

District Review Report 2006/07

School District No. 22 (Vernon)

March 4 - 7, 2007

Submitted to the Ministry of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Mike McKay, Superintendent, School District No. 36 (Surrey)



District Review Report 2007

District: 22 (Vernon)

Superintendent: Dr. Robert Peacock

Date of Visit: March 4 - 7, 2007

Team Chair: Mike McKay, Superintendent, SD 36 (Surrey)

Team Members: Judy Arnold, Director, System Performance, Ministry of Education
Bill Ford, Director of Instruction, SD 52 (Prince Rupert)
Andy Krawczyk, Principal, SD 39 (Vancouver)
Cheryl McCann, Parent, SD 05 (Southeast Kootenay)
Kathy Sawchuk, Assistant Superintendent,
SD 59 (Peace River South)

Context

Vernon School District has a student population of 9,220, of whom, 1,027 are Aboriginal. Declining enrolment has resulted in the decision to close West Vernon Elementary, and the students are scheduled to be transferred to four area schools. In addition, plans are underway to replace Vernon Secondary, which will create new possibilities for secondary schools in the District.

At the same time, the District has undergone significant changes at the leadership level. By the end of the 2007 school year, almost all of the management team will have worked in their positions for two years or less. In Vernon, there is a belief that change brings opportunity. A sense of optimism for the future is expressed by partner groups.

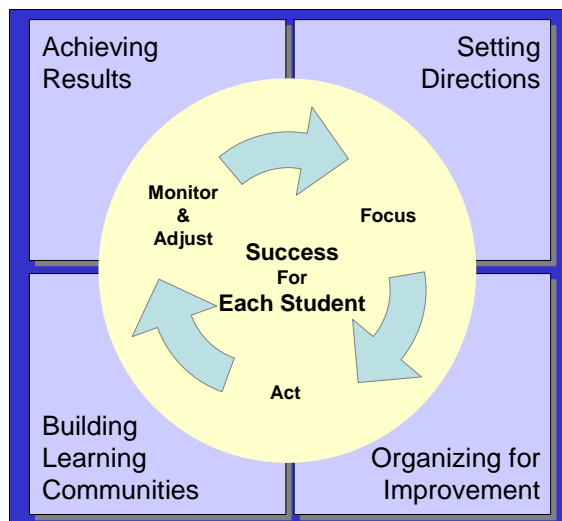
The Purpose of District Review

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:

- What is most important? – Focus
- What are we doing about it? – Act
- 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 report 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 Monday, March 5 and on the morning of Wednesday, March 7 to discuss district strengths, challenges, alignment, coherence, sustainability, current results and the road ahead.

Present for the meetings were:

Bob Peacock, Superintendent
Bev Rundell, Assistant Superintendent
Randy Hoffman, Secretary Treasurer
Bruce Ritchie, Director of Instruction
Don Wilcox, Director of Instruction
Sandra Lynxleg, District Principal
Judy Sedge, Administrative Assistant

The Team also had an opportunity to meet with the principal and staff of the DL program and the "Tech Team". The District Review Team also met with data services staff member, Peggy Wellwood, who provided an overview of the technological support for assessment and school level data collection.

2. Met with representatives of groups including:

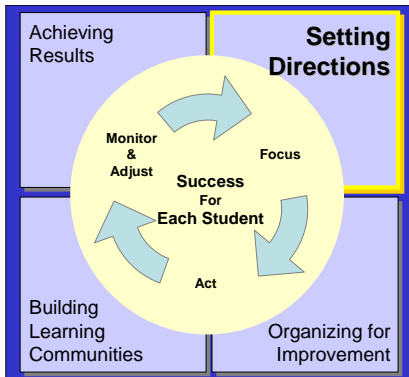
Aboriginal Targeted Funds Committee
Board of Trustees
District Parent Advisory Council
Principals and Vice-Principals
Vernon Teachers' Association

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

Alexis Park Elementary
Coldstream Elementary
Ellison Elementary
Harwood Elementary
Hillview Elementary
Silver Star Elementary

Clarence Fulton Secondary
Vernon Secondary
W L Seaton Secondary

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.

Acknowledgements

- The schools and partner groups communicated a sense of hope and trust in the potential of the new senior management team to lead the work to support success for each child.
- There is evidence of the use of student profiles to track the growth of individual students.
- The District Assessment Committee has demonstrated leadership in the use of evidence to support student success.
- Staff, both school based and district, are engaged in ongoing conversation about instructional practice.
- The literacy initiative has fostered productive dialogue and positive results especially for the early learners.
- There is a strong relationship base in the district among all members of the learning community supporting discussions about what is best for students.
- Support for Aboriginal learners is evident in the appointment of an Aboriginal District Principal.
- Although District directions are broadly drawn, they can serve as a framework to refine actions.

Recommendations

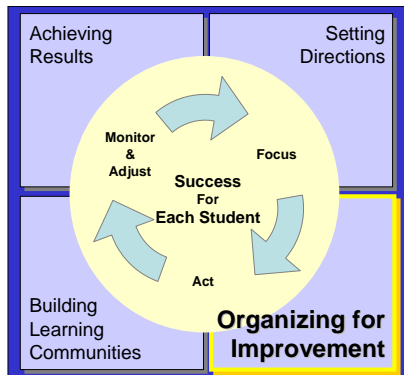
Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Move beyond the initial invitational improvement agenda to ensure there is a universal commitment to the work involved in improving success for each child across the district.

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- Engage all partners in the identification of district directions, priorities and goals and clarify roles and relationships in the process.
- Build on the expert resources in data management in the district to track individual students and groups at each school site. In addition, an expansion of the use of formative assessment to measure incremental gains is suggested.
- Clarify and simplify all planning documents and related processes. Develop goals and objectives with a sharper focus in relation to specific groups.
- Ensure that Aboriginal student success is key to the entire district operation by embedding Aboriginal achievement in all district work and completing the process to sign an Enhancement Agreement.
- Work with all schools to support a focus on excellence and continuous improvement.
- Use all planning documents as vehicles to genuinely improve success for every student. Discussions during the Review visit indicated that there was a sense that school plans and the accountability contract are viewed as compliance documents rather than improvement roadmaps.

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.

Acknowledgements

- All stakeholders recognize the unique opportunity with a new executive team to build a new framework for action to enhance success for each child.
- The Team heard from many members of the school district community who indicated a high degree of commitment to helping set new directions in the work to ensure success for all students.
- The review of special education services currently underway will inform district directions.
- Coaching, mentoring, and action research support staff development.
- The District provides provincial leadership in the implementation of distributed learning programs.
- There is significant potential in the work of the “Tech Team” to support success for the most vulnerable students and provide flexibility to all.
- The District has committed to supporting individual learners through differentiated instruction and is focusing on promising practices research in literacy, numeracy, and assessment.

Recommendations

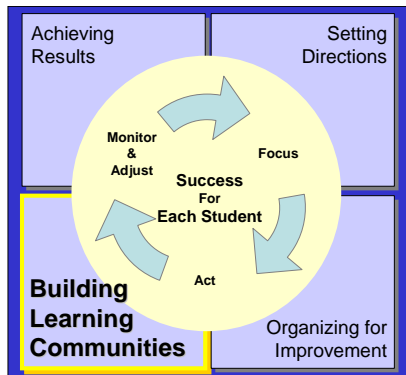
Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Collaboratively develop a strategic plan to guide the work to improve success for each student.
- Clarify the relationship between school goals and district plans so that the unique needs and priorities of schools are acknowledged and supported.
- Support the interpretation, analysis, and dialogue about formative and summative assessment.

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- Integrate the key initiatives currently underway including student support services, Aboriginal services, and literacy initiatives to ensure coherence focused on improving success for each student.
- Further explore career development opportunities and other non-traditional post-secondary connections.
- Align strategies and structures to support school priorities and ensure coherence of services.
- Identify specific strategies to support early learning, Grades 4-7, transitions, secondary school success and Aboriginal students, and track them for effectiveness.
- Develop consistent protocols for student transitions from elementary to secondary school.
- Work with schools and other districts to identify quality assessment instruments in the area of numeracy.

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.

Acknowledgements

- The District has quality connections to several other agencies (the Okanagan Band, Ministry of Children and Family Development, etc.).
- The Teacher Development Program is a sustainable district program for interaction and research to support learning in classrooms.
- There is a range of opportunities for informal parental involvement at the school and district levels.
- The District has collaborative relationships with parent groups and the Vernon Teachers' Association.
- The District is building relationships with the Aboriginal community as it develops its Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.
- The District has a strong tradition of active Local Specialist Associations.
- The District is the lead Okanagan district when promoting Student Voice.

Recommendations

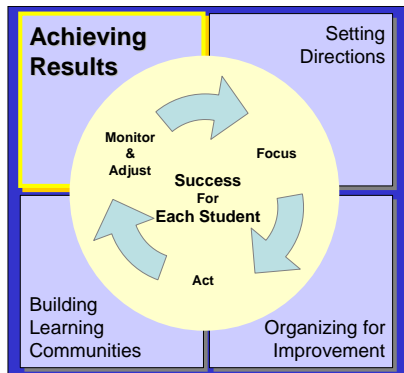
Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Enhance parental involvement at the school and district levels by supporting parent groups and schools in reaching out to less involved parents.
- Strengthen the focus on building leadership capacity and instructional leadership at all levels by building on and expanding beyond current efforts in areas including the Teacher Development Program, the assessment teams, the district's Literacy Project and the numeracy workshops.
- Continue the work of building relationships with all members of the Aboriginal community to support individual student success.

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- Develop partnership protocols so that all partner groups understand their roles and their involvement in the district work to improve student success.
- Clarify roles and provide training for each School Planning Council (SPC) so the SPC is able to play a key role in supporting success for each student.
- Support parent groups in developing connections and relationships with one another.
- Develop a communications strategy so there is a shared understanding among all local education partners of the interconnectedness of strategies and structures in place to support student success at each school and throughout the district.
- Develop consistent transition protocols for students moving from grade-to-grade and from school-to-school.

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.

Acknowledgements

- There are some good results to build on, including positive trends in Six Year Dogwood completion rates for Aboriginal students, PM Benchmarks, and Grade 4 FSA reading at several schools.
- The District is aware of its most vulnerable students, and there are differentiated supports and resources provided to higher needs schools.
- The District is beginning to state the importance of knowing each student and aligning support and resources.
- Student profiles in use in some schools provide a method to monitor success for each child.
- Technology used to collect and monitor individual student progress, as piloted in three schools this year, is superior.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Seek ways of improving the attendance, transition rates, completion rates, and hence, the success of all Aboriginal learners.
- Use valid evidence in all plans to track, monitor and adjust practice to ensure success for each child.
- Help all schools focus on individual students and individual results.
- Establish collaborative processes to regularly review results at the school and district levels.

Conclusion

The District Review Team has considered the work of the Vernon School District to improve student achievement. The Team believes that the District has the capacity and the commitment to respond to the Recommendations in the Report as well as sustain its efforts in areas identified as strengths.

The Team suggests that effective communication and collaboration with the Superintendents of Achievement and Ministry staff in the Governance and Accountability Division will enhance the work to improve success for each student in Vernon.

Response to the Review

The District will respond annually to the recommendations in the report within its Accountability/Achievement Contracts. For further information regarding the District response to this report, please contact School District No. 22 (Vernon).

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 Accountability/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.