

District Review Report
School District No. 60 (Peace River North)
February 10 – 14, 2008

Submitted to the Ministry of Education



District Review Report 2008

District:	60 (Peace River North)
Superintendent:	Larry Espe, Superintendent
Date of Visit:	February 10 – 14, 2008
Team Chair:	Bob Peacock, Superintendent, SD 22
Team Members:	Judy Arnold, Director, System Performance, Ministry of Education Ted Cadwallader, District Principal of Aboriginal Education, SD 79 (Cowichan Valley) Daphne Churchill, Principal, SD 62 (Sooke) Dean Goodman, Education Officer, Ministry of Education Lynda Henney, Literacy Support Teacher, SD 22 (Vernon) Stephen McNiven, Principal, SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) Laurey Roodenburg, Parent, SD 28 (Quesnel)

Context

School District No. 60 (Peace River North) is located on the eastern side of the Northern Rockies in the northeast corner of British Columbia at the northern edge of the Canadian prairies. The region is characterized by energy and growth and enjoys a positive economic outlook due to rapid development taking place in the petro-chemical, energy, forestry, and service industries.

The District is experiencing increasing enrolment, which in 2007 is expected to exceed 6,000 students. It has a diverse student population, including Aboriginal (19 percent) as well as European ESL students.

A range of school configurations is used to meet the needs of its various communities. School size ranges from a two-room rural school to a large senior secondary school. The majority of the students and schools are in the City of Fort St. John with other facilities located in surrounding communities such as Hudson's Hope, Taylor, Baldonnel, and Charlie Lake.

The District has a variety of programs, including French Immersion, Distance Education, Career and Apprenticeship, Fine Arts, and Aboriginal Support. The District has a strong focus on ongoing staff development.

In the summer of 2006, the district management team underwent a significant reorganization with new appointments in a number of key positions, including Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, three Directors of Instruction, and several Principals and Vice-Principals.

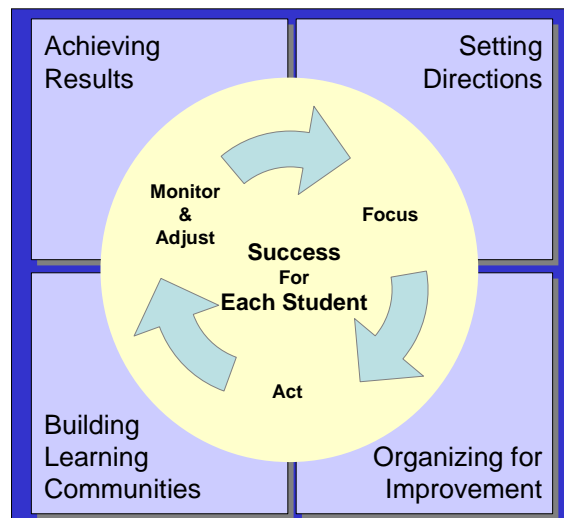
The Purpose of District Review

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 February 10 and 11, 2008.

Present for the meetings were:

Larry Espe, Superintendent
Lesley Lahaye, Assistant Superintendent
Douglas Boyd, Director of Instruction (February 11, 2008)
David Sloan, Director of Instruction
David Vandergugten, Director of Instruction

2. Met with representatives of groups including:

Peace River North Board of Trustees
CUPE
District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) and Parent Advisory Council (PAC)
School Administrators
Northern BC Distance Education
Student Support Services
First Nations Education Centre
Peace River North Teachers' Association

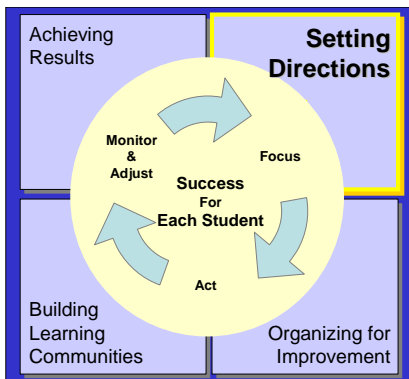
3. Met with school staff, students and parents at the following schools:

Baldonnel Elementary
Bert Ambrose Elementary
Buick Creek Elementary
CM Finch Elementary
Duncan Cran Elementary
Ecolé Central Elementary School of the Arts
Taylor Elementary

Upper Pine Elementary-Junior Secondary
Hudson's Hope Elementary-Secondary
Prespatou Elementary-Secondary

Dr. Kearney Junior Secondary
North Peace 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.

Observations

- The recently appointed district management team is enthusiastic about the work to improve success for each student. The school and staff in the district appreciate their efforts. The team has earned widespread trust amongst all partner groups. Given these factors, it is an opportune time to develop a district-wide, shared vision that everyone will support and follow.
- Teachers, parents and students measure educational success by having students doing their best in school and finding meaningful jobs when they graduate. A shared understanding of what success means for Peace River North will be a part of the vision of the future. The Review Team acknowledges that the District is beginning this process and encourages senior staff to move forward decisively.
- The District has established a mechanism to collect a wide range of evidence, specifically at the primary and elementary levels, largely focused on Literacy. Schools are using this evidence to inform instruction.
- School and district plans contain many objectives that focus on student achievement. However, given the large number of stated objectives, the plans currently do not reflect the focused work that is taking place to improve individual student success.
- The District has established social responsibility as its primary goal, a priority that was supported by all partner groups. From conversations with district and school staff, the goal reflects a commitment to create individualized, caring learning conditions for each child. However, actions and measures outlined in the current Achievement Contract do not adequately convey this commitment.

Recommendations

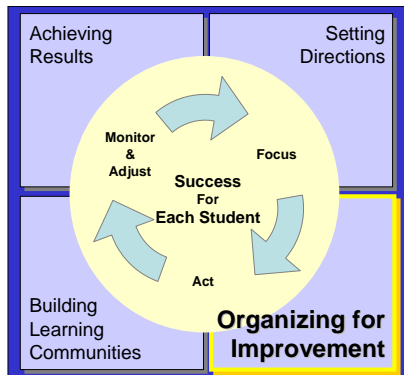
Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Establish a clear and concise vision for the future.
 - Develop processes and procedures to engage staff and partner groups, including parents and the Aboriginal community.
 - Provide opportunities for feedback.
 - Communicate decisions in a timely manner.

- Establish goals and a manageable set of objectives, particularly at the school level.
 - Provide schools the flexibility to develop evidence-based plans focused on the unique needs of the students.

- Use evidence to:
 - Collect data for social responsibility that reflects the true intention of the goal.
 - Establish assessment tools to inform numeracy instruction.
 - Identify the specific needs of vulnerable students and develop clearly articulated strategies for assistance.

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.

Observations

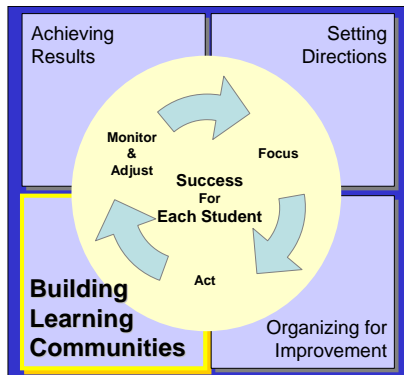
- The District is commended for providing a breadth of academic and career pathways for its students. These opportunities respond to the need for a viable and skilled workforce for the local community and beyond.
- Administrators and teachers expressed appreciation for the support provided to staff at schools. This includes coaching, demonstration lessons, in-service, collaboration grants, and itinerant support staff.
- The District has implemented several promising programs to increase student success in the early years and at the secondary level. The District looks for innovative ways to address the needs of each student.
- The First Nations Education Centre has processes and procedures to track and support each Aboriginal student. Successful initiatives include counseling programs, school-within-a-school programs, and healing circles. However, the alignment and integration of these initiatives within the district is unclear.
 - The report prepared and provided by the First Nations Education Centre is exemplary.
- The Review Team acknowledges the ongoing challenge of teacher turnover and the high quality of assistance provided by the District to address this challenge, including recruiting, mentoring, coaching, and the Alaska Highway Consortium on Teacher Education (AHCOTE).
- Distance Education provides customized programming for students, Kindergarten to returning adult learners. The initiative includes partnerships with local teachers to provide lessons in real time with on-line learners. This multi-media approach creates opportunities to meet the needs of learners asynchronously.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Expect everyone at all levels to champion the success of Aboriginal students.
 - Integrate service and support for all Aboriginal students.
 - Explore ways to support the most vulnerable students and keep them connected to the local school community.
- Evaluate programs and initiatives for effectiveness in improving the success for all students.
 - Clarify the purpose and scope of programs.
 - Identify appropriate measures for evaluating a program's impact on student success.
 - Eliminate programs that do not lead to improved student success.
 - Provide schools with flexibility to meet student needs with programs that are current and reflect best practice.
- Reduce the number of initiatives in the district to those that are most important in the effort to improve student success. Focusing on Assessment for Learning is one example.
- As the new direction in the district evolves, examine the research on best practices related to reconfiguration and student transitions.
- Implement strategies to support vulnerable students in Grades 4 to 7.
 - Interventions for keeping students engaged in school need to happen early when students show signs of not managing themselves in healthy and productive ways.
- Ensure transparency and collaboration in decision-making with regard to resource allocations for supporting vulnerable students.

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.

Observations

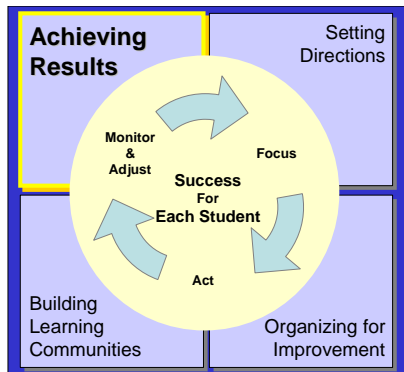
- People in this district are proud of the work that is being done to support student learning.
- Some partner groups noted improved relationships in the district with the new management team, but commented on the need for continued growth in this area.
- Parents, partner groups, and staff at all levels are eager to move forward in the effort to improve success for each student. Ongoing, interactive dialogue and communication will ensure that priorities and directions are understood and supported.
- Strong partnerships exist with businesses, industry, the municipality and other educational organizations. These partnerships are very positive for students and the community.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Include parental voices at the district level as fully engaged partners.
 - Invite parents to sit on district committees and to be a part of future direction setting.
 - Reach out to engage Aboriginal parents.
- Expect parents and principals to work together in meaningful ways in the interest of student success.
 - Provide training to support both groups (e.g., School Planning Council training).
- Work with teachers in the decision-making process regarding the implementation of resources and district initiatives.
- Lead the dialogue to address the challenging issues around success for Aboriginal students.
 - Educate students, parents, and staff about the value of making healthy choices before the students transition out of elementary schools.
- Build on the positive relationships with industry to provide opportunities at the junior secondary level and to help keep more students involved in their education.
- Celebrate student successes as defined by the District.

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.

Observations

- The District is proud of the success of students in career preparation and apprenticeship programs. The District reports that 90 Aboriginal students are involved in these programs.
- Several schools show significant improvement for students using the Developmental Reading Assessment, PM Benchmarks Performance Standards, and Reading Recovery. A Kindergarten screen identifies vulnerable primary students. There is a sense of optimism for the more than 200 children registered in the Strong Start program.
- Schools are at different stages in their use of Assessment for Learning. Some schools have developed individual student and class profiles to help them look at progress for each student and plan for instruction.
- To meet the needs of their students, many schools are monitoring and adjusting their strategies. For schools collecting and tracking relevant evidence, the Review Team observed a more focused approach in achieving improved results.
- The disaggregation of evidence for specific groups of students at the school level was not consistently used to monitor progress and adjust instructional strategies.
- Although above the provincial average, the annual completion rates for Aboriginal students vary significantly and require investigation. The extensive information and evidence provided by the Aboriginal program may provide insight into this issue.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Improve success for all students with a focus on:
 - Transitions and completion rates for Aboriginal students.
 - Transitions for students, especially at Grades 8 and 9.
 - Students between Grades 4 and 7.
 - ESL students.

District Review Report 2008

- Build capacity at all levels to use Assessment for Learning.
 - Evaluate assessment tools to ensure they are providing the information needed to monitor strategies that improve student success.
- Sign and implement the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (EA). Ensure that the EA goals are embedded in the school plans and the District Achievement Contract.

Conclusion

The District and its schools are focused on the success of students as individuals. Innovation is a prominent feature of this District. The District looks for innovative solutions to challenges dictated by their geographic location and demographics. The new leadership team has a window of opportunity to develop a system-wide vision and strategic plan to guide the District into the future. 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. 60 (Peace River North).

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.