

District Review Report

School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith)

Date, March 7 - 9, 2005

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Laureen Doerksen, Superintendent, School District No. 43 (Coquitlam)

**District Review Report
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District Name:	Nanaimo-Ladysmith
District Number:	68
Superintendent:	Rick Borelli
Date of Visit:	March 7-9, 2005
Team Chair:	Laureen Doerksen, Superintendent, SD 43 (Coquitlam)
Team Members:	Melisse Adams, District Principal, SD 44 (North Vancouver) Barbara (Sue) Chambers, Teacher, SD 6 (Rocky Mountain) Ray Comeau, Principal, SD 43 (Coquitlam) Dave Derpak, Principal, SD 39 (Vancouver) Bela Kovach, Teacher, SD 36 (Surrey) Cheryl McCann, Parent, SD 5 (Southeast Kootenay) Claudio Morelli, Assistant Superintendent, SD 22 (Vernon) Heather Morin, Education Officer, Ministry of Education Claudia Roch, Lead Director, Ministry of Education David Witt, Director of Instruction, SD 83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap)

Context

School District No. 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) is located on the east coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. At September 30, 2004 there were 15,854 students in the district. The District has 33 elementary schools, 7 secondary schools, 4 secondary alternate schools, and a Career Technical Centre.

The District describes its culture as one that reflects:

- A belief in a balanced curriculum and the whole learner
- A commitment to authentic assessment of students
- A recognition of the need for social equity programs
- A tradition of collaboration and consultation
- Strong support for public education
- A recent history of district-wide data collection

The vast majority of students in School District No. 68 achieve success in school; however a significant number of students face challenges that affect their readiness and ability to learn. The District faces the multiple challenges of a student body with a high transience rate, high poverty levels and declining enrollment.

The 2004/05 District Performance Plan articulates goals for writing, reading, numeracy and social responsibility. The District Plan sets targets to enhance the performance of all students in these areas. In addition, the District Plan identifies performance targets for Aboriginal students and students in Inner City schools who have traditionally been less successful in their studies.

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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 school district and school achievement data;
- Reviewing the School District Performance Plan, Aboriginal Education Improvement Agreement and School Plans to improve student achievement;
- Determining the capacity of the School District to support schools in improving student achievement;
- Making recommendations to the School District and to the Minister of Education about improving student achievement;
- Identifying promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools in their plans to improve student achievement.

At the outset of the review, the Team participated in a meeting attended by representatives of senior district staff, the Board of Trustees, district support staff, the District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), Aboriginal communities, principals, teachers and support staff. At the introductory session, district staff provided an overview of the District Performance Plan and described key district and school efforts to promote student achievement. Three members of the Review Team also attended meetings with representatives of the Aboriginal communities and DPAC.

The Team reviewed School Plans and the 10 Points of Inquiry at 4 secondary schools, 19 elementary schools and the Learn @ Home program. These schools included Bayview, Brechin, Cilaire, Coal Tyee, Davis Road, Forest Park, Frank J. Ney, Ladysmith Primary, Learn @ Home, McGirr, Mountain View, North Cedar Intermediate, Pauline Haarer, Park Avenue, Randerson Ridge, Rock City, Rutherford, Seaview, South Wellington, and Uplands Park as well as Cedar Secondary, John Barsby Secondary, Nanaimo District Secondary and Wellington Secondary schools.

At the conclusion of the review, the Team met with district staff, board and other representatives to present the draft review report.

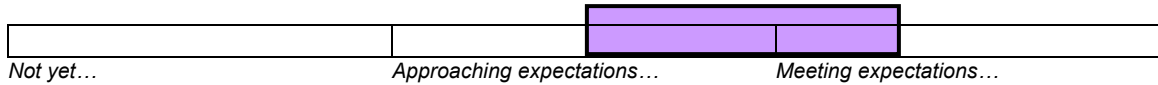
The Team wishes to acknowledge the School District for the genuine welcome at the district office and in schools. The Team appreciated the active engagement of and open dialogue with the school community throughout the review.

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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.



- The District goals reflect the priorities of schools and are focused on improving student achievement.
- Schools have at least one of the district goals as part of their school plans.
- Some schools have included unique goals that support their school needs.
- Some schools are including specific objectives in their school plans.

2. Rationale:

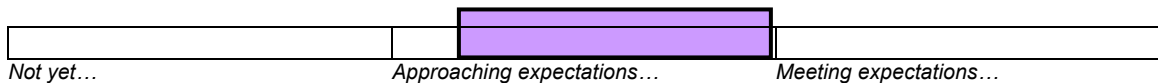
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



- The District and schools are beginning to make connections between goals and multiple sources of evidence.
- The evidence supports the district priority to enhance the success of Aboriginal students and students attending inner city schools.
- Schools vary in the degree to which improvement plans are based on achievement data.

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.



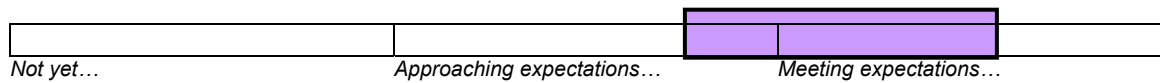
- The District has been proactive in systematically introducing a new literacy assessment tool (DART) to inform instruction and provide key data in future years.
- The District is developing a tracking system for coordinated data management.
- The growing use of British Columbia Performance Standards is evident throughout the district.
- Schools are in varying stages of utilizing multiple assessment tools to set goals and establish meaningful baseline data.
- A few schools are in the initial stages of analyzing and interpreting school data, monitoring results, and making adjustments to improve student achievement.
- It was not evident that schools are disaggregating data for Aboriginal students.

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4. *Strategies:*

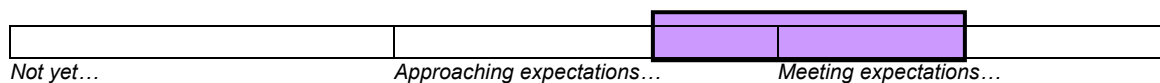
Improving districts and schools have focused, well organized improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



- There is district-school coherence in strategies adopted.
- The District provides focused program supports that reflect best practice.
- District strategies are well informed by research.
- School plans reflect well-organized, practical, research based strategies.
- Some schools are beginning to articulate the link between goals, strategies, and desired results.

5. *Structures:*

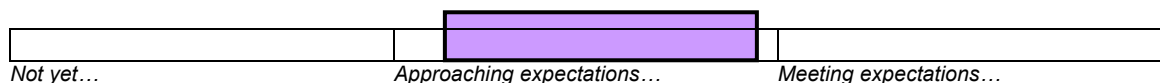
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organization – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



- The District has effectively aligned structures with student achievement goals.
- The District provides differentiated support to the most vulnerable schools.
- The District has a comprehensive Aboriginal Education Improvement Agreement and takes a proactive approach to fostering a positive relationship with the Aboriginal communities in support of student achievement.
- The District values and benefits from partnerships with other school districts, community organizations and post secondary institutions.
- It is evident that the school community values a number of key structures, including District Resource Teachers, Literacy Lead teachers, training, funding allocation to schools and resource bins.
- Some schools have made structural changes (time, resources, personnel) to support the implementation of their goals.

6. *Results:*

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



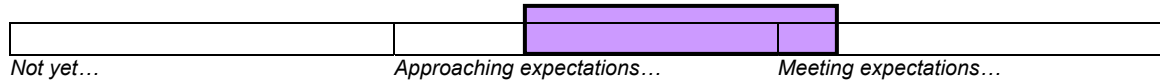
- The District is using a thoughtful approach in piloting action research projects.
- The District is beginning to implement a tracking system to monitor results.
- Some schools are in the process of identifying performance targets.
- Some schools are using classroom based assessment tools to both monitor results and inform instruction.

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7. *Communication:*

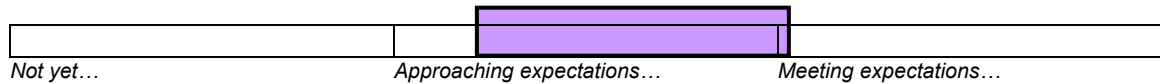
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



- There is considerable evidence of focused dialogue about student achievement among schools and district staff.
- Parents on School Planning Councils are well informed and engaged in the dialogue on student achievement.
- Schools have welcoming environments which foster communication.
- There are multiple means employed to communicate with parents about school activities.
- A number of schools described the need to encourage two-way communication with all parents about student achievement.
- In some schools students are an integral part of the achievement dialogue.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence:*

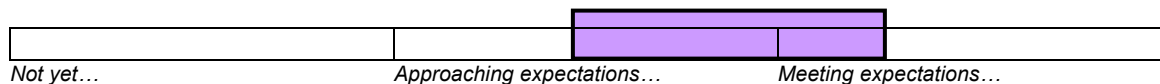
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and district directions are both valued.



- The District goals and resource allocations reflect the priorities of the schools and are focused on improving student learning.
- Some schools express appreciation for the depth of district support as they address their goals.
- Parent groups and the broader school community have limited knowledge of district goals and plans for improving student achievement.
- Opportunities exist to improve interschool connectedness.

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.



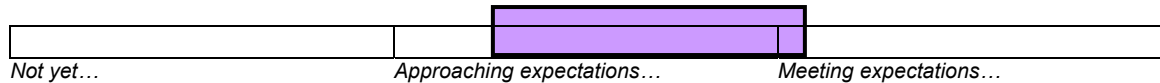
- Some parents in most schools are involved in setting goals to improve student achievement.
- The District has provided valued support and training for School Planning Councils.
- There are varying degrees of parent involvement in schools with some notable examples of parent leadership in support of student achievement.
- A few schools have developed innovative strategies for engaging Aboriginal parents.

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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 Board of School Trustees and senior district staff have a clearly articulated vision and a demonstrated commitment to student achievement.
- The Goal Area Leadership Teams foster support for school and district goals.
- Strong principal leadership has facilitated a variety of processes that have moved schools forward in developing plans to improve student achievement.
- The District Educational Leadership Team is working collaboratively to develop an integrated approach to support student achievement.
- Despite barriers to collaboration, informal teacher leadership and teamwork are demonstrated throughout the school community.

Strengths

The team made the following observations of particular strengths related to student achievement:

- Strong district leadership
- Strong principal leadership
- District resource personnel
- District support for literacy leaders
- Large pool of talented, experienced and dedicated employees
- The alignment of resources with goals
- Supportive parents
- Action research
- District support for Aboriginal students
- Development of a district literacy assessment tool and data tracking program
- Partnerships beyond the district
- Many exemplary strategies being used in schools

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Promising Practices

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

- Literacy lead teacher model
- Practices to provide intensive reading intervention
- Training for parents to become involved in guided reading programs
- Collaborative structure for allocation of resources for educational planning and resources with the Aboriginal communities
- Organization of school time to support goal areas.
- Literacy, Numeracy and Social Responsibility Resource Bins
- Rec' N Reading summer program
- Links between SFU, Malaspina and student teachers
- Neighborhood Heroes – media profiles of community 'heroes'

Recommendations

The review team respectfully offers the following recommendations:

- Consider embedding the 10 Points of Inquiry into district and school improvement planning processes.
- Continue to thoughtfully and systematically use multiple sources of data to establish baseline information, and set goals, objectives and performance targets.
- Encourage schools to disaggregate data in order to set specific objectives for the performance of Aboriginal students and students of Inner City schools.
- Assist schools in refining the use of assessment tools and techniques that will inform instruction.
- Encourage and support greater networking and sharing of best practice among schools.
- Continue to develop collaborative relationships that will broadly engage all partner groups as active participants in processes supporting the improvement of student achievement.

The District Review Team observed many examples of collaboration in schools. We believe, however, that school improvement efforts in School District No. 68 would be enhanced by the involvement of teachers on School Planning Councils.