

# Elizabeth Mackenzie School Review - Executive Summary

2023-2024

The review was conducted by:

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Documents/Evidence: School Improvement Plan, School reports, school/class walkthroughs, PLC team meeting minutes, staff interviews, several group discussions with staff, one parent engagement session (online survey), student achievement data, and interviews with board representative Rosa Mantla and TCSA Chairperson Ted Blondin, and TCSA CEO Kevin Armstrong.

## Summary

Evidence for this school review was collected between August 2023 and May 2024 (see list of documents/evidence considered above). Key interviews were conducted with school staff, Board Representative Rosa Mantla, Principal John Gouthro, contractors/consultants, and program observations. The student and parent engagement sessions were conducted with a survey that was conducted in May 2024.

Elizabeth Mackenzie Elementary School is in Behchokò and has 184 students in the 2023-24 school year in grades JK-6. Behchokò is on the all-season highway and the largest of the Tłı̨chò communities. EMES has 22 teaching staff and 30 school support staff, including custodians, a secretary, and 20 support assistants (SA or SNA). In 2023-24, the school had no vacancies other than unexpected leaves and one resignation.

The enrollment at EMES had a significant decrease from 2015-2016 (233 students) to 2019-2020 (236 students) and 2022-23 (197 students). The school-wide average attendance was 55.5% which is near the regional average (59.9%) for the 2023-24 school year. EMES was the first school in the region to use the School Messenger system to call home when students are absent.

The school has, like other Tłı̨chò schools, seen an increase in students with significant complex needs. Through measures such as the Early Development Index (EDI) and Middle Years Development Index (MDI), EMES reports very few students who are 'on track' or 'thriving.' EMES, like most Tłı̨chò schools, has a significant number of students on Student Support Plans, Modified Education Plans, and Individual Education Plans.

EMES is a mid-sized Northern school with a significant amount of human and physical resources. The school is challenged by declining enrollment as well as teacher recruitment. The school is well cared for and has a welcoming climate.

The evaluators are satisfied that the curricular learning outcomes for all students are within the range of reasonable expectations, given the context of the school and applicable Departmental direction. The TCSA uses a rotating schedule for school reviews, and the next review of EMES is scheduled to take place in 2028-2029.

## Strategic Goals and Evidence

1. In line with the TCSA's key strategic goals (Tłıchoǵ language and Culture, Literacy, and Numeracy, Student Health and Wellness, and Lifelong Learning) and EMES' School Improvement Plan, the school has demonstrated:

### Target 1: Tłıchoǵ Language and Culture

Goal – Culturally responsive programs and services: Indigenizing education in support of developing capable Tłıchoǵ people.

#### Results

- EMES has an ILE team that regularly meets, with dedicated time and a variety of staff participating including the Vice Principal.
- EMES is the only school in the region with Tłıchoǵ Immersion (K-2).
- Tłıchoǵ is heard regularly throughout the school - including by all staff in hallways (common phrases), in announcements, and by the secretary answering the phone. Tłıchoǵ language signage is found throughout the school, including in a significant amount of Tłıchoǵ resources (books, posters, songs) in most classrooms. In addition, on the ILE Action Plan EMES has identified phrases of the month.
- Some staff were unfamiliar with key program materials (ILE handbook, OLC curriculum, and camp guidebooks) although they are found throughout the school and were the subject of several staff meetings during the school review.
- There is instructional evidence of the use of Dene Kede in Integrated classrooms, including lesson plans, teacher resources, and posters.
- EMES looks and feels like a Tłıchoǵ school (canoe and banner at the front, Tłıchoǵ items used in displays, reading levels dry fish, drying racks in classrooms). Many educators mentioned the positive impact of the expansion of the cultural programs available at the school and being led by the Vice Principal. These are also seen to be positively impacting the community's impressions of the school. Culture food is regularly offered at the school and at camps.



### Target 2: Literacy

Goal – School-wide reading level target of 500 levels, regional target for Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL) of 60% above the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, regional target for 50% of students to improve more than one-year reading growth, 50% of students to improve more than one-year math growth, dedicated PLC team approach to improving reading and early literacy, review and consider Response to Intervention (RTI) model, increase use of approved resources and coaching within the school.

#### Results

- EMES achieved 263 reading goals by May 2024

- *EMES TROLL: JK- 58.3% and K - 52.9%, school-wide 55.2% at or above the 25th percentile (slightly below the regional average of 59.4%)*
- *EMES Reading: 32.6% of grade 1-6 students improved one or more years of reading growth (below the regional average of 48%)*
- *EMES participated in the All-Region Write (ARW) to improve writing.*
- *EMES's CTBS results were 40% of students gained at least one grade level (22-23) – EMES' results were in line with the regional average*
- *Staff are leaders in using the approved resources and instruction is aligned with Regional Literacy Action Plan and Oral Language Initiative.*
- *Coaching was provided to all staff to improve reading instruction.*
- *There are tier 2 and 3 literacy interventions in place in the elementary*
- *The PLC teams are using an evidence-based approach to improve instruction and student achievement.*



### *Target 3: Lifelong Learning*

*Goal – Develop lifelong learning strategies and career-focused education. Provide professional development to support staff in reaching performance goals. Improve transition programming and support for students (junior high pathway, MAP sessions, work experience, career pathways), specialized programming for students with complex needs in classroom coaching for teachers and SA.*

#### *Results*

- *EMES has a welcoming and safe space for all students.*
- *Coaching is provided to all teachers and support assistants through mentorships, one-on-one modeling, as well as small group in-servicing / workshops.*
- *EMES staff are working toward individual professional development goals (ex: diploma in Support Assistant through Douglas College).*
- *EMES is aware that as the territory moves to the BC curriculum ADST courses will become increasingly important courses to support career development*



### *Target 4: Student Health and Wellness*

*Goal – ensure all students can succeed with adaptive programming in response to student-centered decision-making. Achieved through evidence-based approaches to decision-making, fostering self-regulation, creating a safe environment with trauma-informed practices, ensuring individual programming planning is the foundation of all instructional planning, and improving*

attendance.

### Results

- *EMES has one Child and Youth Counsellor, 2 Peer Support Workers, and two Elders.*
- *Multi-tiered System of Support is established at EMES, however the leadership has identified that mapping out the system with a focus on referrals, criteria for interventions, and in particular the learning center needs consideration moving forward.*
- *The Safe School and Emergency Response Plans were updated in alignment with recommendations from the region and territory (including Personal Emergency Response Plans where appropriate)*
- *EMES is a community school and regularly hosts events that engage the community in the school, including a particularly active library.*



### 2. Summary of 'conversation' evidence: quotes /insights from interviews, surveys, self-evaluations

Without exception, all stakeholders spoke to the overall feeling of belongingness, connectedness, and trust within the school. “The principal cares, models expectations, and supports the growth of educators, and encourages the development of all students and their unique talents” (taken from staff interview) Staff and students feel good and respected at the school. Sense of team: the vast majority of educators mentioned a very positive atmosphere at the school and strongly indicated they would not want to leave.

There is a theme among many of the interviews that while they trust the school and leadership many don't know the 'why' or how a program is connected to a larger approach. “Why are we doing this? Why are we doing this now? What led us to this approach? How does my role connect to the bigger picture?” (staff comment) There seems to be a theme of wanting to understand the foundation behind decision-making. Dispersing leadership in existing teams and creating department heads may be one possible solution.

The interviews focused on two themes: Inclusive Schooling, and Indigenous Education, resulting in the following themes:

- *Getting clarity on MTSS* – The need for clarity on processes such as referrals, ensuring interventions address the right student at the right time, improving fluidity between interventions, and regularly evaluating supports for effectiveness. This includes academic, behavioural, and mental health supports within the school.

- *Staff Training* –With the increasing number of students with complex and diverse needs EMES is rising to the challenge. Many support staff are not trained to work with the exceptional needs of the students. While it is not seen negatively the school is responding to extreme behavioural and social-emotional needs.
- *Attendance* - EMES attendance is declining. It is unclear the cause, however, those interviewed felt the issue was related to social determinants of health (ex: poverty, addictions, lack of housing, etc).
- *Program Effectiveness and Evaluation* – All stakeholders praised EMES for its culturally responsive schooling and Immersion program. Most wished to see it expand but acknowledged that the lack of fluent Tłıchǫ teachers limits this. “EMES Immersion program brings new perspectives and rejuvenates Tłıchǫ Yatı (language) to students, parents, teachers, staff and community members.” (Lucy Lafferty) There are no measures in place to evaluate the immersion program’s effectiveness.
- *Student Behaviour / Discipline* – The region has updated the student behaviour policy to align with trauma-informed practice. The school demonstrates this trauma approach however needs to update its discipline policy to reflect its current practice. “When there is extraordinary behaviour, we come together...each person knows their role. We don’t undermine each other’s attempts, we try lots of strategies, we know the background of our kids, and we work off our strengths” (staff comment). “I’m loving the teachers this year, my child’s teacher is very supportive and nice. I love that she’s so kindhearted and she’s caring to her students.” (parent from survey)

### 3. *Summary of walkthrough evidence: insights, checklists, celebrations, pictures of student achievement*

- The Director and Principal completed school walk-throughs – they focused on building safety, Tłıchǫ language and cultural programming, inclusive schooling, and academic programs.
  - Example of best practice: EMES has begun a ‘best practice’ of the communication board in the staff room with suggested resources for teachers to use to support upcoming camps and Tłıchǫ language class focuses. This board is connected to literacy and the example showed a book walk for the upcoming snowshoe and snaring camps.
  - Example of the area improved during the review: Improving purpose and intention associated with MTSS. EMES actively identified gaps and next steps and worked with regional staff to develop a phonics assessment tool.
  - Example of the area to continue to improve: Attendance - What patterns have emerged that might support targeted approaches to attendance? Analyzing school attendance data to specifically target attendance approaches and staff assigned to support families with improving attendance.
- Celebrations and evidence of success



## Celebrations/Commendations

- EMES staff, parents, and students care about each other. Mutual respect is evident in the interactions. There are very few suspensions. Staff embraced the trauma-informed practices workshop, and it is evident they care deeply for the students.
- EMES has a well-developed culture of safety for staff and students. Their OHS is well established as routine.
- EMES has allocated a significant portion of its budget to ensure the culture program is well-resourced. This includes a full-time cultural staff (and relief cultural staff), and 2 Elders. Camps are a regular occurrence and are linked to the Tłı̨chǫ calendar.
- EMES is a regional leader in transiting students into Kindergarten and Junior High, including the Grade 6 moccasin annual project.
- EMES set a goal of 500 reading levels by May they reached 263.
- EMES has a very safe and welcoming environment – it is truly a Tłı̨chǫ school in feeling and appearance. EMES has well-established programs such as Elizabeth Mackenzie Day, library literacy nights, and Traditional Foods Day. EMES has fluent Tłı̨chǫ speakers who can translate or interpret for community members.
- Through Jordan Principle funding EMES has delivered an increase in SLP, behaviour and reading intervention, and one-on-one support assistants for students with complex needs.



## Recommendations

1. *Student Achievement* - Place a sustained and enhanced effort on responding to the student achievement data to improve student achievement as identified in the TCSA Strategic and operational plans. Refine MTSS and focus interventions on closing the gaps. Document the approach to ensure all staff are aware of the purpose of interventions, and referral processes, with criteria for entry and exit to interventions.
2. *Tłı̄chǫ Immersion Program* - Conduct a program evaluation on the Tłı̄chǫ immersion program and collect baseline data sets on student achievement in this program. Consider factors such as measures of learning, immersion student access to school intervention systems, parent involvement, and best practices.
3. *Human Resources* – The leadership team at EMES is well regarded however, they are also seen as over-tasked. Consider the composition of school teams to disperse leadership and/or topics (ex; mental health-focused SBST, and ILE team members taking more responsibility for planning/leading events), utilize regional coaching staff for mentorships to reduce load on PSTs, increase accountability with chronically absent staff, consider models to respond when experiencing high staff absenteeism, and utilize department head structure to create efficiencies.
4. *Attendance* – Analyze school attendance data, and look for targeted groups where specific interventions and approaches could lead to improvement. Utilize school staff such as Elders, Peer Support Workers, Secretaries, and others to lead elements of the school-wide initiative (ex: communication and awareness with parents, support to families to overcome barriers, publicizing success linked to attendance, utilizing health programs to improve executive functioning skills such as time management in older students )

