

District Review Report

School District No. 74 (Gold Trail)

April 11-13, 2005

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By Gary Graf, Superintendent, School District No. 54 (Bulkley Valley)

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2004/2005**

District Name:	Gold Trail
District Number:	School District No. 74 (Gold Trail)
Superintendent:	Nancy Wells
Date of Visit:	April 11-13, 2005
Team Chair:	Gary Graf, Superintendent, SD 54 (Bulkley Valley)
Team Members:	Gayle Bedard, District Principal, SD 36 (Surrey) Ann Garside, Education Officer, Ministry of Education Robyn Gray, District Principal, SD 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) Terri-Lynne Huddlestone, Parent, SD 52 (Prince Rupert) Brent Munro, Researcher, Minister of Education Lori Robinson, Special Education Learning Assistance Teacher, SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) Kathy Sawchuk, Director of Instruction, SD 59 (Peace River South) Scott Stewart, Principal, SD 82 (Coast Mountains)

Context

School District No. 74 (Gold Trail) is a unique public school system which serves communities of Lytton, Spences Bridge, Venables Valley, Ashcroft, Cache Creek, and Clinton along Highway 97 C, and west to Pavilion, Big Bar, Lillooet, Gold Bridge and Shalath/Seton Portage.

The area has a student population of 1800, of which 54% is of Aboriginal ancestry. The students belong to 3 Nations and 19 Bands. The District also serves students of Metis origin.

Communities are primarily resource and agriculture based and the natural beauty of the area offers a wide range of recreational amenities. The School District contributes to the local economy by employing approximately 150 FTEs.

The District has 6 elementary schools, 4 secondary schools and 3 rural schools which enroll students in Kindergarten to Grade 12; the Open Learning program which offers alternate course delivery to students in the district and throughout the province; and an adult learning center in Lillooet serving the needs of students 16 years of age and older. The school in Shalath is operated in partnership with the Band.

In recent years, the District has faced financial and leadership challenges that have impacted the district culture. Recently, the District has moved forward to reaffirm its commitment to student learning.

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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 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, Ministry data related to the District and individual school growth plans.

At the beginning of the visit the trustees, District staff and Principals provided an overview of the District and the individual schools. This overview provided the Team with an understanding of the unique features of the district, the challenges being faced and the passion and commitment of the district community.

The Team visited all schools and met with School Planning Councils (SPCs). As well, meetings were conducted with the President and Professional Development Chairperson of the Gold Trail Teachers' Association and the local President of CUPE. The Team met with members of the First Nations Education Council. The Team also met with a representative of the District Parent Advisory Council.

At the conclusion of the review, the Team met with District staff, School Principals, Trustees, and community members to provide an overview of the District Review Report. This presentation was broadcast to other communities and school teams via video link.

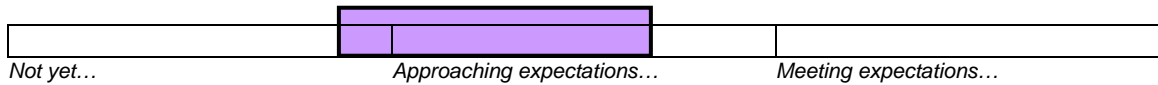
The Team experienced a warm, welcoming and open reception provided throughout the visit and would like to extend its appreciation to the District and school communities.

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Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*

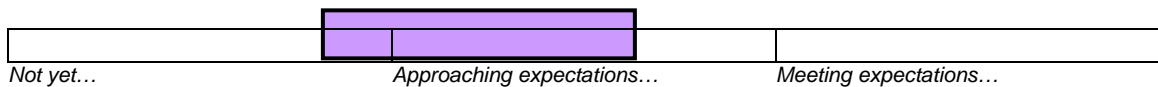
Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



- All goals are focused on student achievement.
- Neither the District nor the schools have a specific goal to address the achievement of Aboriginal students.
- Most schools have a literacy goal and some schools have a numeracy goal.
- District plans include specific objectives; this is not evident in school plans.
- Most schools are addressing social responsibility as a goal area.

2. *Rationale:*

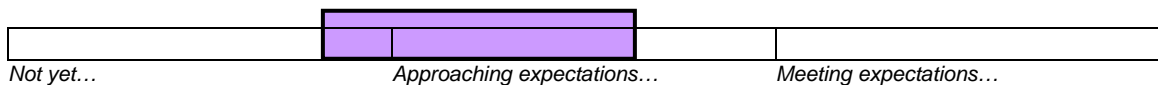
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



- The District plan has evidence that supports the selection of the goals.
- Some school plans have evidence that provides rationale for the goals.
- In some schools there was not a clear link between the goal and evidence to support the goal.

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.



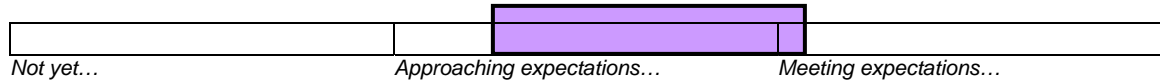
- Some schools are collecting a variety of data.
- Some schools are at the beginning stages of using data for making instructional decisions.
- Data analysis is beginning to become a part of the planning cycle.
- Performance Standards are being used to assess writing.
- The District is disaggregating data and some schools are beginning to disaggregate data.
- Data discussion and analysis is not evident at all schools.

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4. Strategies

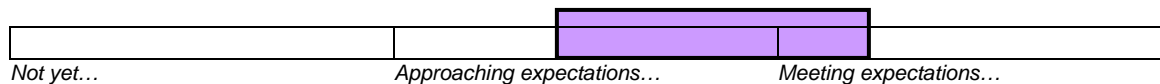
Improving districts and schools have focused, well-organized improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



- The District plan describes many strategies related to student achievement and most of these strategies were evident in schools.
- Current research to inform and implement best practices is being used at the District but not yet at all schools.
- Schools have been innovative in developing strategies that address the uniqueness of the school communities; however specific strategies were not explicit for Aboriginal students.
- District and school based staff development supports strategies that address student achievement.

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.



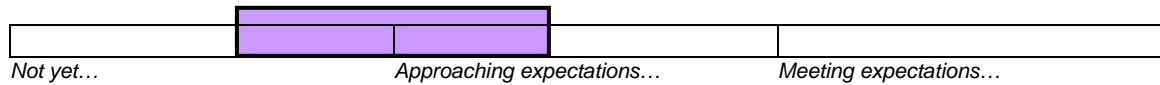
- The District and many schools have been innovative in creating structures to support learning in spite of challenging financial constraints.
- Programs are being reinstated to support a broader range of student opportunities.
- The District is beginning to develop structures to increase the interactions and connections between schools.
- Some schools are networking with schools outside the district and becoming part of provincial projects.
- The District has created a District Aboriginal Principal position to support Aboriginal student success.
- The District is supporting the school purchases of guided reading and classroom library materials.

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6. *Results:*

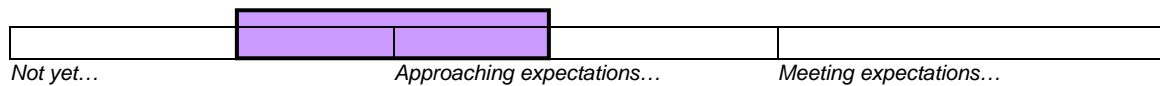
Improving districts and schools monitor and make adjustments to get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



- The District and some schools are beginning to monitor achievement results.
- There is little evidence of adjustments being made to improve results.
- School improvement is not described in terms of achievement results.
- Schools are challenged to represent student achievement results in ways that enable thoughtful analysis.

7. *Communication:*

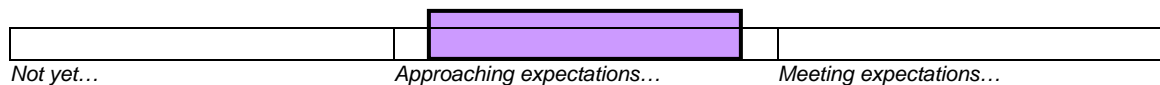
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



- Goals are being communicated to the local community through school and parent newsletters as well as community newspapers.
- Schools are not making reference to student achievement results on a regular basis.
- Updates to school and district plans are not well known throughout the schools and the District.
- Communication channels with all partner groups are not evident.
- The District is conducting a number of “round tables” to focus on the improvement cycle, and to define purpose, identity, and passion.

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.



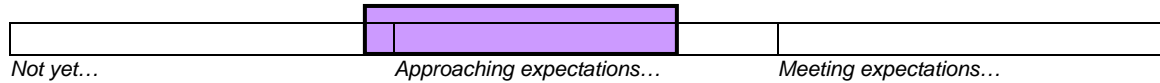
- The District is being active in providing a student focus and direction.
- Some schools have adjusted their growth plans to become aligned with the District.
- Schools understand that District resources will support school goals in the areas of literacy and social responsibility.
- The District is providing guidance in the development of school growth plans.
- Connections between the District and school plans are being reinforced through regular contacts with the District staff.
- It is an ongoing challenge to keep the small rural school plans connected with the District plan.

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9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement.*

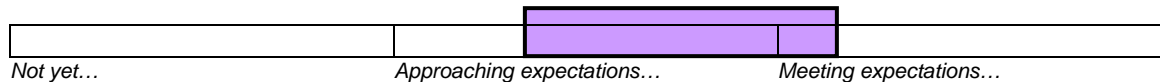
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- School Planning Councils are indicating their desire to learn more about the planning process and become more knowledgeable and participative in dialogue regarding data.
- Many parents are involved in activities that support school goals and initiatives.
- The District is providing resources to support the development of a District Parent Advisory Council.
- Some schools are seeking advice regarding increasing Aboriginal parent engagement.

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.



- District leaders have a vision for improving student achievement.
- The District leadership and support for learning are being acknowledged in all schools.
- The District is providing opportunities for leadership development and taking steps to develop a positive and collaborative learning community.
- Parents, students, teachers and support staff are taking on leadership roles in their school communities.
- More district-wide team work will enhance the leadership at all levels.

Strengths

Team observations of particular strengths related to student achievement at specific schools.

- District-wide full-day Kindergarten
- Volunteerism within school communities
- Commitment to complete the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement
- Leadership Program to develop capacity in the District and schools
- Student leaders initiating Drug-Free Zones
- Students, parents and schools providing monthly articles for local community newsletters
- Community partnerships including preschool, nutritional and tutorial programs
- Community, parents and Elders participating in the One-to-One Reading Program

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- Cooperating with Thompson Rivers University to develop trades programs
- Community and district commitment to providing educational programs for adult learners
- Summer and after school programs supporting literacy
- First Nations Education Council interest in mentoring youth
- English Language Development Program

Promising Practices

District or school practices that could be helpful to other districts with a similar focus.

- Education Round Tables held to develop the District vision
- The development of an electronic infra structure to support a District Parent Advisory Council
- District support for adapting the AVID program to a small secondary setting
- Cooperation with a First Nations Band to operate a community school
- Aboriginal parent club that invites school and district participation
- Formation of a Community Campus Radio Station

Recommendations

Team recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results are that:

- The District and schools include a goal and strategies that address Aboriginal student achievement; while honouring the unique differences of the communities.
- The District support schools in the application of the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-limited) criteria for goal development.
- The District and schools identify and systematically collect meaningful data to establish targets reflective of student needs.
- Staff, SPCs, and the First Nations Education Council be actively involved with professional development in the analysis and interpretation of data and results to assist in dialogue pertaining to student achievement.
- The District and schools need to consistently make student learning the priority for communication and this needs to be an ongoing dialogue with partner groups with a focus on engaging all Aboriginal communities.
- The District and schools carefully consider planning practices and timelines so that plans are complementary and interactive.
- The development of leadership at all levels is essential to sustain the improvement process.