

District Review Report
School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith)

May 11 –14, 2008

Submitted to the Ministry of Education



District Review Report 2008

District: 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith)

Superintendent: Michael Munro, Superintendent

Date of Visit: May 11 – 14, 2008

Team Chair: Terrence (Terry) Sullivan, Superintendent, SD 73
(Kamloops/Thompson)

Team Members: Judy Arnold, Director, System Performance, Ministry of Education
Elisa Carlson, Principal, SD 36 (Surrey)
Opal Charters, District Principal, First Nations Education, SD 58
(Nicola-Similkameen)
Stan Corfe, Parent, SD 35 (Langley)
Krista Horn, Teacher, SD 06 (Rocky Mountain)
Claudio Morelli, Assistant Superintendent, SD 41 (Burnaby)
Glenn Rowan, Coordinator, System Performance, Ministry of
Education
Dave Thomson, Principal, SD 61 (Victoria)

Context

Located on the east coast of Vancouver Island, School District 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith), serves approximately 14,900 students. A number of economic and social issues face the District. The District's enrolment has declined by almost 1,500 students in the last five years, a decrease of about 10 percent. There are over 2,100 Aboriginal students in the district this year.

The District operates 33 elementary, 7 secondary, 2 alternate secondary schools, and a career technical center. Additionally, the District offers three distributed learning programs: Learn@Home K-7, Learn@Home 8-12, and Aurora. Class sizes in the district are essentially the same as provincial averages. A range of educational opportunities, services and programs are offered to students.

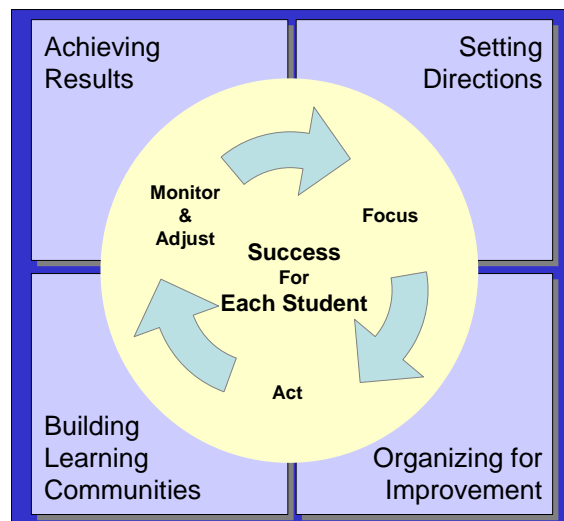
The Purpose of District Review

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 Management on May 11, 2008, and throughout the visit.

Present for the meetings were:

Mike Munro, Superintendent
Dave Mumford, Assistant Superintendent - School Operations
John Phipps, Assistant Superintendent - Educational Programs
David Green, Secretary-Treasurer
Stella Bates, District Principal - Aboriginal Education
Bob Eslinger, District Principal

2. Met with the Board of Education on Sunday, May 11, 2008. Present for the meetings were:

Jamie Brennan (Board Chair)
Ron Dale (Human Resources Committee Chair)
June Harrison (BCSTA Provincial Representative-Alternate)
Andrea Bonkowski
Terry Lynn Saunders
Tony Hennig

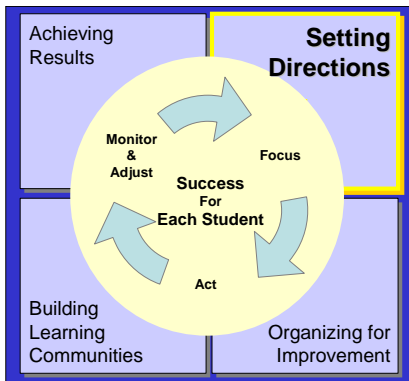
3. Met with representatives of groups including:

Senior Management Staff
Principals' and Vice Principals' Association
Board of Education
District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC)
Nanaimo District Teachers Association
Aboriginal Advisory Committee
Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 606
District Administration Services Group (DASG)

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

Coal Tye Elementary	North Cedar Intermediate
Davis Road Elementary	Ladysmith Secondary
Fairview Elementary	Wellington Secondary
Forest Park Elementary	
Hammond Bay Elementary	John Barsby Community School
North Oyster Elementary	
Park Avenue Elementary	5 Acres Alternate (Learning Alternatives group)
Pleasant Valley Elementary	Learn@Home 8-12 (Learning Alternatives group)
Quarterway Elementary	
Seaview Elementary	

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

- Staff district-wide expressed appreciation for the work of the district team in building relationships. At all levels, staff expressed the desire to have the senior staff more regularly connected with schools to support the work to improve student success.
- The District is committed to a focus on collaborative change in order to support improved success for each student in the district.
- Staff throughout the district displayed passion and professional commitment to improving success for each student.
 - Assessment for learning was noted in several schools and some were tracking individual student progress over time.
 - At some schools, there was clear direction, excellent planning and the use of a variety of evidence to monitor student improvement.
- Planning does not consistently function as a road map to guide efforts to improve success for all students. Some staff members commented on the need to establish clear directions for the future and a well understood decision-making process to guide planning and actions to support student success.
- It is unclear what evidence is used to determine priorities for Aboriginal students.

Recommendations

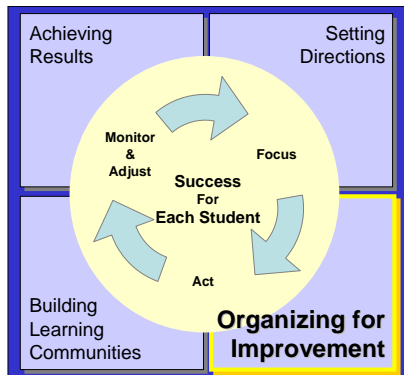
Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Develop a coherent district plan that will support alignment between schools and the District and support student success. Coordinate actions with priorities and goals set through the review of a variety of evidence, and communicate the plan district-wide to all partner groups.

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- Define success for students in Nanaimo-Ladysmith and:
 - Include a variety of achievement indicators for vulnerable to strong students.
 - Use formative and summative evidence as well as professional judgment to create a performance profile of students in the district.
 - Develop ways to track student progress over time, beginning with early learners.
- Ensure all planning documents guide directions for improving student success.
 - Consider expanding the inquiry model as a vehicle for school planning.
 - Use best practice and current research to inform planning processes.
 - Engage staff, students, parents, SPCs and the community in the support of school and district plans.
 - Establish an interactive process led by district staff to approve and monitor the effectiveness of planning documents in guiding improved success for students.
- Provide district-level training on the school improvement planning processes to ensure the meaningful participation of all partner groups.
- Use school and district evidence to identify vulnerable early learners, inform interventions and track progress.
- Embed the goals of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement in all school plans to support improved success of all Aboriginal students.

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

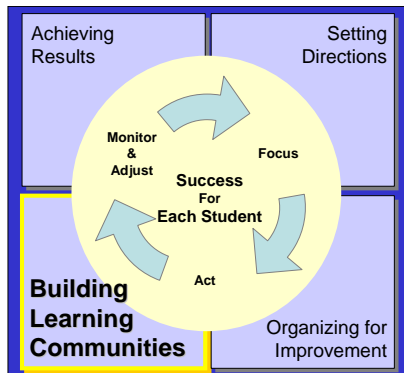
- The Review Team observed promising organizational practices and programs in the District.
 - Nineteen schools are participating in the network of performance-based schools, or working on action research projects.
 - Several schools are tracking individual students and implementing interventions to support improved learning.
 - Many principals are supporting teachers by providing collaboration time to focus on practices related to improving student success.
 - The evolving structure of the Learning Alternative Program is innovative and shows promise in reconnecting students with schools.
- A number of positive comments were made throughout the Review including:
 - Appreciative remarks regarding the work of the Literacy facilitators and lead Literacy teachers to enhance collaboration and focus practices on student success. Positive results from their work were discussed at several schools. Staff expressed a desire for the continuation of the programs at each school.
 - Staff comments on the two Strong Start centers in the district and their impact on students, families and schools.
- There appears to be an organizational barrier to district-level contact and interaction with schools regarding focused efforts to improve student success. Principals expressed the need to collaborate more consistently with district staff to align purpose and practice.
- The Review Team heard requests from principals and staff for genuine input into district level decision-making related to:
 - Allocation of staffing and resources to schools.
 - Technological support.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Develop a coherent strategy for intervention and support of early learners.
- Establish a pyramid of intervention, at the district level, that is well understood by all schools. This will clarify how the Alternate Program fits into the expanding number of choices and opportunities for students in the district.
- Develop a relevant, effective system capable of tracking the performance of each student.
- Examine current structures, strategies and supports for effectiveness in realizing improved success for students and:
 - Review special education delivery models and the use of IEPs.
 - Examine the efficacy of ability groupings in schools.
 - Use assessment for learning and differentiated instruction to support students.
 - Continue to provide district-wide in-service opportunities for staff in dealing with and supporting students with behavioural issues.
 - Strengthen connections with social services agencies to support vulnerable students.
- Collaboratively establish expectations and protocols to support student transitions:
 - Into school.
 - Between schools.
 - From elementary to secondary school.
 - To post-secondary opportunities.
- Further engage principals in setting priorities, organizing for improvement and monitoring results.

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

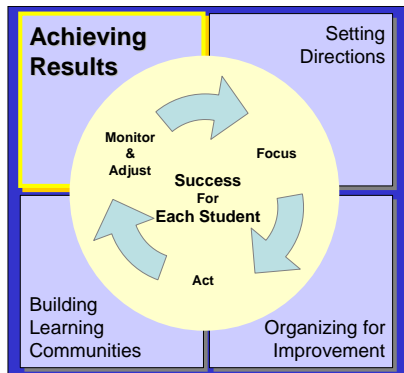
- The Review Team heard, throughout the district, supportive comments regarding the work of Senior Management. There was the clear perception that senior district managers have worked to build relationships and provide stability over the last few years.
- Several capacity building systems are in place in the district including:
 - Teacher coordinators and lead teachers modeling best practices supported by principals and classroom teachers.
 - Examples of inclusive learning communities that involve administration, staff, students and parents.
 - A growing understanding of Professional Learning Communities.
- Parents and PACs are supportive of and involved in schools in a variety of ways to assist students. Some are involved in making decisions to support student learning. An exemplar of coordinated elementary, intermediate, and secondary PAC planning and partnership was noted.
- Parents, teachers, school administrators, support staff and students across the district voiced concerns about annual staff changes and the impact on distributed leadership, educational continuity and student success.
- Collaboration regarding student achievement is taking place within all groups across the system. However, much of that collaboration is taking place in isolation, at schools, or in various groups.
- School communities appear to have little knowledge of, or expectations related to, the important role the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement has regarding relationships with the Aboriginal community.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Establish structures that encourage collaboration and dialogue in the interest of improving success for each student.
 - Support schools ready to work collaboratively or as learning communities.
 - Create structures that facilitate school-to-school, district-to-school and school-to-district connections, interactions and the sharing of successful practices.
 - Clarify processes for gathering input from and consulting with partner groups.
- Build leadership capacity, at all levels and in all roles, to support student success by:
 - Creating networks to support principals as leaders of learning, especially those new to the position.
 - Supporting teachers as leaders.
 - Enhancing parent involvement in district decisions.
- Introduce formal structures to ensure that there is more meaningful and consistent parent involvement, at the school and district level, in planning and implementation of actions to support student success.
- Sustain relationships and continue conversations with district and aboriginal community leaders to further enhance Aboriginal student success and engagement.

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

- There are an increasing number of Aboriginal students receiving Dogwood Completion certificates. The work of the Aboriginal staff to support student learning is highly valued by teachers and district staff.
- Some students are successfully transitioning to work in trades after Grades 10 or 11.
- A variety of assessment tools are used in schools to measure progress and inform instruction.
- Some schools are using assessment for learning, monitoring progress of strategies and interventions, and adjusting programs.
- The Learning Alternative Program is tracking students that do not complete Grade 12 in order to reconnect them with a variety of educational opportunities. This practice has led to high retention and completion rates in the senior Alternate Program.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on work begun to:

- Use disaggregated data to monitor and track incremental achievement gains.
 - Adjust learning strategies as required: based on evidence.
- Continue to improve success for Aboriginal students.
 - Build support from parents and schools.
 - Track these students as they move through the system.
- Identify and support vulnerable or at-risk learners as early as possible.
 - Implement early intervention strategies district-wide.

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- Use Social Responsibility as a foundation to focus on academic achievement.
- Challenge all students to achieve their personal best.
- Develop and implement a method to monitor the progress of all students.

Conclusion

The Review Team observed significant commitment from all stakeholders to students in the district. Throughout the visit, it was evident that the District is working to provide quality educational experiences. The Team also recognized a number of district strengths including, but not limited to, a professional, committed and passionate staff. Additionally, lead teachers and coordinators are empowered to disseminate knowledge and best practice district-wide. Finally, the growing use of Assessment for Learning and cohort tracking as district norms are beginning to entrench themselves in the culture of the district.

To effectively move forward and achieve even more success, the District needs to focus on the future and implement a set of coordinated, sustainable directions and actions focusing on each student's success. Planning documents must serve as collaboratively developed, consistently monitored and adjusted road maps: reliably implementing best practices to address student needs and support improved learning.

With the development of a strong district vision and the alignment of programs and resources, the Review Team is confident that the District has the commitment and capacity to implement the recommendations in this report and improve success for each student.

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. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith).

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.