

District Review Report
School District No. 39 (Vancouver)

May 4 – 9, 2008

Submitted to the Ministry of Education



District Review Report 2008

District: 39 (Vancouver)

Superintendent: Chris Kelly, Superintendent

Date of Visit: May 4 – 9, 2008

Team Chair: Dick Chambers, Retired Superintendent

Team Members: Judy Arnold, Director, System Performance, Ministry of Education
Terry-Lee Beaudry, Director of Instruction, SD 35
(Central Okanagan)
Cheryle Beaumont, Superintendent, SD 35 (Langley)
Donna Burke, Parent, SD 37 (Delta)
Daphne Churchill, Principal, SD 62 (Sooke)
Deborah Courville, Principal, SD 61 (Victoria)
Marjorie Plante, Teacher, SD 36 (Surrey)
Renee Wentland, Coordinator, System Performance,
Ministry of Education

Context

The Vancouver School District is a large, urban and multicultural school district providing programs to 56,000 students in Kindergarten to Grade 12, 3,000 adults in adult education programs and 48,000 in continuing education. These students are served through 74 elementary schools, 17 elementary annexes, 18 secondary schools, 7 adult education centres, and 1 distance education school.

The District is an increasingly multi-cultural community with new students arriving throughout the year. Sixty per cent of its students speak a language other than English at home. More than 2,000 Aboriginal students representing over 600 bands attend Vancouver schools. It includes some of the most affluent as well as impoverished urban neighbourhoods in the country. Similar to other urban districts, Vancouver has shifting populations with some areas in decline and others increasing in student enrolment.

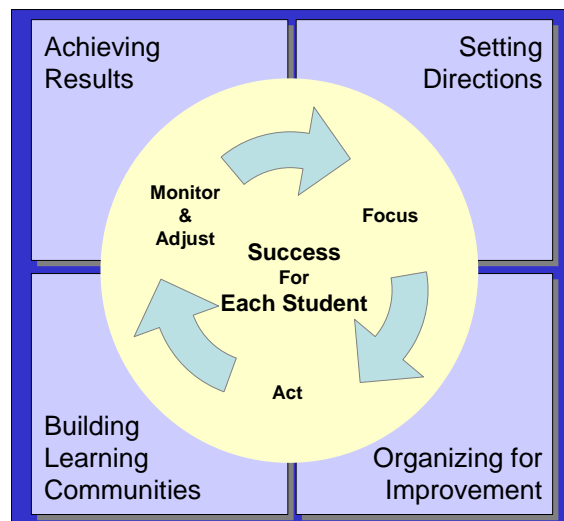
The Purpose of District Review

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 the following district staff members:

District Management Team:

Chris Kelly, Superintendent
Laurie Anderson, Associate Superintendent – Continuing & International Education
Lynn Green, Associate Superintendent – North Area
Sonia Hutson, Associate Superintendent – Centre Area
Gary Little, Associate Superintendent – South Area
Valerie Overgaard, Associate Superintendent – Learning Services
Paul Wlodarczak, Associate Superintendent – Human Resources
Brenda Ng, Secretary-Treasurer
Mark Dale, Director, Facilities
Rick Krowchuk, Director, Finance and Administration
Catherine Remedios, Director of Instruction, Learning Services

District Staff:

Eleanor Cramb, Case Manager
Sylvia Helmer, Manager – District Reception and Placement Centre
Lisa Pedrini, Manager – Social Responsibility
Sara Forsey, Math Consultant
Shelagh Maguire, Early Intervention Consultant
Dan Marriott, Coordinator – Community School Teams
Carol McFarlane, Coordinator – Career Programs
Debra Martel, Administrator – Aboriginal Education

Trustees:

Clarence Hansen, Board Chair
Carol Gibson, Board Vice Chair
Eleanor Gregory
Ken Denike
Shirley Wong

2. Met with representatives of groups including:

Aboriginal Advisory Committee
Adult Learning Staff
Alternate Programs Staff
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC)
Vancouver District Student Council
Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association
Vancouver Learning Network
Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association
Vancouver Teachers' Federation

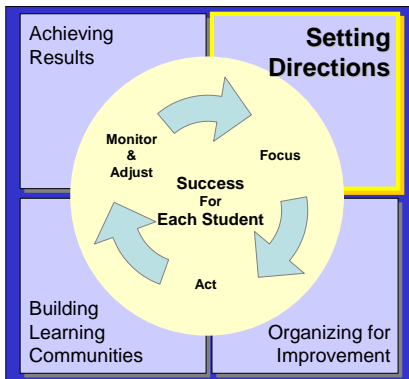
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3. Met with school staff, students and parents at the following schools:

Bayview Community Elementary
Champlain Heights Community Elementary
David Lloyd George Elementary
Dr A R Lord Elementary
General Wolfe Elementary
Graham Bruce Community Elementary
Grandview Elementary
Kerrisdale Elementary
Lord Beaconsfield Elementary
Lord Roberts Elementary
Lord Selkirk Elementary
Lord Strathcona Community Elementary
Queen Elizabeth Elementary
Quilchena Elementary
Shaughnessy Elementary
Simon Fraser Elementary
Sir Wm Van Horne Elementary
Walter Moberly Elementary

Britannia Community Secondary
Gladstone Secondary
John Oliver Secondary
Lord Byng Secondary
Prince of Wales Secondary
Sir Charles Tupper Secondary

Setting Directions:



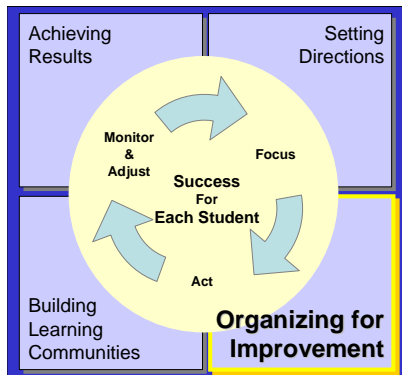
Expectations:

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 bases its work on a collective responsibility to ensure the highest quality of learning experiences for all students with a focus on engagement, learning and development in a safe, inclusive environment. Staff at all levels in the system are committed to and models this core purpose. Care and concern for each student is evident across the district.
 - Social Responsibility has been embedded in the culture of the District and is recognized by all partner groups as an area of strength.
 - The focus on Early Intervention and Literacy shows significant promise in increasing student success over the long term.
 - Numeracy is in the early stages of focus for the District with the recent addition of a numeracy coordinator.
- Many schools are using formative assessment to inform decisions, actions, and planning to support students. Several schools expressed an interest in assessment for learning and action research as a focus for school planning.
 - Some schools track students in grade groups over time to assess the success of interventions.
 - Some schools are evaluating and refining assessment tools.
 - A few schools are working to evaluate progress and the success of interventions within the context of transient and immigrant populations.
 - Some schools feel isolated and would welcome more connection to and direction from the District as they make changes in the interest of improving success for each student.
- The District recognizes:
 - The need to focus on the success of Aboriginal students.
 - The need to create a district-wide picture of student progress in order to make decisions that will support an increasingly diverse student population.

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.

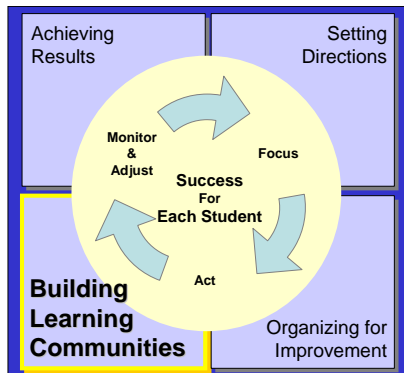
Observations

- Students have many choices in the district.
 - Program options include academics, fine arts, and the trades.
 - Alternative programs serve a broad range of student needs.
 - Adult learners are well supported with a variety of program centers geared to different learning needs.
 - One initiative of particular interest is the Outreach Family Literacy program located in a number of elementary schools.
- There is a strong focus on individual students in schools.
 - Collaborative time is created in some schools to allow teachers to discuss student achievement initiatives.
 - Schools expressed confidence in the quality of the service provided by district special education staff. However, there is some concern regarding the accessibility of some services.
 - Staff at several schools are helping families deal with serious non-educational issues.
- There are strong links with the community, local businesses and the University of British Columbia (UBC) to support student success.
 - Schools work with alumni and businesses, and some schools access grants, to support school initiatives.
 - Some schools have well-established connections to and partnerships with community programs.
 - Settlement workers are helpful in dealing with new students arriving in Canada.
- There are many district initiatives to support learning.
 - The 'Family of Schools' structure supports the unique needs of students within each 'Family'.

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- The focus on Appreciative Inquiry has functioned as a vehicle to build engagement about district strengths and the challenges to be addressed to improve student success for each student.
 - Schools are eager to continue this work and assess the effectiveness of actions undertaken.
- The District is in the process of conducting an Education Facilities Review, which will influence program delivery in the future.
- Coherence and alignment with district directions and expectations were not clearly understood at all levels in the system.

Building Learning Communities:



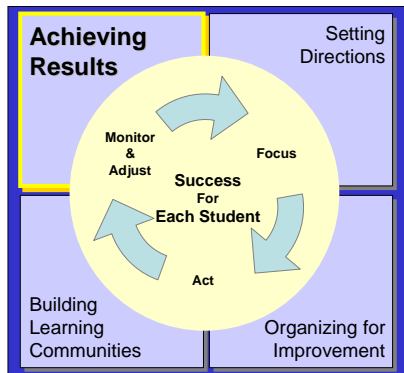
Expectations:

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

- The District is to be commended for work in the last five years to establish and maintain positive working relationships across the system.
 - The District has many advisory and standing committees that include partner groups, parents and students. The work of students at the recent sustainability forum was exemplary.
 - To promote distributed leadership throughout the system the district has developed a leadership program that includes all employee groups
 - Collaboration and distributed leadership are evident throughout the community school teams.
- The District and schools make significant efforts to engage parents.
 - Parents are involved at the PAC and SPC levels in supporting the work being done by the schools.
 - Where school communities have a large population of those who have a first language other than English, PACs are struggling to communicate with and involve parents/families in school life.
- The Aboriginal Learning Inquiry invited the Aboriginal community to participate and collaborate to improve First Nations students' academic success.
 - Efforts to build bridges among First Nations and Aboriginal communities and the district are evidenced by the process used to develop the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.
- Schools have made many valuable connections to their communities. Examples include on-site daycares, community centres, and partnerships with Scouts Canada, Arts Umbrella, sports organizations, and UBC.
 - With the help and support of teachers and parents, some schools are creating dual language books that will help families support learning at home.

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

- From early evidence, Literacy and Early Learning initiatives (such as the Literacy Innovation Project) have had a positive effect on student learning as these initiatives have fostered teacher collaboration and influenced instructional practices in the classroom.
- At several schools, using a variety of evidence, there is significant improvement in student success over time.
 - Several schools are using screening tools to identify vulnerable Kindergarten students in order to plan and implement differentiated instruction.
 - Schools that are monitoring and adjusting their actions to improve student success expressed a need for school-based assessment tools that inform instruction.
- The six-year dogwood completion rate for all students combined has remained consistent over the last five years.
 - The District is concerned about the lack of success of Aboriginal students at all levels.
 - Transitions at all levels have been identified as a challenge for vulnerable students.
- At the district level, the effectiveness of some strategies is difficult to determine due to the lack of common measures using qualitative or quantitative evidence.

Recommendations

The Review Team believes that students in Vancouver will benefit from strategic attention to the areas outlined below. This may require the initiation of new actions or a clearer, deeper focus on initiatives already in place.

Enhancing Student Success

- Establish a consistent way to assess, monitor, and communicate the progress of all students.
 - Use formative and summative assessments combined with professional judgment to establish baselines for each student and school to inform decision-making and actions.
 - Track progress and communicate about progress made.
 - Enhance the use of technology in the collection and interpretation of evidence
- Build collective responsibility for keeping students in the system and enhancing their success.
 - Explore the reasons why students leave the system without completing school.
 - Develop a protocol to track transient students in the district.
- Raise the bar for students who already meet expectations. Support these students to move from meeting to exceeding expectations.
- Improve success for Aboriginal students. (Pre-K to Grade 12)
 - Establish consistent structures for clear communication between everyone responsible for Aboriginal student success.
 - Engage staff, Aboriginal parents and students in the implementation of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.
 - Designate a senior management champion to ensure the implementation of the agreement.
 - Establish clear targets for the goals of the agreement and specific timelines for achievement.
 - Ensure school plans reflect the goals of the agreement.
 - Evaluate services provided to Aboriginal students to ensure effectiveness.
- Improve the success of all vulnerable students.
 - Develop a definition for and a clear picture of vulnerable students in the district and use this information to support schools.
 - Deepen the work with social service agencies and advocate for increased support for vulnerable students and their families.
 - Assist schools in connecting with the parents of vulnerable learners.

Organizing to Support Improvement

- Articulate long-term strategic directions to guide district work to improve student success.
- Establish organizational expectations to:
 - Ensure coherence and alignment of actions and directions focused on success for each student.
 - Support staff at schools in the use of assessment for learning, action research, and differentiated instruction.
 - Ensure sustainability of initiatives.
 - Early Learning, Literacy and Appreciative Inquiry projects are tools for the long-term improvement of student success; however, some schools do not maintain the momentum and focus when projects end.
- Increase the impact of planning processes at the school level:
 - Ensure alignment between intended outcomes and the reality and efficacy of actions undertaken.
- Establish expectations related to monitoring and adjusting plans and actions throughout the year.
- Connect schools as they work to improve student success.
 - Create vertical and horizontal opportunities for dialogue to build collective understanding of strategies that are successful in supporting the diversity of learners within the district.
 - Enhance the Family of Schools structure to support collaboration for teaching and support staff.

Monitoring for Effectiveness

- Evaluate programs and strategies for effectiveness.
 - Share successful strategies and revise those that do not produce the desired results.
 - Review Alternative Programs, including their distribution in the district, their connection to schools and to each other.
 - Review training for support workers in dealing with high-needs students.
 - Monitor the effectiveness of opportunities provided to students enrolled in a variety of programs (e.g., Junior Kindergarten, Mini-schools, etc.).
- Evaluate the current directions for ESL and immigrant students for effectiveness.
 - Consistently share centralized results of assessments on ESL learners with receiving schools.
 - Develop a consistent, well-understood protocol to integrate students who are new to Canada into schools in a way that supports success for the students and minimizes disruption in the schools.

Strengthening Community

- Support DPAC in their efforts to:
 - Reach out to parents (including providing support for translation services when necessary).
 - Develop parent leadership programs.
 - Promote parenting skills courses.
 - Include parents in meaningful collaborative dialogue when planning district directions.

- Explore ways to support and provide training for school staff in dealing with the social-emotional issues at schools.

- Develop strategies to help schools address the concerns of parents from other cultures who may not understand the Canadian education system, the curriculum, or the strategies used to support students.

Conclusion

School District No. 39 (Vancouver) has many excellent programs and initiatives either in place or underway. One of its challenges is to coordinate, connect and sustain these promising projects - to incorporate them into the culture of the district to enhance the success of each student. Similarly, the District needs to be strategic in determining which practices should be school-driven and which should be consistent across the district.

The District is addressing an increasingly diverse and vulnerable student population. It faces complex decisions generated by a shifting population and increasing expectations. The District recognizes that the achievement of Aboriginal students is at an unacceptable level and is near the signing of an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement that addresses this issue.

The Review Team was impressed with the dedication and ownership for student learning demonstrated by all staff of the Vancouver School District. The District has made significant efforts to develop a consultative and collaborative environment. The Review Team is confident that the District has the commitment and capacity to improve student achievement.

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. 39 (Vancouver).

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.