

District Review Report
School District No. 08 (Kootenay Lake)
February 24 - 28, 2008

Submitted to the Ministry of Education



District Review Report 2008

District: 08 (Kootenay Lake)

Superintendent: Dr Bill Reid

Date of Visit: February 24 - 28, 2008

Team Chair: Julie MacRae, Superintendent, SD 72 (Campbell River)

Team Members: Judy Arnold, System Performance, Ministry of Education
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Gayle Bedard, District Principal of Aboriginal Ed, SD 36 (Surrey)
Penny McLean, System Performance, Ministry of Education
Rob Livingstone, Teacher, SD 75 (Mission)
Mike Munro, Superintendent, SD 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith)
Leah Robinson, Principal, SD 52 (Prince Rupert)

Context

School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake) covers a wide geographical area and serves numerous communities within the East and West Kootenay region of British Columbia. The two largest communities in the District are Creston and Nelson. Other communities in the District are: Kaslo and Jewett, small communities to the north of Nelson; Crawford Bay, a small community on the east shore of Kootenay Lake; Wynndel, a village north of Creston; Yahk, a tiny community 40 km east of Creston; Salmo, a small town south of Nelson; and South Slocan, Slocan and Winlaw, which are all part of the Slocan Valley.

District enrolment is declining steadily, with a current enrolment of approximately 5,400 students. There are 26 schools in the district, and school population ranges in size from 19 to over 650. The Board is committed to maintaining its community schools, and is addressing the decline in enrolment through a school reconfiguration plan in Nelson and the surrounding area. This action will result in the closure of two small schools and the movement of a multi-age program into a vacant space in another facility.

Five hundred of the District's students are of Aboriginal ancestry and are widely dispersed among schools. There is one First Nations Community in the District, the Lower Kootenay Indian Band, just south of Creston. The District enrolls 72 ESL students, and 62 International students.

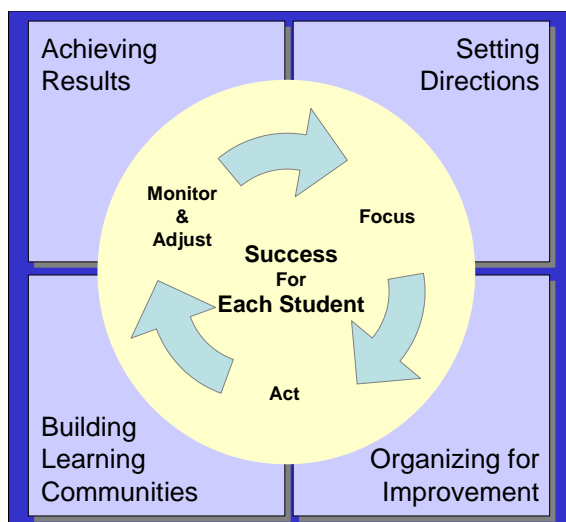
The Purpose of District Review

Continuously improving school districts actively consider and respond to the following three questions in relation to their work to improve the success for each child:

1. What is most important? – Focus
2. What are we doing about it? – Act
3. How will we monitor and adjust our work to get improved results? – Monitor and Adjust

District Reviews are intended to explore these questions as they consider the work of the District in four key areas:

- Setting Directions
- Organizing For Improvement
- Building Learning Communities
- Achieving Results



The District Review report is not a report card to be seen as an end product. Rather, it is a document intended to assist the District in the work to improve success for each child. The report acknowledges District work and provides recommendations in the areas of Setting Directions, Organizing for Improvement, Building Learning Communities and Achieving Results.

Process

The District Review Team:

1. Met with district senior staff on February 24, 2008. Present for the meeting were:

Bill Reid, Superintendent
Pat Dooley, Director of Achievement
Monica Schulte, Secretary-Treasurer
Bob Wright, Board Chair
Lenora Trenaman, Trustee
Dr. Rod Johnston, Director of Instruction-Student Services

2. Met with representatives of groups including:

Principals and Vice Principals
Kootenay Lake Teachers' Federation
CUPE
District support team
District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC)
Aboriginal Education Program

3. Met with school staff, students and parents at the following schools:

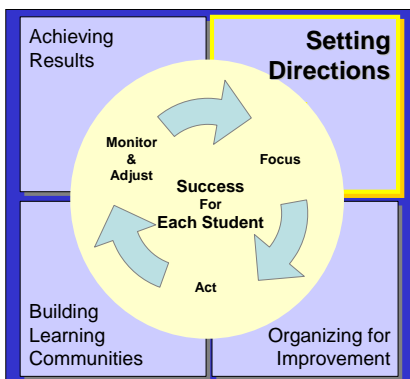
Adam Robertson Elementary
Erickson Elementary
Hume Elementary School
Rosemont Elementary School
Salmo Elementary School
South Nelson Elementary
Winlaw Elementary School

J V Humphries Elem-Secondary
Trafalgar Middle School

Mount Sentinel Secondary
Prince Charles Secondary
Salmo Secondary

Central Education Centre (teleconference and in-person)

Setting Directions:



Expectations:

Continuously improving districts set directions that will enhance success for each child. Priorities are identified through the examination of evidence from a variety of sources at classroom, school, and district levels. The focus of district priorities is evident in district goals and objectives, and the related rationale.

Observations

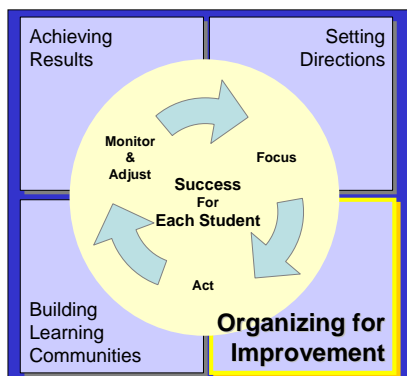
- There is a high level of commitment to student success at all levels of the system. There are many positive targeted initiatives underway in the District to improve the success of individual students. These include Literacy, Early Learning, and the “Improving Life Chances Project”.
- Staff expressed appreciation for the value the District places on improving achievement, the funding and support provided to build capacity, and the commitment to maintaining community schools.
- The Literacy goal is a priority and is well supported through:
 - Professional development,
 - Literacy grants,
 - Literacy facilitation.
- Schools appreciate the concise template for school planning. The reduction in goal requirements in school plans helps focus efforts on the role of assessment for learning, which is gaining acceptance and utility with teaching staff.
- The District uses a variety of assessments to inform decision-making including portfolio assessment and the collaborative marking of district assessments based on performance standards.
- School Planning Councils (SPCs) are not fully functioning in all schools.
- The Team noted the need for increased community involvement and district commitment to the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement process.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Establish a district Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee to champion and oversee Aboriginal initiatives in the district.
 - Build understanding of the value of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement in relation to the success of Aboriginal students.
 - Reflect the goals of the EA in the district initiatives, Achievement Contract and school plans.
 - Establish clear expectations for the implementation of the EA.
- Consolidate recent innovative changes in planning and practices to build capacity and ensure sustainability of improvement efforts
 - Monitor the effectiveness of school planning documents.
 - Consistently engage SPCs and parents in developing plans and monitoring improvement efforts at each school.
 - Deepen the use of assessment for learning at the school level
 - Evaluate progress.
 - Review assessment practices to ensure a balance of formative and summative information to guide decision-making and instructional practice.

Organizing for Improvement:



Expectations:

Continuously improving districts organize their efforts and activities to ensure success for each child. Work at all levels in the district is coherent and aligned to focus on improvement. School uniqueness and district directions are both supported. Strategies and structures selected to achieve the goals are a blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking. This includes effectively differentiating resources, time and professional development to get results. The district supports connections among staff and schools to build capacity.

Observations

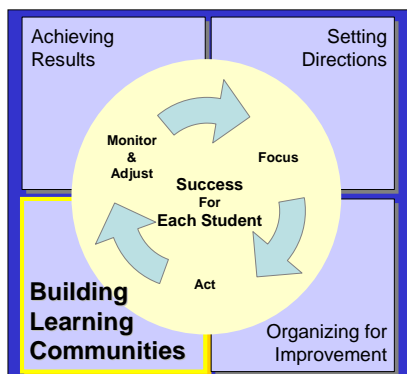
- The District is working collaboratively with the local community to support early learners. Each school is involved in an Early Learning project. There is also funding to support early intervention in Grade 1 based on district assessment results.
- Staff expressed their appreciation for the leadership provided by the Director of Achievement and the District Literacy Facilitator in the areas of Literacy, assessment, and school improvement. Their visibility and accessibility at schools is highly valued.
- There are extensive staff development opportunities in the District to support student success.
- The District provides grants to schools in specific focus areas. The grants provide the opportunity for schools to address the individual needs of their students.
- The District uses collaboration and mentoring in schools to improve student success in Literacy. Staff expressed the hope that similar strategies will be developed to support Numeracy.
- Staff looks forward to the completion of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement to guide the development of actions to support Aboriginal student success.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Use the upcoming involvement in the Student Centred Leadership project to consolidate and clarify funding available to each school.
- Support the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.
 - Expect a more significant role for school and district leadership.
 - Build understanding and commitment by all members of the education community.
- Expect all schools to support student transitions into school, from school to school, into secondary school and from school to post-secondary opportunities.
- Differentiate instruction to support individual learners.

Building Learning Communities:



Expectations:

Continuously improving districts have a vision for, and a shared commitment to success for each student. Leadership at all levels in all roles focuses on student success. Relationships are developed and maintained to support students and ongoing parent involvement is embedded in district culture. The district makes their plans and progress public. Communication occurs in multiple ways about their efforts and activities, and input is actively sought and valued.

Observations

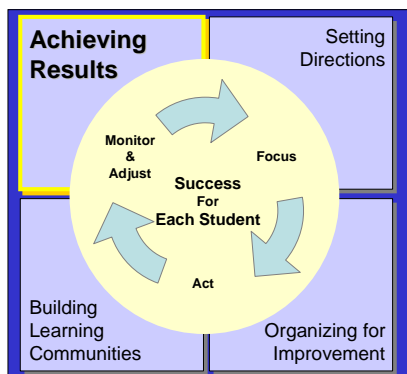
- Parents are very supportive of the work in schools to improve student success.
 - Schools are developing innovative means of electronic communication with parents to overcome geographical obstacles (website, email newsletters).
- There is school, district and community support for vulnerable students (breakfast and lunch programs).
- DPAC and district staff expressed interest in having more involvement at the district level in planning for the future and supporting efforts to improve student success.
- Some schools have committed to the Professional Learning Community model and receive funding support from the District to support the work.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Create opportunities to engage staff at all levels in addressing challenges facing the District.
- Establish open, transparent, and well understood processes to gather input from staff, parents, and the community.
- Enhance relationships and improve communication with all education partners.
- Work with SPCs, PACs and DPAC to increase parental involvement at all levels and to find ways to reach out to less involved parents, including Aboriginal parents.

Achieving Results:



Expectations:

Improving districts continuously improve results. They monitor progress and make adjustments in key areas of their work to improve achievement – for individual students, groups of students, schools and the district.

Observations

- The District is justifiably proud of graduation rates that consistently exceed provincial averages for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners.
- The results of the “Improving Life Chances Project” for those students who are minimally meeting expectations are promising and merit tracking over time.
- District-level data indicates there is a reduction in the level of vulnerability in students at some schools.
 - Some schools are making consistent use of data to examine trends and inform classroom practice.
 - Others are still establishing baselines.
- The use of assessment to inform instruction, when fully implemented, has the potential to monitor the incremental gains made by each student.
- School staff identified the need for a district strategy to support student transitions, establish benchmarks for student success and track cohort data for high-risk students.
- The Team found little evidence of the involvement of parents in monitoring results and setting goals for improvement.
- There is little available data regarding results achieved in alternate and distributed learning programs.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Improve supports for and the success of Aboriginal learners.
- Implement a plan to support successful transitions for all students.
- Monitor the progress of special needs, alternate, and distance learners.
 - Encourage participation in Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA).
 - Use school or district assessments to track progress.
- Enhance the success of students who meet expectations. The focus on vulnerable students may result in this group of students being overlooked in planning and service delivery.
- Help staff understand the value and complementary purposes of various levels of assessment in the efforts to improve student success.
- Consistently include parents in monitoring student results.

Conclusion

The Review Team acknowledges and commends the District for the thorough follow up to the recommendations of the last review. The Team appreciated the comments from the District about the work yet to be done to build capacity to address the needs of all students.

The assessment for learning focus has laid the groundwork for improved instructional practices and for improving already strong student results in School District No. 08 (Kootenay Lake).

With staff and parent involvement in planning for the future, the Team believes that the District has the capacity and the commitment to address the recommendations made in this report, to continue to improve success for each student.

Response to the Review

The District will respond annually to the Recommendations in the report within its Achievement Contracts. For further information regarding the District response to this report, please contact School District No. 08 (Kootenay Lake).

The Ministry of Education, through the Superintendent of Achievement and the Governance and Accountability Division, will monitor the District's progress in addressing the Recommendations in this report. This may include discussions/interactions with the District about the Achievement Contract, the completion of or ongoing efforts relating to the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, training and support for school level staff and School Planning Councils, and/or other ongoing dialogue with the School District and its community.