

District Review Report

School District No. 34 (Abbotsford)

April 25 - 27, 2005

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Dick Chambers, Superintendent, School District No. 57 (Prince George)

**District Review Report
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District Name:	Abbotsford
District Number:	34
Superintendent:	Des McKay
Date of Visit:	April 25 - April 27, 2005
Team Chair:	Dick Chambers, Superintendent, SD 57 (Prince George)
Team Members:	Judy Arnold, Manager, Ministry of Education Bruce Beairsto, Superintendent, SD 38 (Richmond) Stacy DeCosse, Teacher, SD 6 (Rocky Mountain) Pat Dooley, Regional Coordinator, Kootenay – Boundary Region Rhonda Dunsmuir, Principal, SD 23 (Central Okanagan) Kathleen King Hunt, District Principal, SD 85 (Vancouver Island North) Andy Krawczyk, Principal, SD 39 (Vancouver) Tanya Twynstra, Manager, Ministry of Education Terri Watson, Parent, SD 78 (Fraser-Cascade)

Context

Abbotsford and its immediate communities are among the most ethnically diverse in the nation. The 2001 census numbers put metropolitan Abbotsford – which includes Mission – third in diversity, behind first-place Vancouver and second-place Toronto. The city also had the largest portion of south Asian people in any large Canadian city (this includes Indo Canadian, Vietnamese, Laotian, Taiwanese and Chinese).

School district enrolment in September 2004 was 19,485. This consisted of:

- 11,556 elementary (K-7) and 7,929 secondary (school age only)
- 1,467 aboriginal (7.53%)
- 32 Level 1 special education students
- 347 Level 2 special education students
- 194 Level 3 special education students
- 787 career preparation students
- 1,859 English as a Second Language students (9.5%)

Abbotsford schools have used a goal setting and school improvement model with 'Focus Teams' since 1995. The introduction of School Planning Councils was a natural progression for school improvement. In March 2004, the District revised its School Plan/Accountability Contract Cycle. School Planning Councils completed School Plans in June 2004. School Plans were collated and reviewed by District Staff and School Trustees.

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Abbotsford School District is a leader in B.C. in offering Choice programs to its community. These include:

- elementary and secondary French Immersion,
- elementary and secondary Traditional Schools,
- elementary and secondary Fine Arts Schools,
- a Career Technical Center,
- a Continuing Education Center,
- Integrated Studies Program,
- International Baccalaureate Program,
- an Electronic School; and
- a Virtual School.

Over the past five years the District has been in the process of moving to a middle school (Grade 6-8) model. This reconfiguration is scheduled to be completed by 2006. The District has very recently announced a creative plan to relocate a significant number of its middle and secondary programs. As well, early in 2005 a new Superintendent of Schools was appointed.

Summary of Process

The purpose of the District Review is to provide feedback and recommendations to the District, the Ministry of Education and the public regarding the District's work in improving student achievement by:

- Reviewing district and school achievement data;
- Reviewing the District's accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- Making recommendations to the Board and the Minister of Education about improving student achievement; and
- Identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

School District No. 34 (Abbotsford) is one of 20 districts to be reviewed in the 2004/2005 school year as part of the Ministry of Education's accountability cycle.

The Team reviewed the District's Accountability Contract and its results pertaining to student achievement and:

- met with members of the Board, Senior Staff, members of the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Department, a representative of the First Nations Education Advisory Committee, and representatives of the District Parent Advisory Committee on Sunday afternoon to review the District's characteristics, its processes and its Accountability Contract;
- visited 27 schools: 5 secondary schools, the Continuing Education Center, the Electronic School, the Career Technical Center, 4 middle schools, and 15 elementary schools;
 - at each school, the Team met with the School Planning Council – the principal, teacher, parents, and students (secondary schools) – in order to review the school's plan.

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- met with the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Department, representatives of the First Nations Education Advisory Committee, and the District Parent Advisory Council.

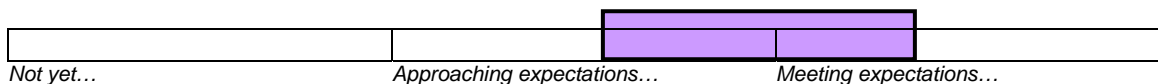
In addition to the District's Accountability Contract and the School Plans, the Team considered the following:

- First Nations Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee 2003/2004 Annual Report,
- First Nations/Aboriginal Education Administrator's Handbook for School Based Services, 2004-2005,
- The Developing Writer Teacher Resource,
- Literacy Profiles – Getting to Know your Readers and Writers,
- School District No. 34 (Abbotsford) District Review Data Binder: Grade 1-3 Reading Results, Grade 3, 6 & 9 Writing Results; and
- District Performance Report, 1999/00 to 2003/04 (as of January 2005), School District No. 34 (Abbotsford).

Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*

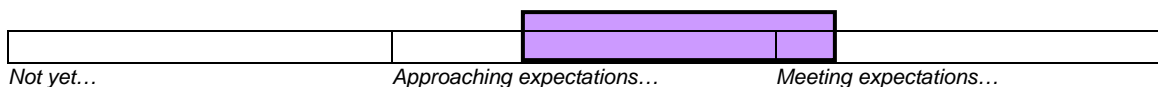
Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



- District goals are focused on student achievement.
- School goals are aligned with the District's goals.
- Most schools do not have objectives to refine their goals.
- The District reading goal does not have an objective for secondary schools.

2. *Rationale:*

Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



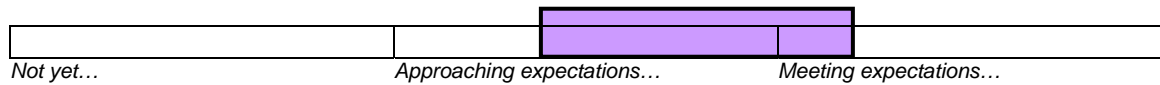
- Some schools are using a variety of evidence to establish goals.
- Some schools are basing their goals on philosophy or belief rather than data.
- Some schools are basing their goals on district goals, accreditation goals or perceptions of staff.
- The District is working on increasing its breadth of data sources to inform goal selection.

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3. *Data:*

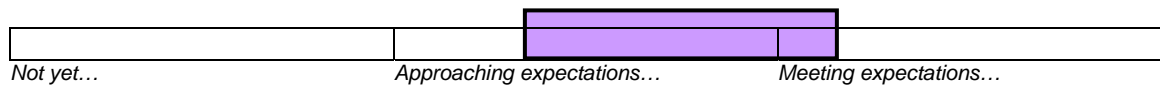
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



- There is considerable consistency among the data sources used by schools.
- Most elementary and middle schools use PM Benchmarks, Accelerated Reader, STAR, Gates McGinitie, and SuccessMaker as data sources.
- Schools are at various stages in using BC Performance Standards to inform instruction.
- A few schools are developing and analyzing classroom and school-based data to complement the district and provincial data that is available to them.

4. *Strategies:*

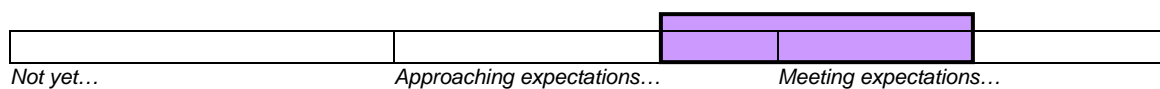
Improving districts and schools have focused, well organized improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



- A broad range of strategies are evident.
- First Nations cultural content is incorporated into academic strategies that can benefit all students.
- Some strategies are carefully selected to match and impact the achievement of the goals.
- Some schools are monitoring strategies and adapting them to improve achievement.
- Many strategies are unrelated to instructional practice.

5. *Structures:*

Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organization – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



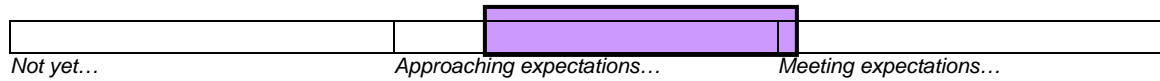
- The District offers a wide variety of choices to its students.
- The District has been bold in realigning a number of significant structures in the pursuit of its goals, e.g. “The Plan”.
- The District has differentiated resources towards areas of highest need, e.g. full-day kindergarten.
- Many schools have been creative in aligning their resources to focus on their goals.

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6. *Results:*

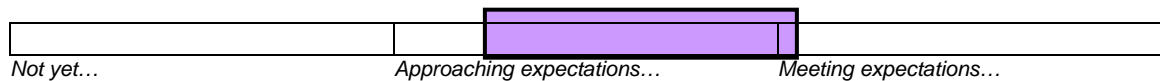
Improving districts and schools monitor and make adjustments to get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



- The vast majority of district results at both elementary and secondary levels exceed the provincial average; of particular note – Aboriginal results usually far exceed the provincial average, while English as a Second Language results lag somewhat below the provincial average.
- Some schools are monitoring results throughout the year and making instructional changes based on their analysis of the data.
- Some schools have good results but are less focused on continuous improvement.
- District resources are being developed to support schools in making instructional decisions based on results.

7. *Communication:*

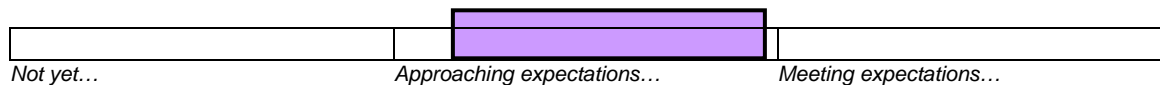
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



- The District and schools use a variety of methods to communicate with staff, parents and community.
- The District has identified clear strategies and support to reach out to the Aboriginal community.
- Some groups express a desire for more interactive dialogue with the district.
- Some schools are communicating their improvement plans and progress towards achievement goals.
- Some schools employ interactive strategies to promote a dialogue about student achievement.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence:*

Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and district directions are both valued.



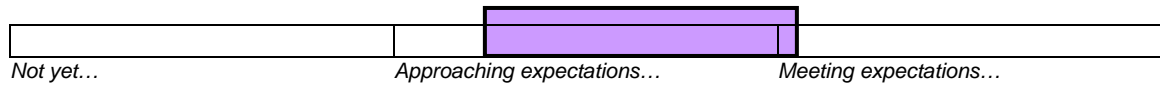
- The District has recently modified its accountability cycle with the intention of providing clear direction to schools about their goals.
- There still appears to be confusion about the connection between school and district plans.
- There is a perception by some schools that opportunities for input in building the District's Accountability Contract are limited.

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9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement:*

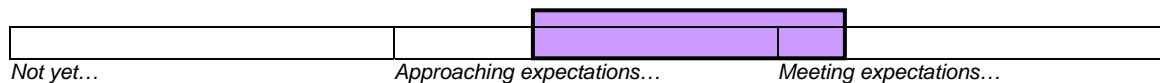
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- In the dialogue about student achievement, most schools are continuing to search for ways to interactively engage their community; some schools are using strategies to accommodate linguistic, cultural and socio-economic diversity.
- Elementary schools are reaching out to their parents through initiatives such as “Ready, Set, Learn”, PALS and drop in centers.
- The District is utilizing a variety of creative methods to interact with the Aboriginal community such as a Family Dinner night, Sto:lo Awards, Enhancement Agreement and the First Nations Aboriginal Education Annual Report.
- The District Parent Advisory Council expressed the desire for more collaborative involvement in the District’s Accountability Contract.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*

Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- The District has articulated a clear vision for improving student achievement.
- There are many examples of collaborative leadership in schools.
- Most secondary and middle schools have student leadership programs.
- The First Nations Aboriginal Advisory Committee provides effective leadership.

Strengths

Team observations of particular strengths related to student achievement at specific schools included:

- There is a strong commitment to, and caring for, students by District and school staff as well as parents.
- Abbotsford students perform very well on provincial measures.
- The District and schools are bold and creative in the realignment of resources to address identified goals:
 - Full-day kindergarten and resources,
 - Realignment of middle and secondary school,
 - Creation of the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Department,
 - Reorganization of timetables to allow time for collaboration; and
 - Behavioural specialists at secondary schools.

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- There are a wide variety of program options available to parents and their children.
- There is a very effective Aboriginal education program that is highlighted by:
 - positive student achievement,
 - over 500 cultural presentations,
 - student leadership activities,
 - student mentoring activities,
 - excellent interaction with the Aboriginal community

Promising Practices

District or school practices that could be helpful to other districts with a similar focus include:

- The Career Technical Center, a pioneering program in B.C., continues to be an outstanding example of partnership with industry and post-secondary to promote trades and career development.
- The Key Communicator initiative provides opportunities for parents to connect with senior staff and visit other schools.
- ABC 1,2,3 – a community pre-school and literacy program – builds readiness skills for kindergarten.
- The Parent Ambassador Program at Rick Hansen Secondary School is an innovative way to encourage parent involvement beyond formal Parent advisory Council participation.
- Aboriginal Family Nights successfully engage parents in their children's education.

Recommendations

Team recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results:

- Continue to clarify and refine district goals to ensure objectives for each goal specify the ultimate aim for the learner.
- Continue to clarify the district and school goal setting process and promote greater collaboration in the development of district goals.
- Expand and deepen the use and analysis of classroom and curriculum based assessment measures to inform the ongoing adaptation of instructional practice in every classroom.
- Complete the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement and embed it in district and school plans.