

Student Advisory Council Innovation Grant Application for (Removed) 2024-2025

SAC Chair: (Removed)
Principal: (Removed)
Contact Person: (Removed)

Title: A Sensory Journey: A Mi'kmaq poqtamga'sit

Summary

A Sensory Journey: A Mi'kmaq poqtamga'sit is a unique indoor and outdoor path that promotes a sensory exploration with ties to the past and a cultural bridge to the future. It is a journey where all students and families are welcome and able to join and learn along the way.

Objective

Our objective is to establish an inclusive indoor and outdoor sensory path that fosters connections to heritage while serving as a cultural gateway to the future. Poqtamga'sit means to set off on a journey. This multi-sensory project aims to create a journey that is accessible to all students and families. The indoor portion of the sensory path, will provide an opportunity for students to have independent movement breaks for those requiring gross motor activities and a daily reconnect to their central nervous system pathways for optimum learning and socio-emotional development. There will be a calming area with a mural, located in an adjacent hallway, for those students seeking regulation and calming. These types of breaks are known to increase student engagement and performance on classroom tasks. The outdoor culturally responsive extensions allow students to engage in meaningful play that connects everyday life through the lobster boat play structure. Signage will provide scaffolding for playground behaviors and expectations. This project has an Indigenous lens that is a purposeful step towards friendship and reconciliation in a community that has often stood divided by commercial fishing and treaty rights.

The design is primarily designed based on: **The Seven Sacred Teachings**: which are the "basis for a worldview that's rooted in respect for one another and the natural world" (Trevor Sanipass, a Mi'kmaw educator). Each lesson in the Seven Sacred Teachings is associated with an animal." In conjunction with a local Mi'kmaq artist, these animals will be adjusted/connected to wildlife found primarily in our region. The **Indigenous Medicine Wheel** which forms a primary view of the world, through the "alignment and continuous interaction of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realities. The circle shape represents the interconnectivity of all aspects of one's being, including the connection with the natural world." (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.) A response to the **Call to Action Number 62** within the 94 Calls to Action which states: Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory educational requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

In brief, this project will provide an opportunity to promote needed central nervous pathway development through an artistic and educational piece which highlights native animals and the Seven Sacred Teachings, our role in Truth and Reconciliation, and the Medicine Wheel delightfully portrayed through artwork of a local Mi'kmaq artist, (removed).

Project Description

Breakdown of Components of A Sensory Journey: A Mi'kmaq poqtamga'sit

Indoor Interactive Sensory Pathway

The sensory pathway would be in the main hallway that has the most traffic and is most accessible to all students. It will consist of four areas promoting movement, reinforcing local culture, promoting reconciliation and a sense of belonging. The walls will have life sized silhouettes (in black) and signage/placards would have the English and Mi'kmaq word with phonetic spelling and be completed in bright colors. Vinyl decals (footprint and feathers) would be applied to the floor to show the students the pathway of activities. For example:

Rabbit - Apli'kmuj (bunny hop), Deer - Lentuk (slow and quiet), Black Duck - Apji'jkmuj (duck walk) and Eagle - Kitpu - (soaring)

Calming Station Mural

A 3 by 5 foot mural will be created in an adjacent hallway to promote calming and mindfulness for students that do not require gross motor outlets. A sunset will be reflecting a near mirror image on a calm harbor with silhouettes of Cape Island style boats on the horizon. The familiar sights are intended to have a calming effect while students can sit and notice details.

Outdoor Installation of Seven Sacred Teachings Panels

At the end of the sensory pathway, the exit doors will connect the indoor and outdoor sensory pathways. Students will be met with beautiful signage of the Seven Sacred Teachings as you enter the common area of the playground. Text will be applied diagonally over a white background which would have the traditional colors of the Medicine Wheel.

Culturally Responsive Play Area



The discovery ship closely resembles a Cape Island Fishing Boat. Endless hours of culturally responsive play can be created around the fishing and lobstering industry. It has the possibility of endless hours of cross generational learning for our smallest to oldest crews.

Future ExtensionsTo the Outdoor Sensory Area (covered by other funding sources)

This project provides the basic scaffolding to the outdoor sensory area with the Seven Sacred Teaching signage and the culturally responsive fishing play area. Future related projects will focus on enriching and developing this outside area of our school to create a place where everyone belongs culturally, socially, emotionally, developmentally and ensuring accessibility for all. This area will allow mixing of all grade levels and it will ensure the dignity of students by allowing them to access activities that engage them without going to areas where younger students may be playing. This area will focus on accessibility and inclusivity for all students (wheelchair accessible easels and other items to attach to chain link fence, accessible tough tray, musical chimes, accessible surfacing, signage to support non-verbal students, etc).

Timeline For A Sensory Journey: A Mi'kmaq poqtamga'sit

Dates	Action Item
October 2023	SAC raised the idea of installing a culturally responsive sensory path (logging, hunting, fishing, lobstering) to support students struggling with attention and needing breaks.
Nov. 2023-March 2024	SAC and Home and School discussions about playground and sensory path development.
March - April 2024	Collaboration and development of sensory path plan with (Removed), local Mi'kmaq artist.
April 2024-June 2025	Playground Committee and Administration actively applying for grants to finish part two of the A Sensory Journey: A Mi'kmaq poqtamga'sit
June 2024	Notification of successful grant applicants. SAC would make several public announcements and social media postings about being a successful recipient for the SAC Innovation Grant and highlighting key areas of the project (calming mural, sensory pathway, seven sacred teaching outdoor installation and the culturally responsive play area highlighting fishing). Additional messaging will be ongoing about treaty rights, reconciliation work within the school and community.
July-August 2024	(Removed) will work on life sized silhouettes off site and place cards off site for the sensory path and calming mural. (Removed) will begin on-site installation of the sensory path

	and calming mural.
August 2024 -May 2025	SAC and administration will continue to highlight work, progress and items from the A Sensory Journey: A Mi'kmaq poqtamga'sit
September 2024	SAC Innovation grant money is released.
September 2024	Payment to (Removed) for Sensory Path and Calming Mural.
August-September 2024	Review 2024 Student Wellness Surveys to compare to 2023 data. This will be baseline data for this project.
October 2024	Order Discovery Ship from Scholar's Choice (Removed) will work off site to complete outdoor Seven Sacred Teachings panels and upon completion and installation on the playground. During Mi'kmaq History Month there will be a kick off and introduction of the sensory path, calming mural and Seven Sacred Teachings panels with students and families. Artist visits will be funded by Student Success or Engagement Grant. Teachers will be provided with access to age/grade appropriate curriculum to support the understanding of the Indigenous elements.
October-November 2024	Direct teaching of use and storage of items for the culturally responsive fishing play area.
November 2024-February 2025	Data collection (micro surveys of Student Wellness questions) from students on effectiveness and use of sensory path, calming station and culturally responsive play area through Student Success Planning and Collaborative Learning time. Feedback will also be gathered from grades primary to 6 on frequency of use.
May 31, 2025	Final report submitted to SAC Innovation Grant Committee.

Impact

Students at (Removed) have identified that they are struggling to pay attention in class, are stressed and feel they need a break. The Student Success Survey from 2022-2023 is the basis of our work in student wellness related goals in our Collaborative Learning Time, Student Success Plans and Health Promoting School work. It identified that over half of our student body was struggling to pay attention in class. Please refer to Table 1 below for specific details and further breakdown of reasons that students identified why it was hard to stay attentive. This data was collected in the spring of 2023.

Table 1: 2022-2023 Student Success Survey Data Highlighting an Area of Concern

Percentage of students who indicated Agree or Strongly Agree	School
	2023
	Overall (n=36-62)
I often find it hard to pay attention in class	58
Top reasons why students find it hard to pay attention (among those who strongly agree/agree)	
Feeling tired	50
Feeling bored/not interested	42
Sitting too much or not moving enough	47
Needing a break	31
Feeling overwhelmed/stressed	28
Other students' behaviour	44
Feeling hungry	47
Noise from other activities	47
My mental health	14

Upon further investigation through SSP and CLT a micro survey of the same criteria was administered in the fall of 2023 with the results shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Data taken from Cycle 1 Student Success Plan where a micro survey was completed by grade 4-6

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total
I find it hard to pay attention in class because:	5	11%	13	28%	21	46%	7	15%	46
I am tired	4	9%	15	32%	17	36%	11	23%	47
I am bored	12	26%	10	21%	13	28%	12	26%	47
I have to sit too long	5	11%	11	23%	22	47%	9	19%	47
I need to go for a break	9	19%	12	26%	18	38%	8	17%	47
I am feeling overwhelmed	8	17%	18	38%	10	21%	11	23%	47
because of other students' behaviours	10	21%	10	21%	17	36%	10	21%	47
I am feeling hungry	6	13%	14	30%	16	34%	11	23%	47
Of the noise of other activities in the school	3	6%	7	15%	13	28%	24	51%	47

Overall the results from students indicated that they continue to struggle to pay attention but showed an increase in needing a break, feeling stressed and overwhelmed. Student Success Planning and Collaborative Learning Time continued to focus on this area to increase student wellness as an action item. Teachers will intentionally use movement for transition (jumping, galloping, etc), incorporate movement breaks throughout each day and embed daily movement (dance and freeze, skills based practice, etc). The indoor sensory pathway allows intentional movement and the option for students needing additional self directed breaks.

The outdoor portion of the “Sensory Journey: A Mi’kmaq poqtamga’sit” is an extension to ongoing work by the Health Promoting School Committee (HPSC). Their focus has been creating opportunities to encourage outdoor play and allow children to connect with nature and the community, with focus on adding new activities to all outdoor play areas and updating painted games that encourage interactive play. They have put in accessible play features like mud kitchens, loose parts and raised garden beds to allow all students to participate in activities. The HPSC has been updating the painted sensory pathways outside for a number of years. The Early Development Instrument identified that 58 percent of our current grade ones are at risk and 5.9 percent are considered vulnerable in terms of emotional maturity. Play has continued to be one of the reported means to develop regulation and self control in students and increasing meaningful, engaging play activities is a way to support our young students needing emotional development.

This project aligns perfectly with the guiding principles of the Inclusive Education Policy. The proposal demonstrates commitment to excellence by supporting the well-being and academic success of all students through evidence-based teaching and support systems. It promotes students' physical, social-emotional, and behavioral well-being while fostering independence and resilience. The focus on equity ensures success for historically marginalized and underrepresented groups, while stimulating learning opportunities keep all students engaged, challenged, and inspired. Additionally, the sensory path ensures students see themselves reflected in their schools and learning experiences and meets their needs in a culturally and linguistically responsive, accepting, respectful, and supportive manner that values their identity and experiences. This project, developed through an Indigenous lens, serves to promote and educate inclusivity and diversity in our public education system.

Innovation

The idea of an indoor sensory path was mentioned at the School Advisory Council meeting on October 25th, 2023. It was noted there was a sensory path at other schools within our regional centre. The committee felt like a generic sensory path that could be purchased but it didn’t fit our school or reflect our local culture and our connections with the land. (Removed), the SAC chair stated, “It is important that we have an area that is inclusive to all students. As part of that inclusivity it is important to remember our roots and embrace play around the history of fishing, logging and hunting.” Discussions continued, at following meetings, which developed the idea of the 3D and hands on play based items should be part of the sensory experience for our students. Culturally responsive items like child sized lobster pots, buoys, rope and fishing gear were suggested

to be included. Along with items to meet the needs of some of our students (wheelchair accessible, musical, sensory play).

All schools are approaching the need to be accessible by the year 2030. Inclusive and accessible buildings and grounds are required by all. This is a time sensitive issue that all NS schools are facing, and we are not alone in this process. This project shoulders with overall playground and grounds improvements. Generic commercial sensory paths are available on the market and are present in other (Removed) Schools. This is where our project diverges from previous things completed in schools. This project supports treaty education in a visible and culturally responsive way. In a community that is bound to the sea through commercial fishing and lobstering there is reconciliation work needed within our walls and extending out into our community.

Measures of Success

- 1) Successful installation and completion of the indoor sensory path, calming mural, seven sacred teaching signage, fishing boat and culturally responsive fishing play area.
- 2) Positive social media messaging about the "Place of Belonging Sensory Path" to promote engagement, education and steps towards reconciliation in our local fishing community.
- 3) Direct teaching and focused efforts by staff on delivering lessons or indigenous content, treaty work and reconciliation will be monitored and reported on final project documentation submitted in May 2025
- 4) 2024 Student Success Survey Data will be used as baseline data for this project. Micro-surveys will be conducted by the wellness group during Student Success Planning, Health Promoting Schools and Collaborative Learning Time at the end of cycle one and two of SSP to track the ability of students to pay attention in class.
- 5) Informal data collection from grades pre-primary to six by members of the SAC throughout the year. Asking about the frequency and duration of use of the sensory path, calming mural and culturally responsive play area.

Budget

Breakdown of Project	Cost
Interactive Sensory Pathway in main hallway	\$ 2,870.00
Calming Station - Mural	\$1,307.00
Outdoor Installation of Seven Sacred Teachings	\$1,893.00
Vinyl Decals for Interactive Sensory Pathway from Passage Print	\$414
Discovery Ship from Scholar's Choice	\$5059.99
Fishing Gear - buoys, rope, lobster measures, banding tools, etc	In kind
Project Total	\$11,543.99
Additional funding SAC Contribution to Sensory Path	-\$ 1543.99
Budget for Innovation SAC Grant	\$ 10000.00