



Central Okanagan
Public Schools
Together We Learn

**PRESS RELEASE
IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

FOR

Central Okanagan Public Schools Recognized Nationally for Drastically Reducing Indigenous Student Dropout Rates

The EdCan Network to research how Mount Boucherie Secondary School's Academy of Indigenous Studies continues to significantly raise graduation rates.

Toronto – Oct. 27th, 2017 – The EdCan Network is pleased to announce that the Academy of Indigenous Studies has been selected to participate in the 2017 Indigenous 'Innovation that Sticks' Dropout Prevention Research Program. As part of this initiative, a researcher from the EdCan Network will visit West Kelowna, B.C. to explore how this innovative team of educators from Mount Boucherie Secondary School have succeeded in **raising the high school graduation rate for Indigenous students from 55% in 2011 to 78% in 2017**. This is the highest 6-year Indigenous completion rate in the province, and the program is expanding rapidly to reach the district's over 2200 Indigenous learners.

Media are invited to a special recognition ceremony that will take place on October 30th at 1:00pm (PT) at Mount Boucherie Secondary School in West Kelowna, B.C.

Teachers of the program have built a 'learning community' that uses team teaching, self-directed professional learning, and shared goal setting to meet each student's unique needs and encourage cultural pride. Classes are offered to students in grades 10-12 in Indigenous history, literature, leadership, culture, art and Okanagan language, which incorporate the knowledge of Elders and community members of Westbank First Nation. Similar courses already exist within many provinces' curricula, and could be readily offered by schools across Canada. This 'learning community' convenes regularly to discuss student progress, proactively address behavioural challenges, and plan land-based outings to engage students in traditional Okanagan ceremonies.

"The Academy of Indigenous Studies leverages the community's traditional knowledge to light a learning spark in Indigenous students," says Darren Googoo, Chair of the EdCan Network. "Our network of education changemakers looks forward to dissecting what makes this program so successful and to sharing our analysis with school districts across the country."

This program emerged as a timely response to alarmingly high dropout rates among Indigenous learners in this school district, which was ahead of the curve in incorporating Indigenous content into the classroom long before the release of the BC Ministry of Education's 2016-2017 revised curricula, which mandates this in every school. Barriers to success confronted by these students include substance addiction, family strain, social struggles and feelings of disconnect from their First Nations cultures. Students often enter high school anxious, disengaged, emotionally distraught and held back from their full potential. Engaging students with Elders and community mentors, as well as teaching them about their culture and language has spoken to students' hearts and minds, and has allowed them to soar to their graduation ceremony.

"Our Academy connects educators interested in decolonizing our educational system for all students," says Kyla Winacott, teacher of Indigenous Leadership at Mount Boucherie Secondary



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School. “If we are able to come together and allow our students to feel valued, hopeful and worthy, we can help them see graduation as a meaningful pathway to a confident future.”

Central Okanagan Public Schools will receive a \$5,000 contribution on Monday, October 30th courtesy of initiative sponsor State Farm Canada to grow its activities and extend its impact. Program leaders will share their implementation process and lessons learned with an EdCan Network researcher throughout that week, who will produce a case study report that will provide practical guidelines for educators tasked with improving Indigenous student outcomes in their schools.

For more details about this program, please visit: www.edcan.ca/innovationthatsticks

About the Indigenous ‘Innovation that Sticks’ Case Study Research Program on School Dropout Prevention

Since 2015, the EdCan Network’s ‘Innovation that Sticks’ research approach and reports have provided concrete guidance and support to school district leaders faced with the challenge of determining how they can get their own “innovations to stick” and achieve their goals. In 2017-2018, our case study research program will focus on one alternative dropout prevention program for Indigenous learners.

About the EdCan Network

Brought to you by the Canadian Education Association, the EdCan Network is the independent national organization with over 75,000 members working tirelessly to ensure that *all* students discover their place, purpose and path.

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For More Information

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This initiative is generously sponsored by State Farm Canada, which shares the EdCan Network’s commitment to supporting leaders who are transforming Canada’s public education system.