

**District Review Report 2006/07**  
**School District No. 79 (Cowichan Valley)**

April 9 - 12, 2007

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Submitted to the Ministry of Education

By District Review Team Chair

Frank Dunham, Superintendent, School District No. 75 (Mission)



## District Review Report 2007

District: 79 (Cowichan Valley)

Superintendent: Elizabeth Milne

Date of Visit: April 9 - 12, 2007

Team Chair: Frank Dunham, Superintendent, SD 75 (Mission)

Team Members: Judy Arnold, Director, System Performance, Ministry of Education  
Timma Blain, Curriculum & Instruction Administrator,  
SD 57 (Prince George)  
Michael Hooker, Principal, SD 19 (Revelstoke)  
Debbie Leighton-Stephens, District Principal of  
First Nations Education, SD 52 (Prince Rupert)  
Lori Tedrick, Parent, SD 06 (Rocky Mountain)

### Context

The Cowichan Valley School District serves a population of 8,997 students in 34 school sites. Over the past 10 years, the Cowichan Valley School District has experienced a steady decline in enrolment which is anticipated to continue until approximately 2010.

The District has experienced significant financial challenges related to enrolment decline. One outcome of this decline has been the planned closure of Cowichan Station Rural Traditional and Yount Elementary Schools for the 2007/08 school year.

The District has also undergone significant staffing changes in the last year, with a number of senior management positions being filled on a temporary basis.

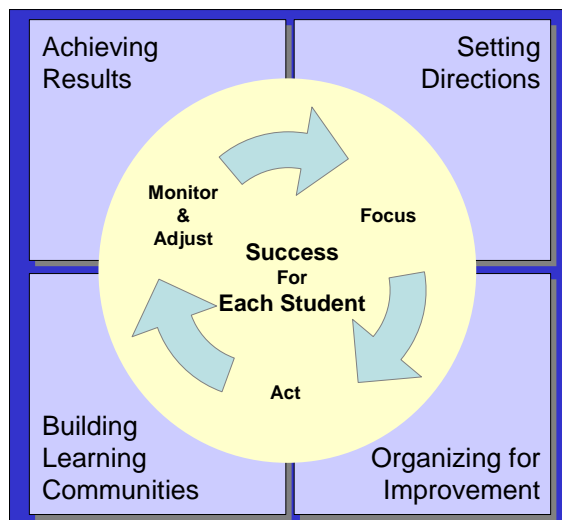
## The Purpose of District Reviews

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:

- What is most important? – Focus
- What are we doing about it? – Act
- 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 report intended to assist the district with 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 Monday, April 9, 2007.

Present for the meeting were:

Betty Milne, Acting Superintendent  
Phil Turin, Secretary Treasurer  
Pat Duncan, Acting Director of Middle and Secondary Education  
Linda McMenamin, Acting Director of Elementary Education  
Lorna Newman, Director of Student Support Services  
Charlie Coleman, Principal of Khowhemun Elementary  
Glen Posey, District Principal of Technology  
Ted Cadwallader, District Principal of Aboriginal Education  
Tammy Renyard, District Literacy Specialist  
Sandy MacKay, District Numeracy Specialist

2. Met with representative groups including:

Board of School Trustees  
Cowichan Valley Teachers' Federation  
Distributed Learning department  
District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) and  
Parent Advisory Councils (PACs)  
District Student Advisory Council  
Hwulmuhw Mustimuhw Education Advisory Committee  
Principals and Vice-Principals

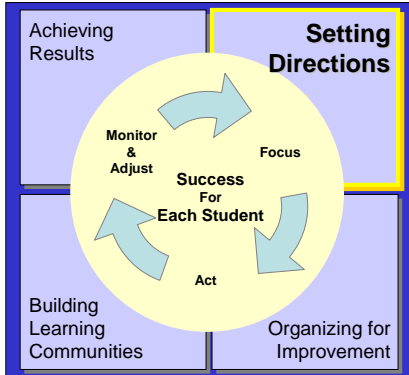
3. Visited the following schools and met with school staff, students and parents:

AB Greenwell Elementary  
Crofton Elementary  
Discovery Elementary  
Duncan Elementary  
Khowhemun Elementary  
Koksilah Elementary

George Bonner Middle  
Mt. Prevost Middle  
Quamichan Middle

Cowichan Secondary  
Chemainus Secondary  
Frances Kelsey Secondary  
Lake Cowichan 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.

## Acknowledgements

- In discussions with partner groups and at schools the Team heard that there is a strong desire to discuss the academic, relational, and financial challenges that face the district. Additionally, everyone is eager to work collaboratively to find solutions.

## Recommendations

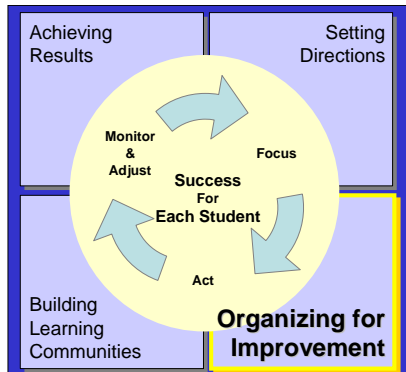
Initiate or build on the efforts begun to:

- Use performance data to identify the most important priorities that will lead the district to a preferred future. Identify focused goals and objectives that will work toward increasing success for all learners.
- Work with all partners to identify challenges and successes within the district and develop a 3-5 year strategic plan that will lead the district forward (including operational budgets, finances. student achievement).
- Establish, as a board of trustees and a senior management team, the operational values that will guide the work to improve success for each student.
- Build clear, consistent and transparent processes that will ensure all education partners are included in finding ways to support student success.
- Ensure genuine relationships based on respect and trust, throughout the organization and across all partner groups.
- Develop protocols to support two-way communication with all partners in order to acknowledge the importance and acceptance of divergent points of view.
- Ensure that goals and objectives demonstrate the shared responsibility for quality education for Aboriginal learners.

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- Identify the most promising practices for increasing student success and ensure their sustainability.
- Rely on the collective wisdom in the district, gathered through community focus groups and discussions with all staff as well as the review of financial and operational functions to guide the way forward.

## 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.

## Acknowledgements

- Literacy and numeracy support teachers provide valued support to schools.
- The increased focus on Aboriginal education has made a positive improvement in the past few years.
- The teachers' union and the board have agreed on a letter of understanding regarding preferential hiring for Aboriginal teachers.
- District Student Advisory Committee functions effectively, modeling leadership and growth potential.

## Recommendations

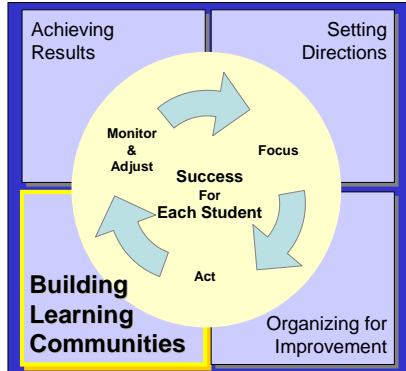
Initiate or build on the efforts begun to:

- Eliminate all extraneous activities
  - Reduce the number of initiatives at the district level. Work with district and school staff to identify which structures / strategies have the greatest impact on ensuring success for students. Focus on those and discontinue the rest.
- Work collaboratively with the Hwulmuhw Mustimuhw Education Advisory Committee to ensure the shared responsibility for Aboriginal Education.
- Focus on strategies to support success for middle and secondary learners
  - Develop a consistent district plan to ensure successful transition experiences for all students.
  - Identify the challenges faced by students transitioning between elementary to middle or middle to secondary school and implement practices to improve transition rates.

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- Strengthen trades and alternate paths to success for students in SD 79.
  - Evaluate the effectiveness of current alternate programs.
  - Examine why there are so many Aboriginal students in these programs.
  - Implement strategies to keep students in their home schools before placement in these programs.
  - Explore ways for students to successfully complete school or return to their home school.
- Align district staff support to reflect focused Goals and Objectives.
  - Enhance the time available for the literacy and numeracy teachers to support teachers to improve student learning.
  - Enhance support for Aboriginal students and the presence of Aboriginal staff.
- Identify and make use of expertise within the district.

## 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.

## Acknowledgements

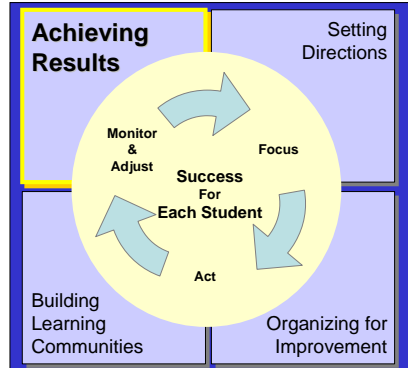
- All partner groups spoke passionately about success for children in their schools and their own roles in ensuring this success. Partners were eager to work with the district to accomplish the task.
- The Team heard an important quote at the Hwulmuhw Mustimuhw Education Advisory Committee meeting: “Open the door we are waiting to be included.” Relationships are the foundations of success.

## Recommendations

Initiate or build on the efforts begun to:

- Identify what the District values about relationships with all partner groups.
- Develop and consistently follow protocols to ensure that public input is encouraged and considered in decision-making processes.
- Provide a variety of venues and opportunities for mutually respectful two-way communication between the district, partner groups and the greater community.
- Strengthen the work of School Planning Councils. The contrast between schools that have engaged parents in developing and monitoring school plans and those that have not is significant and creates inconsistency in the district.
- Include parents in learning opportunities/professional development activities at the school, district and provincial levels.
- Work closely with the Hwulmuhw Mustimuhw Education Advisory Committee to demonstrate shared responsibility for increasing success for Aboriginal students and the completion of a second Enhancement Agreement.

## 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.

## Acknowledgements

- The district-wide administration of DART assessment and its connection to informing instruction at some schools.
- The collection and use of individual student data to track success for each student at some schools.

## Recommendations

Initiate or build on the efforts begun to:

- Focus on success for each student:
  - Improve transition rates and graduation rates especially for Aboriginal students.
  - Improve the success of all students in the early years through systemic early intervention.
  - Improve success for students in alternate programs.
  - Decrease the number of students graduating with a school leaving certificate and increase the number of graduates.
- Strengthen the use of classroom assessments to inform instruction and track individual student achievement over time.
- Monitor and adjust strategies to support students on an ongoing basis to ensure success.
- Expect a commitment at each school that reflects the belief that all students are in a cycle of continuous improvement (including the most vulnerable students, those in the middle and the high achievers).

## **Conclusion**

The District Review Team began its work in the District by seeking to identify what Cowichan Valley believes is the preferred future for its children. That preferred future is unclear. As such, the fundamental building blocks upon which all other important work will flow are not yet in place. Doing so will require that a shared responsibility for student success be first articulated to the public by the Board of Education and, in turn, the superintendent. It is essential that this value be consistently communicated to schools and that district leadership ensures that a resolute focus on student success is obvious in all future work.

## **District Review Response**

The District will respond annually to the recommendations in the report within its Accountability/Achievement Contracts. For further information regarding the District response to this report, please contact School District No. 79 (Cowichan Valley).

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 Accountability/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.