

# Indigenous High School Nursing Mentorship Program

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**Annual Report – 2024-2025**

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## 1. Executive Summary

In the 2024–2025 academic year, a community-based mentorship program was implemented in collaboration with **Bert Fox Community School in Fort Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan**. The program was designed to support and inspire high school students through meaningful relationships, cultural connections, and opportunities for academic and personal development.

A total of **23 students** participated in the program, with **65% identifying as Indigenous**. This intentional inclusion of Indigenous youth aimed to foster a culturally responsive and supportive environment that respected and incorporated both Indigenous and colonial ways of knowing.

Through regular mentorship sessions, hands-on learning activities, and community engagement, the program sought to enhance students’ confidence, sense of identity, and readiness for future educational or career pathways. Early outcomes indicate strong engagement from participants, valuable relationship-building between mentors and mentees, and positive feedback from students.

This mentorship initiative represents a crucial step toward creating inclusive educational spaces that honour diversity, support reconciliation, and empower youth to envision and pursue their goals.

## 2. Highlights from the Year

The mentorship program at Bert Fox Community School offered a variety of engaging, educational, and culturally grounded experiences throughout the year. Monthly events provided consistent opportunities for connection, learning, and growth. Key highlights included:

- **Program Information Session**

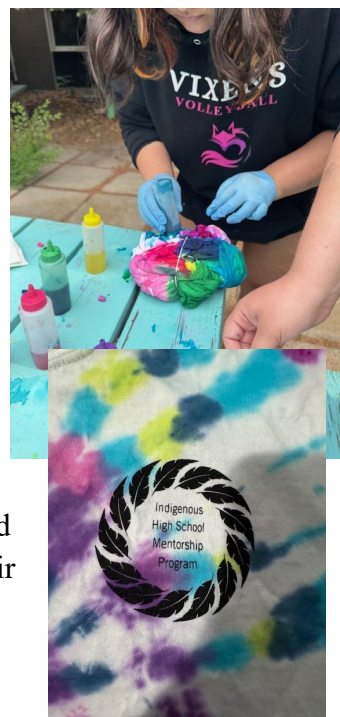
The year began with an introductory session where students, mentors, and staff came together to learn about the program’s goals, meet each other, and set the tone for a year of mutual learning and support.

- **Academic Advising Sessions (2)**

Two focused academic advising events supported students in exploring post-secondary options, course planning, and developing strategies for success. These sessions encouraged students to reflect on their goals and build confidence in their academic journeys.

- **Lunch & Learn: Blood Pressure**

Students participated in a fun and engaging hands-on session



where they learned how to measure blood pressure, gaining practical skills and insight into health and wellness practices in nursing.

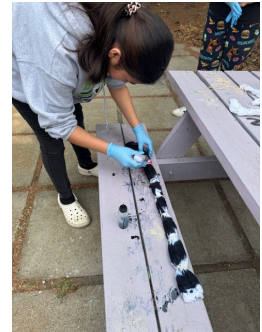
- **Lunch & Learn: Dressing Changes**

This interactive session introduced students to do wound care and dressing change techniques, offering a glimpse into the everyday responsibilities and critical thinking involved in nursing practice.

- **Mentorship Presentation by an Indigenous Nurse**

A powerful and inspiring presentation by an Indigenous nurse mentor created space for cultural connection, storytelling, and career exploration. The session highlighted the importance of

representation in healthcare and encouraged students to see themselves in professional roles.



- **Year-End Wrap-Up & Tie-Dye Shirt Making**

The program concluded with a celebratory gathering where students participated in tie-dyeing shirts. This fun and creative activity marked the end of the mentorship year and provided a tangible memory of their participation.

These monthly events helped build strong relationships, promote curiosity about health careers, and affirm the value of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems working together.

#### 4. Who We Reached

In this first year of the mentorship program pilot at Bert Fox Community School, we successfully engaged a diverse group of students across multiple grade levels. All participants were new to the program, highlighting the fresh interest and potential for long-term impact.

Total Participants: 23 students

Gender Breakdown:

- 2 males
- 21 females

Grade Distribution:

- 11 students in Grade 9
- 1 student in Grade 10



- 9 students in Grade 11
- 2 students in Grade 12

This group represented a diverse range of experiences and aspirations, with many just beginning to explore future education and career pathways. The high number of Grade 9 and 11 participants suggests strong potential for continued engagement in the years to come, providing opportunities to build sustained mentorship relationships over time.

Out of the 23 participants, 9 students attended only one session, but each session averaged 9 participants in total. A survey was given on the last day of the mentorship program and 8 students participated. Feedback revealed that 50% of respondents that day identified as Indigenous, and students ranged in age from 14 to 17 years old. This aligns with our goal of reaching students early in their high school experience and supporting them with culturally relevant, accessible mentorship.



As a pilot initiative, this cohort laid the foundation for future program development and demonstrated meaningful interest among students in both health-related fields and culturally responsive mentorship.

## 5. Stories and Voices

Staff at Bert Fox Community High School shared that both students and educators warmly received the Indigenous Nursing Mentorship program. They observed that students benefited from the opportunity to explore future career paths in a culturally safe and supportive environment. Having a program centered on Indigenous students, offered right within the school, was described as a meaningful and tangible step toward reconciliation. Staff expressed hope that the mentorship initiative will become a permanent part of the school's offerings, noting its potential to spark long-term interest in health careers and expand educational horizons for Indigenous youth. According to staff, students especially appreciated the hands-on activities, the welcoming nature of the presenters, and many said they would recommend the program to their peers.

Student voices highlighted the positive experiences and valuable insights gained through the mentorship program. In their own words, participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn about nursing and explore future possibilities:

*"I learned what to do and how to become a nurse."*

*"I liked learning new skills and having the experience."*

*"I feel more confident now that I know when to apply to nursing school and for*

*scholarships.”*

*“We need more doctors and nurses.”*

When asked what they enjoyed most, students consistently cited hands-on activities, such as the dressing change demonstration, and creative community-building events like the tie-dye shirt wrap-up. Students valued both the practical skills and the supportive environment created by the mentors:

*“The nurses were really kind, and it made me feel more comfortable.”*

Students also offered thoughtful feedback on how to enhance the program:

- Increase the number and length of visits
- Incorporate more hands-on experiences (e.g., first aid, IVs, suturing)
- Schedule sessions during class time rather than lunch hour

This honest and constructive input demonstrates students’ investment in the program and their desire for even deeper engagement.

## 6. Outcomes and Impact

Survey results point to several key outcomes achieved during the pilot year:

- 100% of students felt supported and welcomed in the program.
- 100% said they would recommend the program to other students.
- All respondents reported increased confidence in pursuing a career in healthcare, with 50% answering “yes” and 50% “somewhat.”
- Students reported learning new skills such as:
  - Taking blood pressure
  - Doing a dressing change
  - Understanding scholarships
  - Learning about the University of Regina’s nursing program



Participation in program activities was strong:

- 100% attended the nurse mentorship presentation and tie-dye wrap-up

- 87.5% attended academic advising
- 75% attended the dressing change session
- 37.5% attended the blood pressure lunch & learn

The mentorship program successfully met its goals of:

- Increasing awareness of healthcare careers
- Providing culturally safe and engaging mentorship
- Building relationships between youth and Indigenous healthcare professionals

The pilot year's outcomes suggest strong potential for scaling the program in future years with more hands-on activities, deeper cultural engagement, and sustained mentorship pathways.

## **7. Challenges & Lessons Learned**

Throughout the year, the program encountered several challenges that impacted its implementation and overall continuity. A significant barrier was the teachers' strike, which, when combined with staff turnover at the school, resulted in delays to the program's launch. These disruptions necessitated the rebuilding of relationships and the re-establishment of connections with school staff which are critical components for fostering trust and engagement within the program.

In addition to these structural challenges, various unanticipated school events further affected student participation. Notable examples include the school's volleyball team advancing to provincial championships and field trips, such as excursions to the ski hill or the year end camping trips. While these events are integral to student development and school culture, they occasionally conflict with program sessions and reduce student availability.

These experiences underscored the importance of flexibility in scheduling and programming, as well as the need to anticipate and adapt to the rhythms of the school community. Looking ahead, one key area for enhancement involves the intentional inclusion of more cultural activities such as traditional crafts and culturally relevant gatherings. These additions are expected to provide greater opportunities for meaningful relationship-building, strengthen cultural connections, and enhance overall student engagement in the program.

## **8. Looking Forward**

Building on the success and valuable lessons of our pilot year, the Indigenous High School Mentorship Program is poised for thoughtful expansion and deepened impact.

Student feedback, participation data, and mentorship experiences have highlighted several key opportunities for growth in the coming year.

### **Key Priorities for the Next Year:**

#### **1. Increase Frequency and Duration of Sessions**

Students clearly expressed a desire for more frequent touchpoints with mentors and longer sessions that allow for more meaningful interaction. We plan to increase the number of mentorship sessions and explore scheduling options that better align with the school day such as the possibility of offering sessions during class time instead of lunch hours.

#### **2. Expand Hands-On Learning Opportunities**

Hands-on activities were consistently cited as the most enjoyable and valuable parts of the program. In response, we aim to introduce more skill-based sessions, such as:

- First aid and CPR
- Suture and staple removal
- Learning about reflexes
- Simulated patient care scenarios

#### **3. Strengthen Cultural Integration**

While the program was well received across cultural backgrounds, future programming will include more Indigenous cultural teachings and activities, such as traditional wellness practices and culturally relevant crafts or ceremonies to foster connection and identity.

#### **4. Increase Community Partnerships and Visibility**

We will continue to strengthen relationships with Indigenous healthcare professionals and community organizations to enhance students' exposure to real world nursing pathways. We also plan to share program successes more widely to inspire interest in other schools and regions.

### **Conclusion**

The first year of the Indigenous High School Mentorship Program laid a solid foundation, and the feedback received affirms the value of this work. As we move forward, we remain committed to honoring both academic and cultural knowledge and supporting Indigenous youth in imagining and achieving futures in healthcare.

## **Gratitude & Acknowledgements**

Sincere thanks to Bert Fox Community School for their partnership in developing the mentorship program and for the opportunity to work with their incredible students. Deep gratitude to Jessy Forrester-Tylandsvik for her unwavering support and coordination of our school visits. We also extend heartfelt thanks to the Faculty of Nursing for providing the funding that made this pilot project possible. Special appreciation goes to Tiffany Newby for her vital contributions during the lunch and learn sessions, Kendra Poitras for her support with academic advising and her willingness to lend a hand whenever needed, and Denice Escott for her help organizing supplies and meaningful keepsakes for the students. This program would not have been possible without each of you.