

District Review Report

School District No. 81 (Fort Nelson)

March 14-16, 2005

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Wes Neumeier, Superintendent, School District No. 78 (Fraser-Cascade)

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District Name:	Fort Nelson
District Number:	81
Superintendent:	Diana Samchuck
Date of Visit:	March 14-16
Team Chair:	Wes Neumeier, Superintendent, SD 78 (Fraser-Cascade)
Team Members:	Kas Angelski, Principal, SD 72 (Campbell River) Carol Cole, Parent, SD 28 (Quesnel) Audrey Kelly, Teacher, SD 19 (Revelstoke) Renee Wentland, Education Officer, Ministry of Education

Context

Fort Nelson is a northern community of 6,679 people with a rural population of 21.6%. Approximately 4.1% of the homes are non-English speaking, and 14.7% are Aboriginal. Fort Nelson is one of BC's northernmost towns. It is the service and transportation center for the regional economy. Fort Nelson's economic base is built on natural gas and oil; a wide range of industrial services; forest products manufacturing; a strengthening tourism industry; and, an emerging agricultural sector.

The Fort Nelson School District has an enrollment of 1,116. This figure represents a significant decrease from previous years, with a continuing decline projected due to graduating numbers exceeding kindergarten intake numbers. The School District identifies 22% of its students for special educational services. There are 236 Aboriginal students or 26.6% of the total district population that includes students from the Fort Nelson and Prophet River First Nations.

The District is composed of four schools located in Fort Nelson and one school in Toad River approximately two hours west along the Alaska Highway. Of the four in-town schools, two offer instruction from K-4, and one offers Grades 5-7. Fort Nelson Secondary School offers instruction from Grades 8-12. The Toad River School offers a K-12 program.

The District is proud of its professional climate and of the excellent relationship that exists amongst its support staff, teachers, and administrators. Active Parent Advisory Committees (PACs) and School Planning Councils (SPCs) support the School District.

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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 by:

- Reviewing school district and school achievement data;
- Reviewing the School District Accountability Contract and the school plans to improve student achievement;
- Making recommendations to the Board and the Minister of Education about improving student achievement; and,
- Identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

To this end, the Team reviewed the District's Accountability Contract and its results pertaining to student achievement, and:

- Met with members of the Board, Senior Staff, and partner group representatives to review the District's characteristics, its processes, and its Accountability Contract;
- Visited each District school where the Team met with the SPC, and at times with additional staff and parents; and
- Met with the District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) President, and representatives of the Fort Nelson First Nations Band.

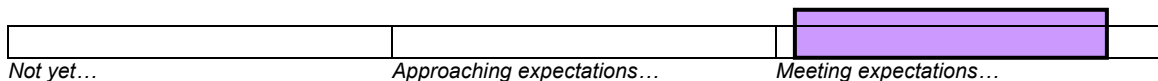
The Team reviewed the District's Accountability Contract and the Growth Plans of all schools. Also reviewed were the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement and Ministry data related to the district and schools.

The Team appreciated the warm reception, the open, informed dialogue, and the professionalism with which they were received.

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.

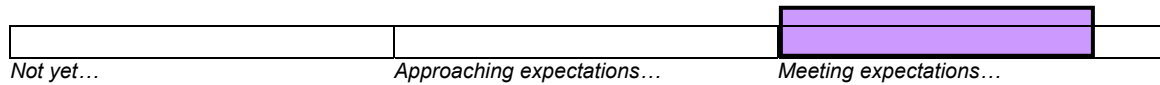


- School and district goals are relevant and focused on student achievement.
- Most of the schools' goals are supported by objectives.
- Goals are based on evidence.

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2. Rationale:

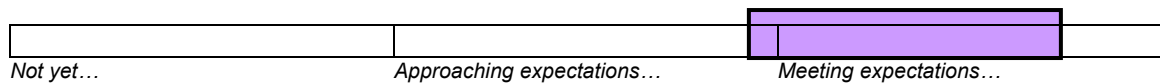
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



- District and schools have based their rationale on evidence clearly linked to student achievement.
- Most schools have used contextual evidence to support their goal selection.

3. Data:

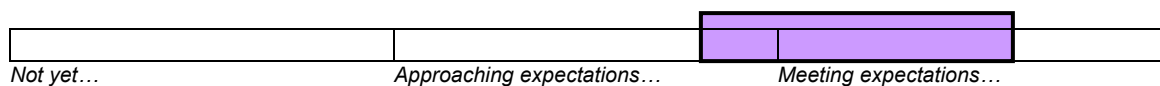
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district, and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the District goals and is used to monitor progress.



- The District and most schools are using classroom, school, district, and provincial data to determine areas of need, plan for improvement, and monitor progress.
- The District and schools are disaggregating their data to identify areas for growth.
- There is good evidence throughout the district that analysis, interpretation, and reporting of data is being used to improve student achievement.
- Many schools have indicated increased use of classroom-based assessment practices and performance standards, and a decreased reliance on standardized testing such as CTBS.
- Data analysis is occurring at a sophisticated level across the district.

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.

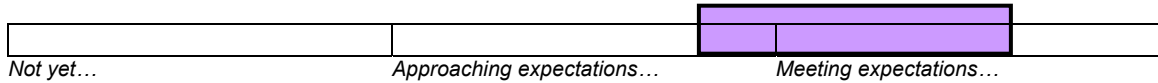


- The District and schools are using many research-based, instructional strategies to realize improvement in student achievement.
- There is a concerted effort to align strategies across all grades throughout the district.
- Most schools use a variety of research-based, criterion-referenced resources and programs to support their goals. In a few instances, strategies are not closely aligned with Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs).

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5. *Structures:*

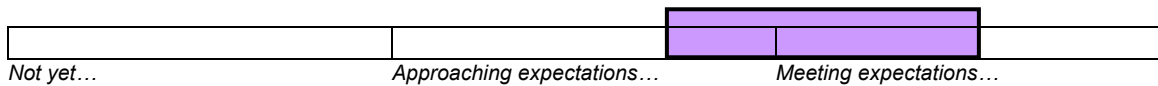
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures—resources, time, and organization—to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



- The District and schools have made structural changes to support student achievement in some areas of highest need.
- Many promising practices from other school districts have been brought into the district for implementation.
- Many school plans do not clearly distinguish between strategies and structures.
- The District has developed leadership teams that support collaboration focused on school goals.

6. *Results:*

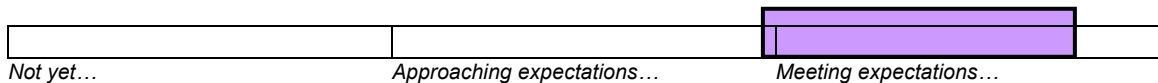
Improving districts and schools monitor and make adjustments to get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



- The District and schools are monitoring results to enhance student achievement.
- Most schools are using their results to make adjustments in their planning.
- Assessment and results analysis is becoming closely linked to instructional practice.
- In a few instances, results indicating achievement gaps for some groups of students are not being addressed.

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.

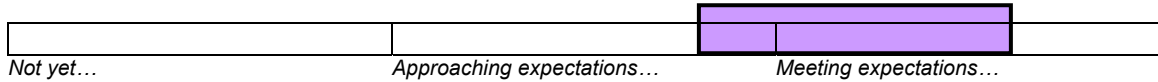


- The District and schools are using a variety of consistent and timely ways to communicate about student achievement.
- Parental input is informed and is valued at all schools.
- Some schools are finding innovative ways to connect with diverse groups in the community.
- DPAC is emerging as an avenue for empowering parental input.

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8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence:*

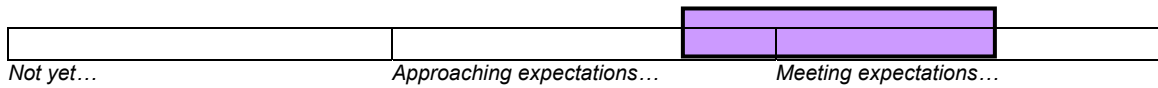
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and district directions are both valued.



- There is a reciprocal relationship for planning between the schools and the District.
- The District implements thoughtful strategies and structures that both support and are viewed as supportive of school planning and implementation.
- The school and district planning process is comprehensive and inclusive of most partner groups.
- In some instances opportunities for district and school coherence are not fully utilized.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement:*

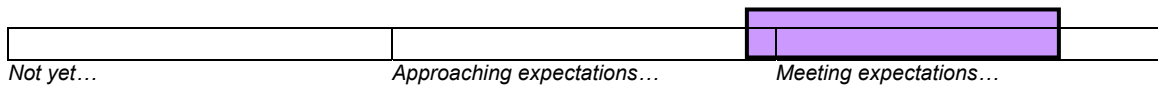
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- Parents are actively involved in setting goals to improve student achievement.
- SPC members are well informed and are full partners in the development of school growth plans.
- The DPAC is looking for opportunities to be meaningfully included in future district planning.
- In some instances where achievement issues exist, opportunities remain for more effective home and school interaction.

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 District and schools demonstrate ample evidence of collaborative leadership.
- A focus on student achievement and data analysis is embedded in the District's activities and culture.

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Strengths

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

- The Fort Nelson District is collaborative, collegial, innovative, and professional.
- Overall, parental involvement is informed and highly valued. SPCs are functioning proficiently.
- The District has strong processes and structures in place to focus district and school dialogue on data-driven decision making about student achievement. The District allocates financial resources specifically to support school growth plans.
- The District has a draft enhancement agreement and has worked with the First Nation Groups as well as the overall local Aboriginal community through the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Steering Committee.
- There is a willingness in the District and in the First Nations and Aboriginal communities to develop strong partnerships to support student learning.
- Community partners generously contribute towards enhancing student learning.

Promising Practices

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

- Collaborative district leadership teams in the goal areas provide significant supports to the District in developing and implementing effective instructional strategies.
- The Northern Opportunities Project, which supports transition to trades programming, has great potential for meeting local educational needs.
- “The Parent Room” is a preschool-friendly designated space within a school for parents to hold meetings, gather information, and organize events. This room provides various opportunities to enhance parent communications and involvement in their community school.
- The local school calendar that addresses community employment schedules supports student success.
- The District has a consistent approach to selecting successful practices and programs within the province.
- The District provides ongoing in-service and systematic implementation of selected programs.

Recommendations

The team respectfully recommends that:

- The District continue to prioritize the development and implementation of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.
- The school community capitalize on the uniqueness of Fort Nelson area First Nations and Aboriginal peoples’ traditions and culture in the development of comprehensive goals for student achievement in school growth planning.

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- The District consider the correlation between local school calendars, flexible scheduling, course options, and alternate delivery and assessment methods when responding to local economic and employment impacts on student attendance and achievement.
- The District continue to develop innovative and creative ways to encourage the sharing of effective strategies and structures that include all schools, and that schools continue to fully utilize and contribute to the development of these supports.
- The District, together with its partners, consider developing a mentorship program to expand and sustain the implementation of research-based teaching practices.
- The District and schools consider a consistent implementation of their common school growth plan template.
- School plans reflect an understanding of the differing functions of strategies and structures.
- The District continue to enhance transition processes for some specific groups and/or sub-groups of students such as those students entering school and those moving between schools.
- The District consider offering multi-cultural awareness training for school staffs and community members.
- The District continue to support DPAC in its developing stages.
- The District consider inviting parents to be part of district professional development and leadership teams.