

District Review Report

School District No. 54 (Bulkley Valley)

February 28 - March 2, 2005

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Co-Chairs:

Julie MacRae, Superintendent
School District No. 72 (Campbell River)

Irene Corman, Associate Superintendent
School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)

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| District Name: | Bulkley Valley |
| District Number: | 54 |
| Superintendent: | Gary Graf |
| Date of Visit: | February 28 to March 2, 2005 |
| Team Co-Chairs: | Julie MacRae, Superintendent, SD 72 (Campbell River) and Irene Corman, Associate Superintendent, SD 61 (Greater Victoria) |
| Team Members: | John Chenoweth, Principal, SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) Shari Green, Parent, SD 57 (Prince George) Christina Sinnemann, Manager, Ministry of Education Catherine Solheim, Teacher, SD 78 (Fraser-Cascade) |

Context

School District No. 54 (Bulkley Valley) includes the communities of Houston, Quick, Telkwa, Smithers and the Moricetown Wet'suwet'en Reserve, all along Highway 16. The mixed economy of the region includes farming, forestry, mining, and tourism, with a rich blend of small businesses.

The District serves a student population of 2,700 students in 9 schools: 7 elementary and 2 secondary. Over the last five years, the District has experienced declining enrolment.

The School District currently employs close to 400 people, making it one of the largest employers in the Bulkley Valley. The 2004/05 operating budget is approximately \$21,000,000. There have been significant demographic and socio-economic changes in the District in the past few years with the recent closure of many regional offices of the Provincial Government and shifts in natural resource economies.

Approximately 22% of Bulkley Valley's student population is of Aboriginal ancestry. The District is currently engaged in the development of an Enhancement Agreement with their Aboriginal community. Three percent of their students are enrolled in ESL programs. These students are, for the most part, of East Asian ancestry.

The District strives to provide a balance between programs such as athletics, fine arts, and information technology.

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Summary of Process

The major 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. The specific purposes of the review are to:

- Review school district and school achievement data;
- Review the school district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- Determine the capacity of the school district to support schools in improving student achievement;
- Make recommendations to the school district and to the Minister about improving student achievement; and
- Identify promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools in their plans to improve student achievement.

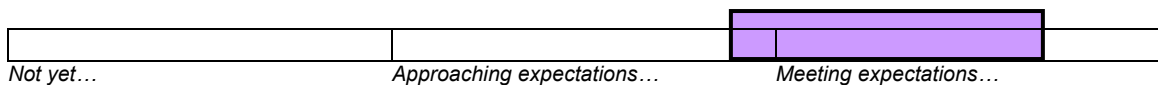
In addressing these objectives, the Review Team reviewed the District's Accountability Contract, the draft Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, Ministry data related to the District, and individual school improvement plans.

At the outset of the Review, the Team met with the District Learning Team that is comprised of representatives from the board, the District staff, school-based administrators, teachers, special education and Aboriginal program support staff and parents. The Team visited all nine schools: in Houston, Twain Sullivan Elementary, Silverthorne Elementary, and Houston Secondary; in Telkwa, Telkwa Elementary; in Quick, Quick Elementary; and in Smithers, Lake Kathlyn Elementary, Walnut Park Elementary, Muheim Elementary and Smithers Secondary including the Bulkley Valley Learning Centre. At each school, the Team met with the School Planning Councils and other community members. The Team also met with the Aboriginal Education Council and with some School Trustees, as well as the president of the Bulkley Valley Teachers' Union.

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.



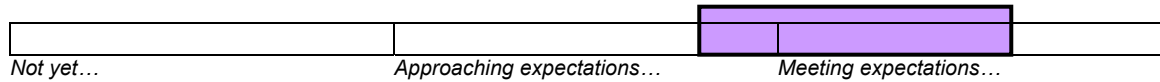
- Most schools and the District have goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely.
- Some goals are not articulated to show a clear relationship to student achievement.
- Some schools have designed objectives to support their goals.
- The team did not observe a consistent standard for goal design across all School Improvement Plans.
- The District Accountability Contract and the Enhancement Agreement focus on Aboriginal student achievement; however, this focus is not clear in some School Improvement Plans.

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2. *Rationale:*

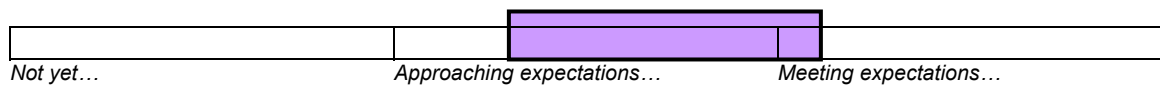
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



- Most schools have data-based evidence for the selection of their goals.
- Most schools express concern for the achievement of Aboriginal students.
- Some of the data sources used for the selection of goals are diagnostic tools rather than measures of performance.

3. *Data:*

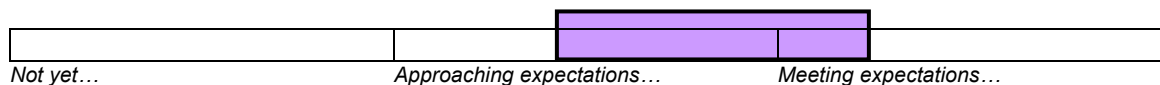
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



- All schools are collecting data. Some schools are using data to inform instruction and planning.
- Most schools are using multiple data sources to direct their goal selection.
- There is a developing awareness that data can be used to inform strategies, structures, and practice, however, no process to roll-up classroom level data to the school level and the district level is evident.
- In some cases goals have not been developed to address student performance data that need improvement.

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.

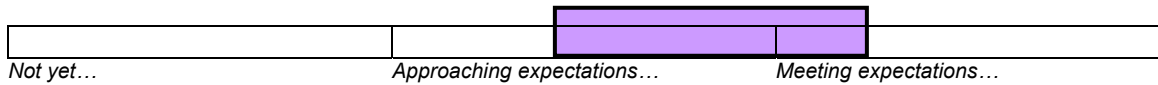


- Some schools adjust instruction as a result of professional development. The District does not yet have a coordinated approach to staff development.
- Some schools are developing strategies that are clearly linked to the results they have achieved.
- Some schools have an understanding of the difference between strategies and structures.
- The District is working towards differentiating resource allocation to enhance the development of strategies in the areas of highest need.

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5. *Structures:*

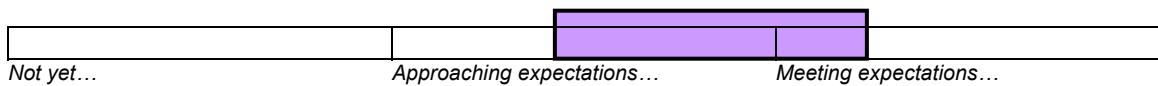
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organization – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



- Some schools have adjusted or created structures in support of their goals.
- Some schools' structures are not clearly linked to the strategies they are intended to support.
- The District is working towards differentiating resource allocation to enhance the development of structures in the areas of highest need.

6. *Results:*

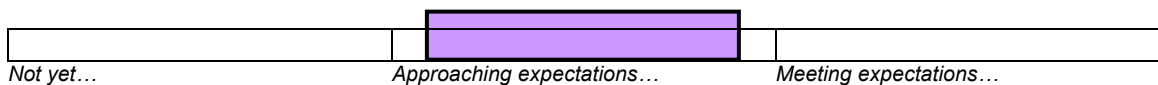
Improving districts and schools monitor and make adjustments to get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



- Most schools are monitoring their results and a number of schools are making adjustments to improve student achievement as a result of their findings.
- Some schools are monitoring participation rates in conjunction with their achievement indicators.
- Some schools are monitoring multiple data sources - classroom, school, district and provincial - to confirm their findings about student achievement.
- The District is developing the capacity to collect, interpret, and respond to multiple data sources.

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.



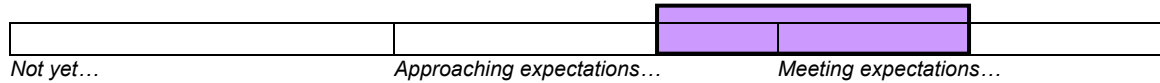
- There is clear evidence that communication within the District has improved.
- Most schools have developed communication channels with their school community.
- Communication and the school planning process will be strengthened with improved two-way communication about student achievement and improvement efforts.

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8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence:*

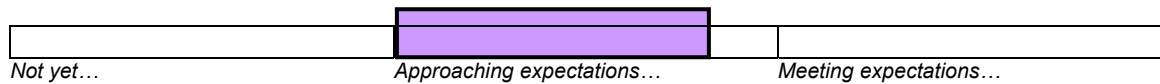
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and district directions are both valued.



- Schools have acknowledged increased collaboration with the current District administration.
- There is an appreciation at the school level of the support provided by the District.
- There is a noticeable appreciation by the District administration of the efforts being made at the school level to improve student achievement for all students.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement:*

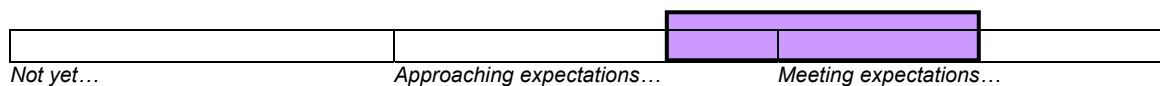
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- The District and schools are making efforts to connect with parents and the larger school community.
- Few parents are aware of the District Focus Groups.
- There is a range in the degree to which parents are involved in the development of School Improvement Plans.

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 creation of the District Learning Team is widely affirmed as a meaningful process for improving student achievement.
- The participation of teachers in the Focus Groups and on the District Learning Team demonstrates shared leadership and a commitment to collaboration.
- Many staff feel that their involvement in leadership is appreciated.

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Strengths

There is a widely expressed appreciation by the school communities of the efforts being made at the school and district levels to improve student achievement for all students.

The Team commends the District for:

- The dedication and caring of staff and community members
- Fostering a professional inquiry approach
- Developing a shared focus on improvement between and among schools
- The willingness to engage in important conversations about student performance
- The movement towards a distributed model of leadership to support the school improvement process
- The relationships and networks being developed across the District that are creating momentum towards improving student achievement

Promising Practices

The team identified the following district and school practices that could be helpful to other districts with a similar focus:

- District Focus Groups for each of the goals in the Accountability Contract
- Healthy School Strategies at Walnut Park
- Radio spots featuring student activities and successes throughout the District
- Whole school guided reading structure (Brownlie, Reading 44), literature circles
- The successes being experienced through the District's Aboriginal program
- School timetables have been restructured and resources provided to allow for leveled guided reading at Quick, Lake Kathlyn and Twain Sullivan
- Networking across schools: network of 2 secondary schools and a network of 3 elementary schools
- Creation of the District Learning Team structure

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Recommendations

The District Review Team respectfully recommends the following:

- Schools would benefit from a district process for reviewing school plans at the draft stage. Some schools need assistance in designing and refining goals and objectives that will guide the improvement of student achievement for all.
- Schools should be encouraged and supported in using assessment data for learning as well as of learning. Elementary schools, in particular, should disaggregate data in order to track and monitor results of specific groups of students.
- District leadership should facilitate, at all levels, a clearer understanding of the difference between strategies and structures and provide assistance to schools in developing the linkages between the two.
- The District should build upon its progress in Aboriginal education by implementing a language and culture program and developing Board Authorized courses that provide additional credit opportunities towards graduation.
- The District should investigate and address the differences in achievement of male and female students.
- The District should broaden the membership of Focus Groups to include students and parents and expand opportunities for meaningful parent and community input to improving student achievement.

Questions for further inquiry:

- How are instructional practices changing as a result of monitoring student achievement?
- Why are there significant variations in participation rates?
- What will happen with district inquiry questions and who will answer them?

The Team would like to express thanks to the Bulkley Valley educational community for their openness and their willingness to engage in the District Review Process.