Bridging the Gap: Piloting a Virtual School Support Pilot for the Yazidi Community

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Topics

- What was the ask?

- What were the biggest challenges?

- What did we do?

- What's next?

What was the ask?

- Create a modified 'Ready For School' Program for the Yazidi community
  - Long running JIAS program that prepares newcomer students to enter the Ontario school system

- Do it online
  - Without an existing framework

- Do it fast
  - Approximately 6 weeks from conception to class start

Biggest Challenges?

- Curriculum

- Assessment

- Staffing – Teachers / Art Therapist / Others

- Technology

Challenge - Curriculum

- Theme that works from Grade 1 through Grade 9
  - Canada / GTA

- Provides support for vulnerable population
  - Trauma informed programming

- Assist students to make academic progress
  - Parents report 80% of students have learning issues

- Is technology friendly

- Engages students – includes virtual field trips

Challenge - Assessment

- Created basic literacy assessment

- Allocated 20 minutes per student

- Planned to use Zoom on school supplied computers

- _Surprised at lack of literacy despite 2+ years in Ontario schools_

  ➔WhatsApp – 5 minute assessments

Challenge - Staffing

- Approx 50 students enrolled
  - Plan was for less than 20 students

- Ontario Certified Teachers and Ontario Certified English Language Teachers
  - Target max 7 students per teacher

- Art Therapist

- Field Trips –
  - Videos – Canada and the GTA,
  - Ripley's Aquarium and an Indigenous Drumming Circle

Challenge - Technology

- Curriculum / Assessment / Staffing

- What is the platform?
  - Zoom

- What does it run on?
  - Amazon Fire tablets

- Training

What did we do?

- 7 classes ➔ 3 levels
  - Can't read – doesn't know alphabet
  - Can read basic words
  - Can read – might be able to write

- 3 days a week for 4 weeks

- Integrated with Project Abraham (other 2 days)

- Regular Staff Meetings and Training

- WhatsApp for communication / support

What's Next?

- Yazidi Literacy Tutoring Program

  - Many of the same students

  - Focus is on reading

  - Through Zoom

  - Volunteer Tutors (not teachers)

  - Training for the tutors

Accomplishments

- Created an online summer program to support school readiness
- Adapted to the challenges of curriculum, assessment and staffing. Used technology to overcome the pandemic imposed challenges.
- Learned about the educational needs of the community.
- Created a template the can be used in other communities.
- Learned that the keys are FLEXIBILITY and ADAPTABILITY
- Set up a follow-up program.

Thank you