

District Review Report
School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes)

May 6 - 9, 2007

Submitted to the Ministry of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Dr. Ron Rubadeau, Retired Superintendent



District Review Report 2007

District: 91 (Nechako Lakes)

Superintendent: Gordon Milne

Date of Visit: May 7 - 9, 2007

Team Chair: Ron Rubadeau, Retired Superintendent

Team Members: Judy Arnold, Director, System Performance, Ministry of Education
Ron Broda, Parent, SD 63 (Saanich)
Peter Gajda, Teacher, SD 53 (Okanagan Similkameen)
Wendy Hyer, Assistant Superintendent, SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen)
Gloria Raphael, Principal, SD 39 (Vancouver)

Context

The Nechako Lakes School District encompasses nearly 70,000 square kilometers in an economic region that is primarily dependent on forestry. Agriculture, tourism and mining also provide significant employment. The student population serves about 6,000 learners (or roughly 5,200 full-time equivalents) who attend 1 of 14 elementary schools, 3 elementary-secondary schools, 3 secondary schools, 8 adult/alternative schools and a province-wide electronic delivery school in the District (E-Bus). Aboriginal people comprise over 35 percent of the conventional student population. The proportion of Aboriginal people in the schools continues to rise.

A wide range of traditional and alternative programs is offered.

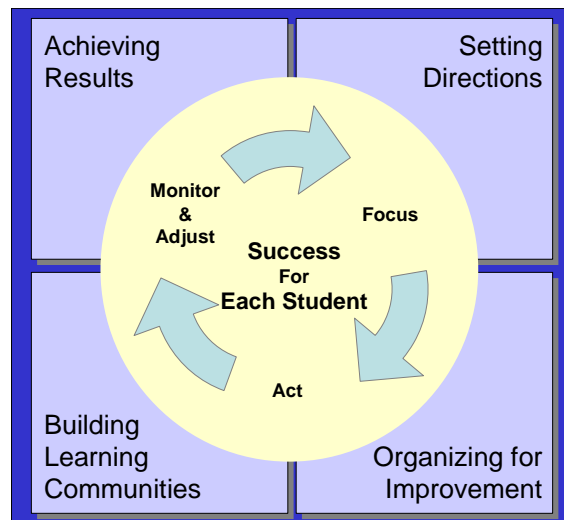
The Purpose of District Reviews

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 in 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 Sunday, May 6 and on the morning of Monday, May 7 to discuss district strengths, challenges, alignment, coherence, sustainability, current results and the road ahead.

Present for the meetings:

- Superintendent
- Assistant Superintendents
- Secretary Treasurer
- Student Support Services staff
- Math Helping Teacher
- Literacy Helping Teacher

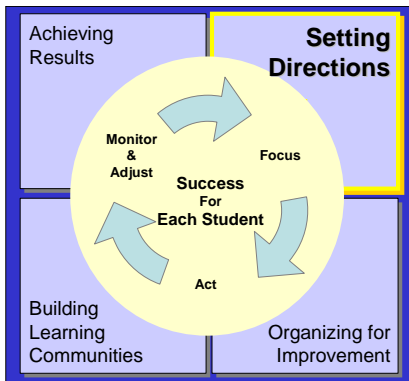
2. Met with Trustees and partner groups including:
 - District Parent Advisory Council/Parent Advisory Council (DPAC/PAC)
 - First Nations Education Council (FNEC)
 - Principals and Vice-Principals Association
 - Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
 - Nechako Lakes Teacher's Association.

3. Met with school staff, students and parents at the following schools:

- David Hoy Elementary
- Evelyn Dickson Elementary
- Grassy Plains Elementary-Junior
- Mouse Mountain Elementary
- Sinkut View Elementary
- William Konkin Elementary

- Fort St. James Secondary
- Lakes District Secondary
- Nechako Valley Secondary
- Nechako Electronic Busing Program (E-Bus)

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

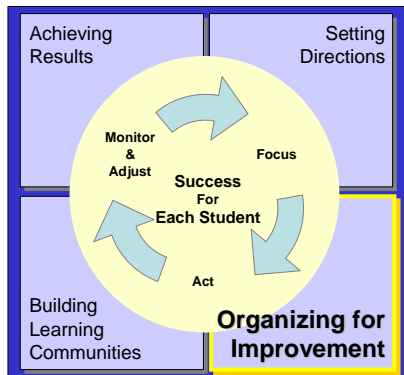
- Literacy and numeracy projects show positive indications for student success.
- FNEC is making progress in redirecting the actions of the district in terms of personnel practice and actions to improve the learning environment for Aboriginal students.
- There are schools using cohort evidence to determine the effectiveness of strategies.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Set well defined directions in a few strategic areas to improve success for each student.
 - A recommendation to reduce the number of goals and objectives was made in the 2003/04 Review. Regrettably, the directions of the district since that time have continued to encompass a large scope, which has made monitoring and adjusting to support success for each student extremely difficult.
- Begin all planning with the needs and priorities of the student in each school. These needs and priorities will inform the district plan.
- Ensure that each school in the district has an expectation of continuous improvement and success for each student.
- Use classroom evidence, performance standards and other data.
- Build profiles for individual students to guide instructional practice.
- Build continuity of assessment practices across the district.
- Ensure that FNEC is represented at a variety of decision making levels.

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

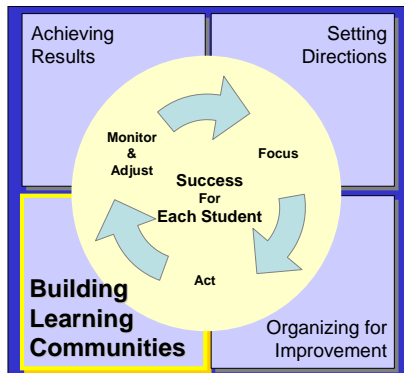
- The District decentralizes budgets so that resources can be aligned to meet the needs of schools.
- A variety of career-oriented projects are in place.
- The District has dedicated personnel specifically to address goal areas.
- Significant professional development for all staff is available.
- Some schools are working collaboratively to direct instruction.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Work more closely and consistently with the Aboriginal communities to develop resources and programs that will increase student success.
- Identify, monitor, and adjust specific strategies and structures to support student learning.
- Integrate strengths of E-Bus into district schools, especially high schools and early education.
- Ensure that there is a shared responsibility in all goal areas for Aboriginal student achievement.

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

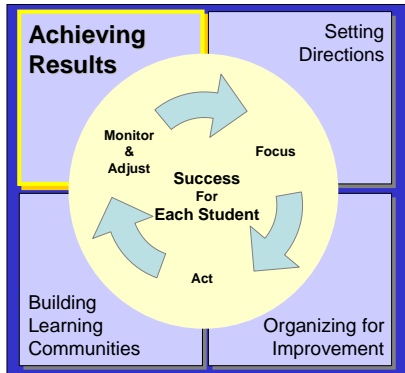
- FNEC is providing an opportunity for many voices to be involved in decision-making.
- Principals and Vice-Principals are provided opportunities to participate in the Leadership Program.
- The DPAC has direct access to the Superintendent of Schools to voice their concerns.
- Specific learning communities in literacy and numeracy are emerging.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Provide opportunities for schools to network and share promising practices to enhance leadership development.
- Take on a more direct role in assisting the DPAC and the School Planning Council (SPC) to become more effective partners in the education of children.
- Provide ongoing training for all members of SPCs.
- Develop strong partnerships with Aboriginal communities pertaining to all issues to the health, education and welfare of the students, such as partnerships with First Nations preschools.
- Work with DPAC, all PACs and SPCs to proactively reach out to all parents to engage in the work to improve success; this is especially important to parents in the Aboriginal community.

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 Team observed improvement at some schools.
- Schools are moving towards analyzing data for school improvement.

Recommendations

Initiate or build on efforts begun to:

- Improve results for each student by expanding district and school efforts to track cohort groups and examining trends or patterns where students are not improving at each school.
- Improve the achievement of Aboriginal students.
- Set goals and targets related to transition and graduation rates especially for Aboriginal students.
- Re-evaluate evidence collected for its relevance in determining and achieving goals.
- Improve capacity to use data sources to specifically inform instructional practice for each student.
- Monitor strategies for effectiveness and adjust as required to improve results for all students

General Observations

School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes) has set out an ambitious plan organized around four general goals and a number of objectives. While these goals and objectives contain a number of measurable targets, they are so broad in scope that they are difficult to implement or monitor. As a result, a significant number of activities or opportunities are provided in the district, which may not lead to the desired outcome.

The District has spent considerable time improving the quality of relationships within and among its educational partners. Senior staff felt this activity was necessary subsequent to the amalgamation of 1996. The Team, however, did not observe a relationship issue in the District but rather that there was concern about the need to move past relationship building to the accomplishment of district achievement goals. A sense of urgency in the work to improve achievement was not evident.

The combination of actions aimed at relationship building and the large number of district goals has created an environment where significant effort has been put forth to provide everything for everyone. In meetings the Team observed a consistent desire of respondents to move into a new era where there is a limited number of goals and specific directions are collaboratively set. Expectations with respect to district direction must then be provided by district leadership.

Conclusion

The Team is confident with a clear, well-defined and more strategic focus and a sense of urgency that the District has the capacity and the commitment to improve success for each student.

Response to the Review

The District will respond annually to the recommendations in the report within its Achievement Contracts. For further information regarding the District response to this report, please contact School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes).

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 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.