

District Review Report

School District No. 71 (Comox Valley)

February 21 - 23, 2005

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Dr. Ron Rubadeau, Superintendent,
School District No. 23 (Central Okanagan)

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District Name:	Comox Valley
District Number:	71
Superintendent:	Dan Russell
Date of Visit:	February 21 – 23, 2005
Team Chair:	Dr. Ron Rubadeau, Superintendent, SD 23 (Central Okanagan)
Team Members:	Rod Allen, Assistant Superintendent, SD 54 (Bulkley Valley) Claude Hrycaiko, Parent, SD 43 (Coquitlam) Marion Hunter, Principal SD 8 (Kootenay Lake) Karen Larsen, Teacher, SD 35 (Langley) Gerald Morton, Manager, Ministry of Education Bev Rundell, Principal, SD 45 (West Vancouver)

Context

School District No. 71 is located in the Comox Valley, with three main centers: Courtenay, Comox, and Cumberland. Approximately 40% of the population is rural, and approximately 10% of the population is of Aboriginal descent. Ninety-one percent of the population reports English as their mother tongue. The area has a higher than average percent of the population involved in resource industries.

Current enrollment (9,656 students) is decreasing and is expected to continue to decline for a number of years. However, there has been an increase in distance education students.

Two years ago, a task force examined enrollment trends in the District and made a number of recommendations. As a result, one school was closed. The District is now embarking on a comprehensive look at how the schools are configured (elementary, middle, and secondary) to ensure the system will serve the educational needs of students into the future.

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;

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- 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 examined the District's Accountability Contract, Ministry data related to the District, and individual school growth plans.

On Sunday evening, the Team enjoyed an informal meeting with district staff and the school board chairperson. At the Monday morning introductory session, the Review Team met with senior district staff, board representatives, district support staff, District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) representatives, school administrators, and teachers. The Review Team was provided with an overview of School District No. 71 Directions, the main goal of the District Accountability Contract, and highlights of a number of district/school programs and initiatives.

Further to this presentation, the Team reviewed school plans and had the opportunity for focused dialogue at a number of schools and programs, including:

Airport Elementary
Cape Lazo Middle
City Center Alternate
Courtenay Elementary
Courtenay Middle
Cumberland Junior
Denman Island Elementary
G. P. Vanier Secondary
Highland Secondary
Lake Trail Middle
Mark R. Isfeld Secondary
Miracle Beach Elementary
Nala'asti Alternate
North Island Distance Education Service
Puntledge Park Elementary
Royston Elementary
Sandwick Alternate
Tsolum Elementary
Valleyview Elementary
Village Park Elementary

Additionally, the Team met with the District Parent Council, the Aboriginal Education Council, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Comox Valley Teachers' Association and the Board of Trustees.

At the conclusion of the review, the Team provided a verbal report on their observations to district staff, the Board, principals, partner group representatives, and parents.

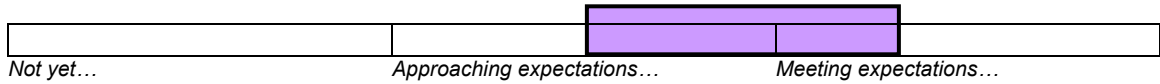
The Team appreciated the candor, honesty, and hospitality provided to each member of the team. Most importantly, the Team appreciated the strong interest observed in all members of the school community to find ways in which achievement could be improved for all students.

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Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. Goals:

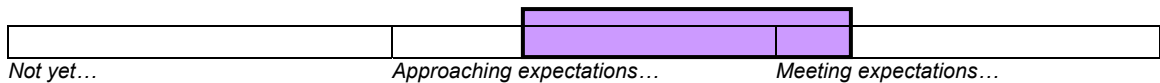
Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



- All schools had at least one goal based on student achievement.
- Most schools had all of their goals based on student achievement.
- The district goal assumes that all school goals have a strong instructional focus, are well grounded in data, and have exceptional objectives and strategies; such was not the case in all schools.

2. Rationale:

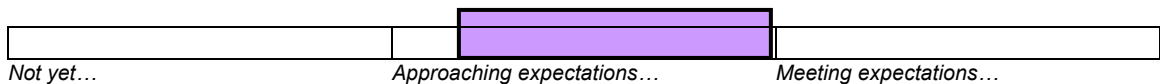
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



- Most schools are in the process of developing rationale based on evidence from multiple sources of data.
- Some schools have done an outstanding job of linking goals and evidence.

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.

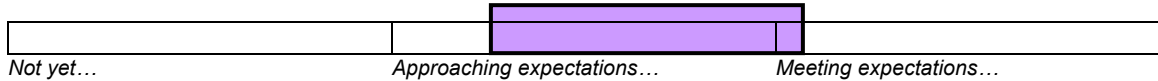


- The District and most schools provide evidence of data collection.
- Some schools utilize multiple sources of data to monitor progress towards performance targets.
- There is evidence of analysis, interpretation and reporting of data.
- The process of disaggregating of data is at the formative stage in most schools.

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4. Strategies:

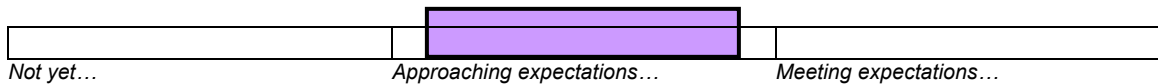
Improving districts and schools have focused, well organized improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



- Most schools have strategies in place to accomplish school goals.
- While the district goal is innovative, it is imperative to connect school and district goals.

5. Structures:

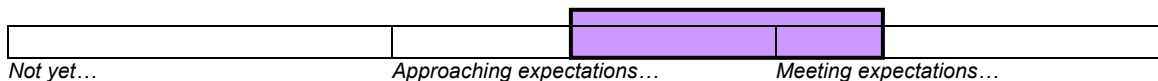
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organization – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



- The District is beginning to allocate resources to support school level goals.
- A few schools have made structural changes to school organization in support of strategies that are well connected to goals.

6. Results:

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



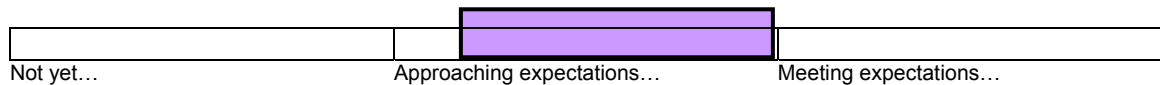
- The District has an Enhancement Agreement in place.
- Many schools are developing processes for monitoring results.
- Some schools are using assessment for, of, and as learning.
- Some schools in the district are not yet making important student achievement decisions based on the analysis of results.

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7. *Communication:*

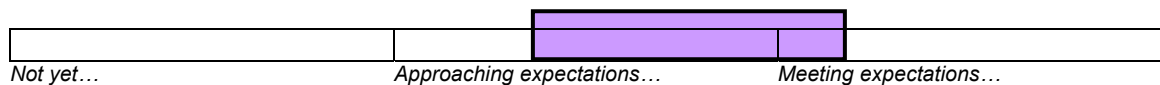
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



- All schools use newsletters, Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings, and informal conversations for sustaining student achievement results.
- Some schools are effectively communicating progress toward goal attainment.
- The District highlights school plans at each education committee meeting.
- The superintendent comments on school/district goals in each newsletter.
- Some schools are effectively using electronic communication to provide information on student achievement.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence:*

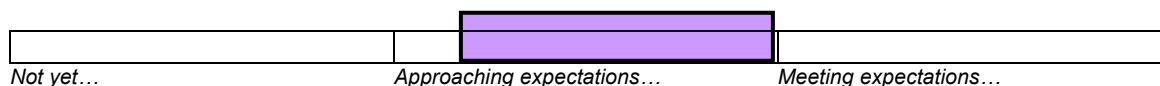
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and district directions are both valued.



- The District student achievement goal uses an innovative approach.
- School Planning Councils (SPCs) are actively involved in developing school goals.
- Most PACs are knowledgeable of school goals and are asked for input.
- The District goal honours the work of individual schools.
- Every school has at least one goal that links to one of the district objectives.

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.



- In most schools parents are engaged in the development and monitoring of school plans.
- Aboriginal parents are well-connected through the Aboriginal Education Council.
- The DPAC expresses concern that their opinions are not considered.

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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.



- In some schools, there is significant evidence of collaborative leadership.
- Some schools are providing outstanding opportunities for teachers, parents, and administrators to work together in an effort to improve student achievement.
- The Aboriginal Education Council is actively working towards improving student achievement.

Strengths

The Team made the following observations of particular strengths related to student achievement at specific schools:

- District is committed to improving Aboriginal student performance.
- District and school-based administrators, teachers, support staff, and parents have high expectations for student performance.
- Schools are proud of student achievement from K – 12.
- Individual schools take into consideration students' achievement after students exit those schools.
- Innovative teaching practice is supported.
- The District is committed to improving teaching and learning.
- The District provides outstanding fine arts, performing arts, and sports opportunities to students.
- The District has excellent teaching, support, as well as school and district administrative staff.
- The District is committed to the concept of data-driven decision-making.

Promising Practices

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

- The development of pods, which include feeder schools and their middle school, to track data and cooperatively plan strategies.
- The Aboriginal alternate education program.
- Single-gender academic classes.
- "Writers in Exodus" program.
- Liberal Arts and Marine Sciences locally-developed courses which provide enrichment opportunities for students.

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Recommendations

The Team respectfully suggests recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results:

- Consider implementing a structure where a number of district staff and one trustee annually attend a formal meeting, with the SPC, to review each school's growth plan. The school's plan will be presented to the board for approval. This could be followed with a mid-year review process at each school.
- Clarify the district vision "teaching and learning" through a collaborative process which includes all partner groups. Everyone needs to understand how the teaching and learning vision translates into action.
- Provide ongoing professional growth opportunities on using assessment for, of, and as learning (i.e. Wellman, SMART school literature).
- Support and recognize DPAC. This would include financial resources and training opportunities to enhance their capacity to work within their mandate.
- Continue to offer ongoing SPC support and training.
- Review alternate and distance education program structures (e.g. locations) to determine how they could more effectively support student learning.
- Set expectations for high participation rates on FSA tests.
- Develop a system for the differentiation of district resources to schools based on need.
- Track students in alternate programs to determine the long-term effectiveness of the alternate programs.
- Acknowledge and celebrate educational leadership at all levels.
- Collect and analyze district level data – i.e., aggregate DART results to develop a district reading profile.