorative practices, we realized this will work for our kids. Because up until we started doing circles, we were suspending students and students weren't making amends, and suspensions are often considered as a break. They were falling behind in school. Dropping out. Getting embarrassed, feeling ashamed. Restorative justice takes that away; everybody feels good at the end of the circle. The process of this work usually happens during the school day. We'll bring in the kids, parents, significant adult in their life, Elder, RCMP, child welfare ... it all depends on the circumstance who we bring in.

What is great about this model is it has now become a four – band initiative. Students in the community now have an option to participate in a restorative justice circle without getting charged and so a charge won't show up on their record.

*Q: What is the overall goal?*

Our vision for our kids is they're going to be healthy citizens of the community. They're going to be employable.

*Q: What are some of the successes? How do you know the program is working?*

If I see them out in the community, they're happy, have a really positive energy, vibe, positive outlook I know we've done a good job. If they're employed or searching for employment, that's a good thing. A lot of kids entered our school really down on themselves saying "I'm dumb I can't do this" and to see that change in them to say now, "I can do anything I want to do!" is huge.

### **Brian – Superintendent**

*Q: Tell me about restorative practices in your school system?*

Restorative practices are considered a practice and process. It's more of a value, a philosophy we're following. It's embedded throughout how we operate in the schools.

We shifted to indigenizing our education system. Once we made this decision we started to look at our practices and what needed to be changed. We want our schools to be safe... When we looked at our approach, practices, and beliefs, we realized we were doing a lot of record keeping. We were practicing the three strikes you're out approach. We realized this was not a 'Cree approach' to how to attend to our kids and the concerns. This led to a philosophical shift. A shift towards indigenizing our practices. We believe Restorative practices are aligned with Indigenous ways of resolution and practice. Once we implemented these practices we said let's track these for a year and if it works we'll see the approach we're using then we'll see those incidents drop... We began to see changes in the second year.

The whole idea of restorative practices is respecting everyone in the group and restoring the relationship. We found the practice not only restored the relationship but transformed it to a better relationship. We found an increase in attendance and an increase in our parent satisfaction survey.



All our systems run restorative practices and strictly on the belief we need to run our school in a more Indigenous / Cree way. We all agreed restorative practices fits our school.

### **Next Steps for the Project**

In reflecting upon the data and shared conversations on and about restorative practices, there are significant accomplishments identified in this report. The following are seen by the researcher to be ongoing activities of a works-in-progress:

- Continue working with families on student attendance issues;
- Parent engagement can improve. Continue to create welcoming and invitational spaces for parents;
- Data tracking must be continuous and consistent; and
- Continue to provide professional development in restorative practices, including Indigenous pedagogy and practices.

As a final reflection, the researcher is thoroughly impressed with the efforts and practices in Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Authority and the positive difference the organization is making in the lives of Maskwacis youth and families.

## Appendix I: Logic Model



Inputs: Resources Human & Financial	Strategies / Major Activities	Outputs or Performance Indicators	Short Term Outcomes or Objectives	Intermediate Outcomes or Objectives	Ultimate Goal/ Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team of support systems:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ MWE Senior Administration and Board</li> <li>○ Principals</li> <li>○ Teachers</li> <li>○ Family Advocate</li> <li>○ Counselors</li> <li>○ Educational Assistants</li> <li>○ Elders</li> <li>○ Community partnerships (including RCMP)</li> <li>○ Staff time and skills</li> <li>○ financial resources</li> <li>○ Facility (Example, includes school and arena for equine therapy)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Daily smudging and prayer</p> <p>Creating a safe and caring school</p> <p>Embedding Maskwacis Cree Language and traditional practices into MWE and the Maskwacis community to sustain language, cultural values, and beliefs.</p> <p>Fostering positive connections with students and their families to improve their spiritual,</p>	<p>Sense of family and sense of belonging</p> <p>Creating safe spaces for restorative circle work</p> <p>Increase in parent's satisfaction surveys</p> <p>Increase in parental engagement</p> <p>Increase in student attendance and retention rate</p> <p>Nehiyaw (Cree) curriculum resource/teaching material developed</p>	<p>Students attend school everyday</p> <p>Students are physically and socially active</p> <p>Decrease in criminal activity</p> <p>Decrease in student intervention occurrence account</p> <p>Improved student retention</p> <p>Improved student engagement with their learning</p>	<p>Students are healthy contributing community members</p> <p>Increased exposure to traditional education, cultural practices and language</p> <p>Students are engaged in their learning and stay in school</p> <p>Students feel safe within their school</p>	<p>Established relationship with students</p> <p>Established relationship with school and community</p> <p>Parent engagement</p> <p>Students further their education and enter post-secondary</p> <p>Student are healthy contributing members and have a strong sense of identity</p> <p>Maskwacis Cree identity: Understanding the Cree Way and speaking Cree</p>

Inputs: Resources Human & Financial	Strategies / Major Activities	Outputs or Performance Indicators	Short Term Outcomes or Objectives	Intermediate Outcomes or Objectives	Ultimate Goal/ Impact
	<p>emotional, physical, and mental well-being.</p> <p>Creating and sustaining relationships between MWE and a variety of organizations, agencies, and resources in Maskwacis and the greater surrounding area to meet student and family needs.</p> <p>These relationships are needed in order to offer the equine therapy, a hot breakfast / lunch program. And restorative justice circles.</p>				