

**District Review Report**  
**School District No. 34 (Abbotsford)**  
April 27 – April 30, 2008

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Submitted to the Ministry of Education



## District Review Report 2008

District: 34 (Abbotsford)

Superintendent: Des McKay, Superintendent

Date of Visit: April 27 – April 30, 2008

Team Chair: Mike Roberts, Superintendent SD No. 23 (Central Okanagan)

Team Members: Judy Arnold, Director, System Performance, Ministry of Education  
Brian Pepper, Superintendent, SD No. 57 (Prince George)  
Dani Garner, Teacher Librarian, SD No. 79 (Cowichan Valley)  
Elaine Viel, Parent, SD No. 22 (Vernon)  
Ellen Mogyorosi, Vice Principal, SD No. 39 (Vancouver)  
Afton Wright, Manager, System Performance, Ministry of Education  
Susan MacNeil, Principal, SD No. 23 (Central Okanagan)  
Francine Johnny, Teacher Counsellor, SD No. 79  
(Cowichan Valley)

### Context

Abbotsford, one of the most diverse and fastest growing communities in Canada, is situated at the eastern end of the Fraser Valley with a population of more than 134,000 residents.

School district enrolment in September 2007 was 19,432. This consisted of:

- 36 elementary schools (K-5), 5 middle (6-8), and 8 secondary
- 1,838 aboriginal students (9.5%)
- 1,763 students with special needs (9.1%)
- 1,915 English as a Second Language students (9.9%)
- 1,163 French Immersion (6%)

The District offers a range of education choices, programs, services, facilities and a variety of learning opportunities for students.

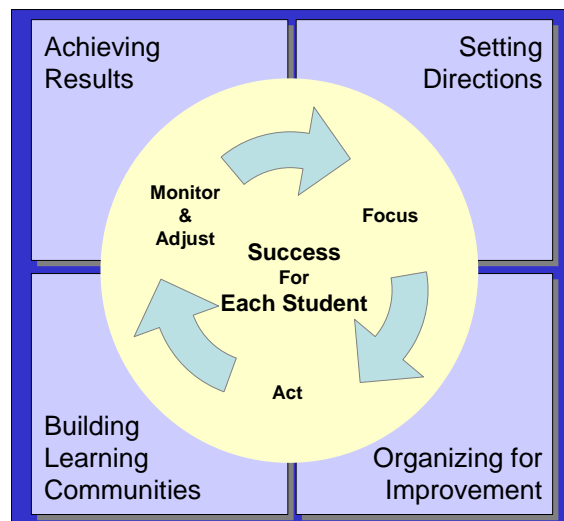
## The Purpose of District Review

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 April 27, 28 and 30. Present for the meetings were:

Des McKay, Superintendent  
George Murray, Secretary-Treasurer  
Bruce Ivany, Assistant Superintendent  
Steve Carlton, Assistant Superintendent  
Kevin Godden, Assistant Superintendent  
Judy Chapman, Director of Instruction  
Debbie Peters, Director of Instruction

2. Met with representatives of groups including:

The Board of Education  
Abbotsford District Teachers Association  
Principals and Vice-Principals  
Aboriginal Education Advisory Council  
District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC)  
District Implementation Teams

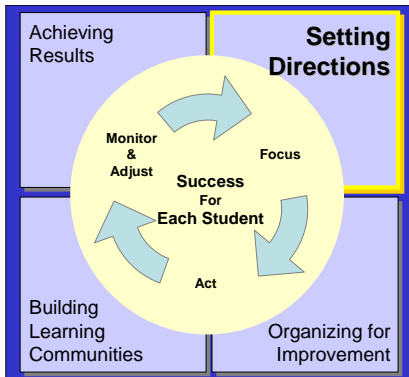
3. Met with school staff, students and parents at the following schools:

Aberdeen Elementary  
Alexander Elementary  
Clearbrook Elementary  
Harry Sayers Elementary  
King Traditional Elementary  
McMillan Elementary  
Mt Lehman Elementary  
Prince Charles Elementary  
Ten Broeck Elementary  
Terry Fox Elementary

Abbotsford Traditional Middle  
Clayburn Middle  
Colleen and Gordie Howe Middle

Rick Hansen Secondary  
Robert Bateman Secondary  
Abbotsford Continuing Education - Alternate Program

## Setting Directions:



### Expectations:

Continuously improving Districts set directions that enhance success for each child. District priorities are identified through thorough examination of evidence from classroom, school, and District level sources. The focus on continuous improvement is evident in goals, objectives and related rationale. Goals and objectives are systematically reviewed and revised.

## Observations

- The District has a focus on improving achievement for each student, and is willing to evaluate existing structures and practices in the interest of improving student success.
  - Significant self evaluation is evident in the recent review of English as a Second Language (ESL) and Abbotsford Continuing Education (ACE) programs. A review of both programs was commissioned by the Board last year and an action plan in response to recommendations is forthcoming in both cases.
- Literacy and Early Learning are high priorities and areas of considerable accomplishment in the District.
- In regard to assessment practices and the tracking of achievement data:
  - The use of formative assessment and differentiated instruction is growing at many schools in the District.
  - Some schools are tracking individual students and grade groups over time.
  - The District is developing its capacity to track individual students and grade groups over time.
- In many schools, there is a strong connection between the school planning process and the work being done by the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
- The District has taken on a significant number of new initiatives.
  - Some are not yet consistently understood by schools or partner groups.
  - The Team heard concerns about the long-term sustainability of the numerous school and district initiatives, particularly in the face of time, enrollment and budget pressures.

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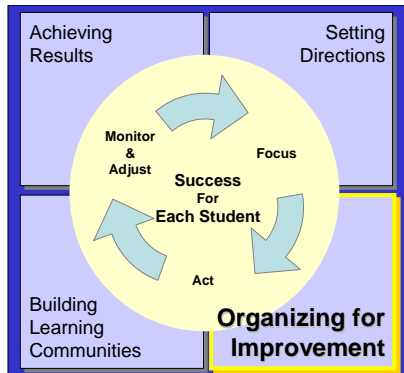
- In some schools, the Team noted a disconnect between the compliant nature of school planning documents and the genuine work that is taking place in schools to improve success for students.
- The District has an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement that is supported by the Aboriginal communities, but has yet to be fully implemented or integrated with other plans.

### Recommendations

Initiate or build on current efforts to:

- Consolidate recent innovative changes in planning and practices to build capacity and ensure sustainability of improvement efforts. Limit major new initiative until current initiatives are part of the fabric of the District.
- Deepen the use of assessment for learning at the school level by:
  - Evaluating progress,
  - Sharing successful practices, and
  - Building on positive examples of differentiated instruction.
- Revise planning and improvement processes:
  - Reflect the genuine work of schools to improve student success.
  - Integrate the work of PLCs with school plans where appropriate.
  - Engage parents and teachers in the work to improve student success at each school.
  - Embed the goals of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (EA) in District and school plans for action.
  - Fully involve Aboriginal staff, across the district, to implement and integrate the EA.

## Organizing for Improvement:



### Expectations:

Continuously improving Districts organize actions 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. Actions selected to achieve goals are a blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking. These actions also include effectively differentiating resources, time and professional development to get results. The District connects staff and schools to build capacity. Actions are monitored and adjusted for effectiveness.

## Observations

- The District offers an extremely wide variety of student programs and options.
  - Parents are very supportive of the choices available to students.
- Substantial effort has been put into the development of implementation committees and the use of Helping Teachers.
- The new PLC model is generating excitement and ownership about formative assessment and differentiated instruction for staff involved.
- There is recognition within the district that the complexities of program offerings, variety of schools, and the evolving community are both a current strength and a future challenge.
  - The District's review of the ESL and ACE programs is a courageous step to improve student success and staff have high expectations for change as a result.
  - As the District continues to change, it will be necessary to monitor and evaluate initiatives to ensure they are sustainable and continue to meet not only their original intent, but the current needs of students.

## Recommendations

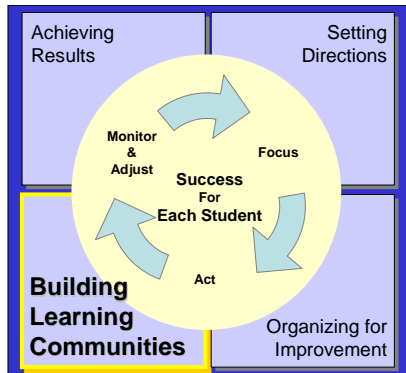
Initiate or build on current efforts to:

- Build collective understanding, purpose and acceptance of PLCs at all levels of the District.
  - Establish a regular review process for PLCs.

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- Broaden collaboration with partner groups to enhance student learning and to facilitate professional conversations between all staff.
- Fully involve school administrators as partners in the school-based PLCs.
- Ensure that the PLC process is effective and sustainable in improving student learning.
  
- Enhance alignment and coherence between the work of the schools and the Districts by supporting the central role of Principal leadership for improving learning in each school.
  
- Build structures and strategies to implement, review for effectiveness, and sustainability the new ESL plan, and the recommendations from the ACE review.

## Building Learning Communities:



### Expectations:

In continuously improving Districts there is a shared vision for and a 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. Ongoing parent involvement is embedded in District culture. The District makes public their plans and progress. They collaborate and communicate in multiple ways about their work. Input and dialogue is actively sought and valued District-wide.

## Observations

- A commitment and passion for children's well-being, in addition to learning, was evident at all levels across the District.
  - Individual schools and their communities are consistently focused on success for each and every learner.
- There has been substantial progress since the last review in engaging parents at the District level.
  - Early Learning Programs are seen as a vehicle for increasing parent involvement at the school level.
- There is strong evidence of excellent relationships with the local community, thus school-community partnerships are thriving, such as implementation of Community Schools and Early Learning Programs.
- The establishment of Professional Learning Communities within all schools has the potential to be a powerful structure for growth.

## Recommendations

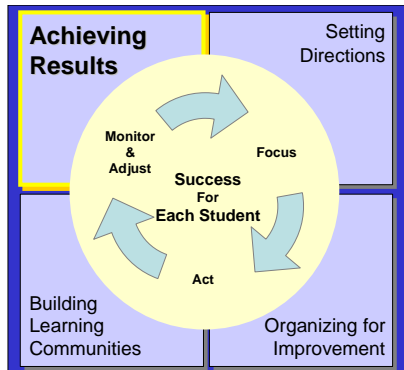
Initiate or build on current efforts to:

- Utilize current strong parent involvement in Early Learning Programs as a model to engage multi-cultural parents and the parents of at-risk students in later grades.

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- Clarify and connect District vision and direction in working with schools, parents and partner groups by:
  - Ensuring the meaningful involvement of parents in setting school and District direction.
  - Restarting conversations among partner groups, district staff and the Board regarding educational initiatives, directions, and planning processes.
  - Increasing opportunities for genuine conversation between all partner groups in the effort to move the District forward to improve the success for students.

## Achieving Results:



### Expectations:

Improving Districts continuously improve results. They monitor progress and make adjustments in key areas of their work to improve results over time – for individual students, groups of students, schools and the District.

## Observations

- Student performance in the District is above provincial and national averages in many areas.
- Learners are achieving positive results through the provision of a wide variety of programs such as Career and Technical Centre, International Baccalaureate, Secondary School Apprenticeships and French Immersion.
- There is substantial District and school evidence of positive results resulting from Literacy and Early Learning initiatives.
- The District is committed to looking for ways to improve success for its students. However, some schools or departments, already achieving considerable success, may be less motivated to make change and commit to continuous improvement.
- The District and some schools use the wide variety of evidence available to inform instructional practice and monitor individual student progress.
- The 2006/07 six-year Dogwood Completion rate is 79 percent for all students and 54 percent for Aboriginal students. The District has begun to explore the needs of students leaving the system before completion.

## Recommendations

Initiate or build on current efforts to:

- Track achievement results and trends over time as part of the regular assessment of instructional practices and individual programs:
  - Explore potential interventions for the benefit of individual students.
  - Ensure all practices are regularly monitored and adjusted to ensure continuous improvement in each school in the District.
  
- Examine the history and concerns of individual students who do not receive a Dogwood graduation or school completion certificate in order to improve student success.
  - For all students.
  - For Aboriginal students.
  
- Improve success for vulnerable students at all levels including those who are of Aboriginal background or are recent arrivals to Canada.

## Conclusion

The Review Team was impressed with the genuine desire to improve the success for each student in the District. The district is to be commended for the focus on the celebration of what is working well, and the willingness to identify what can be improved to further enhance the District's overall positive academic results.

One challenge that this strong District faces is to respond to new information and a changing context in ways that builds on current initiatives and creates a sense of urgency for everyone to work together to move forward. Given the present strength and commitment to students in Abbotsford, the District Review Team is confident that the District has both the commitment and capacity to improve success for *each* child.

## 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. 34 (Abbotsford).

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.