

District Review Report

School District No. 92 (Nisga'a)

April 11 - 13, 2005

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair

Robert Peacock, Superintendent
School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen)

**District Review Report
2004/2005**

District Name:	Nisga'a
District Number:	92
Superintendent:	Patrick Moores
Date of Visit:	April 11-13, 2005
Team Chair:	Robert Peacock, Superintendent, SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen)
Team Members:	Kimberlee Howland, Parent, SD 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) Trish Rosborough, Director, Ministry of Education Pius Ryan, District Principal, SD 48 (Howe Sound) Sue Spalding, Teacher, SD 82 (Coast Mountains)

Context

School District No. 92 (Nisga'a) is located in the Nass Valley, which runs east/west 100K north of Terrace and Prince Rupert. There are four communities in the Valley and the School District: New Aiyansh, Git'wink'sihlkw, Lakalzap, and Gingolx (Kincolith).

The School District is unique, with strong affiliation to both the Nisga'a Lisims Government and the British Columbia Ministry of Education. Ninety per cent (90%) of the Nass Valley population and 98% of the school population is Nisga'a or members or other First Nations.

According to the 1996 Census, compared with other communities in British Columbia, the communities in the Nass Valley:

- are more rural;
- are more homogeneous (90% of the population are Aboriginal compared to 5% provincially);
- are younger (48% are younger than 24 years of age compared to 33% provincially, 10% are over 55 years of age compared to 21.5% provincially);
- have a higher percentage of families with children at home (83.3% compared to 60.8% provincially).

The four schools that comprise the School District are small, rural or remote, geographically distant from other districts, and culturally homogeneous. The 3 elementary schools enroll fewer than 100 students. In September 2004, there were 573 students in the District – 280 students enrolled in Kindergarten through Grade 7 and 293 in Grades 8 to 12 (including ungraded programs).

During the 2003/04 school year, 46 teachers were employed in the District, half of which were Nisga'a or other First Nations and another 10% that were married to Nisga'a. Most of the support staff was Nisga'a or other First Nations. Eighty-three per cent (83%) of the District's educators hold BC Professional Certificates. Four teachers recently completed a Graduate Diploma Program in Literacy Education through Simon Fraser University.

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Summary of Process

The 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 individual school growth plans to improve student achievement;
- Determine the capacity of the school district to support schools in improving student achievement;
- Identify promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

As part of the Ministry of Education's accountability cycle, School District No. 92 (Nisga'a) is one of 20 school districts being reviewed during the 2004/05 school year.

To this end, the Team:

- Reviewed the District's Accountability Contract and School Growth Plans;
- Reviewed the school and district performance data;
- Met with trustees, senior staff, school-based administrators, and other partner groups to review the District's characteristics;
- Met with two representatives of the Nisga'a Lisims Government;
- Visited one secondary school and three elementary school

Acknowledgements

The Nisga'a School District is truly unique. The passion and dedication of all people involved within education was felt throughout the visitations.

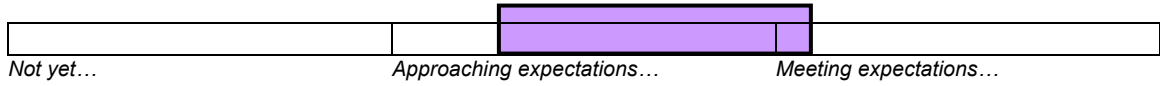
The Review Team is appreciative of the warmth and generosity shared by all, especially the Nisga'a people.

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Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. Goals:

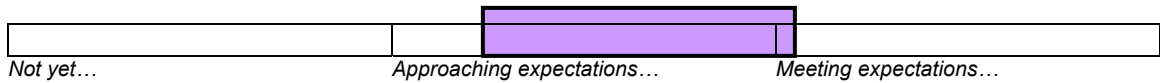
Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



- District and school goals are clearly directed towards student achievement and connected to the wishes of the communities.
- There is demonstrated alignment between district and school goals.
- Some objectives focus on teacher and program development rather than student achievement.

2. Rationale:

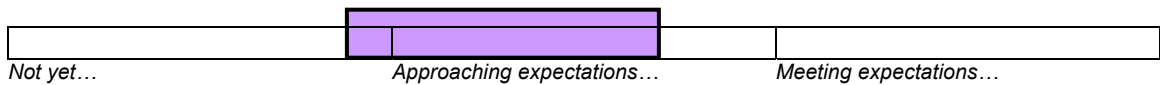
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



- District goals reflect the priorities of the community and focus on improving student achievement.
- School goals are supportive of the district goals.
- District and some schools' literacy goals are based on several data sources.

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.



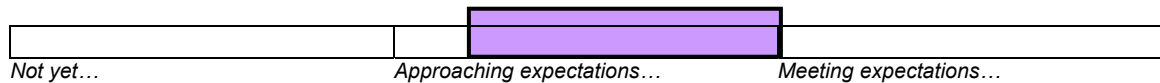
- The District collects and analyzes data related to their goals.
- Some classroom teachers are using multiple forms of data to inform their practice.
- Schools are at the beginning stages of collecting evidence to plan for improvement in the Nisga'a language goal.
- To help with the transition of students, schools are encouraged to continue analyzing and sharing data at all grade levels.
- District and schools are not disaggregating data for specific sub-groups of students (eg. Gender).
- Parent and community stories are valuable and important indicators of success.

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4. *Strategies:*

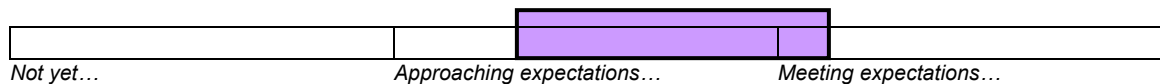
Improving districts and schools have focused, well organized improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



- The District fosters ongoing professional development opportunities for 'all' staff, which focus on student learning.
- Most schools have effectively implemented a variety of strategies, such as Nisga'a Immersion, Artist in Residence, Guided Reading, Wireless Writing, and Rec' and Read.
- Resources are made available to support classroom teacher and school-based initiatives.
- The application of strategies is not consistently linked to objectives.

5. *Structures:*

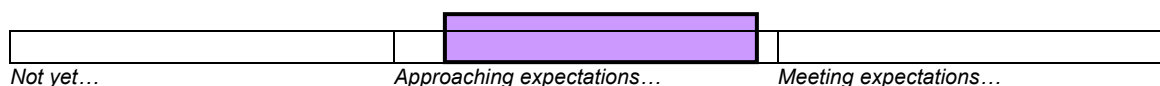
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, and organization – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



- The District has aligned its structures and resources in support of student achievement goals.
- District support staff's direction and expertise are highly valued.
- The District allocates significant resources to support classroom libraries, professional development of "all" staff, technology, and other school initiatives.
- Schools have adjusted timetables for literacy instruction.
- Nisga'a immersion pilot projects have been established in two schools.

6. *Results:*

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

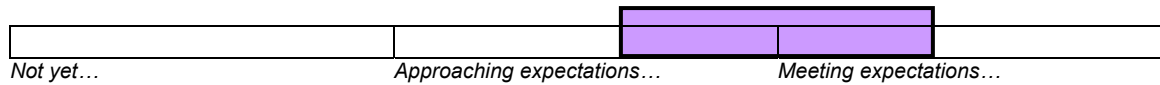


- The District uses results to monitor and adjust practices and professional development activities.
- Some schools use results to refine and adjust strategies and practices.
- Little evidence of results being used for transitions between schools.
- Schools are at the beginning stages of tracking student results with the Nisga'a Language program.

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7. *Communication:*

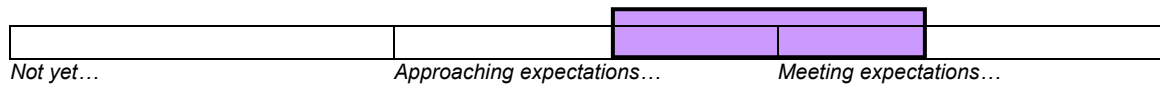
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



- The District and schools communicate in a number of ways with the community, local government and service providers.
- Schools use a variety of strategies to communicate with parents.
- The informal community network is a significant asset to school improvement efforts.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence:*

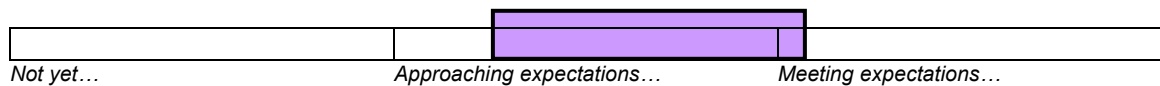
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and district directions are both valued.



- The District and schools have a number of practices that enhance and support goals.
- The District collaborates with the Nisga'a Lisims Government.
- All schools express appreciation for district support and direction.
- There is a process for reviewing school and district goals.

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.



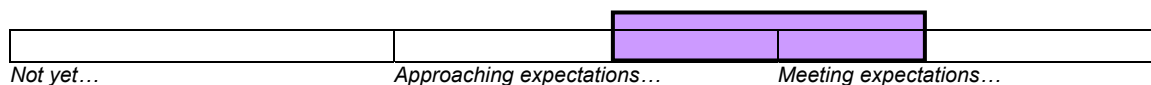
- The District reaches out in a number of ways to involve and engage parents.
- All schools have developed creative ways to bring parents into schools to meet the community needs such as Parent Clubs.
- Some parents would like more timely communication concerning individual student performance.

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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.



- Leadership in all partner groups is evident and encouraged.
- Collaboration and shared dialogue is modeled and fostered.
- Everyone is aware of the goals and many demonstrate commitment towards achieving those goals.
- The District has taken steps towards developing a common vision with the goals of literacy and the Nisga'a language; continued efforts towards developing this vision will sustain the success of Nisga'a students.

Strengths

Particular strengths related to student achievement, observed by the Team, are the:

- Passion and dedication of the staff and community towards student achievement.
- District support towards the professional development of ALL staff members.
- Development of a balanced literacy program.
- Pride in the Nisga'a culture.
- High percentage of qualified Nisga'a teachers and staff.
- Strong 'web of support' reflected in community connections with government, schools, staff, Elders and families.
- Holistic approach towards student education from Head Start to adult education.
- District wide two-hour literacy instruction block.
- Rec' and Reading program, including the summer program.
- Conscious development of class libraries.
- Youth worker in the secondary setting.
- Continued work that the District does in developing educational successful role models through their adult continuous education centers.

Promising Practices

District or school practices that could be helpful to other districts with a similar focus include the:

- Teaming of fluent language speakers with a certified teacher and a teacher assistant to deliver the Nisga'a Immersion program.
- Active and direct involvement of Elders in education.
- Artist in Residence at the secondary level.
- Wireless Writers Program.
- Development of oral language of primary students through Talking Tables.

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Recommendations

For strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results, the Team encourages the District to:

- Gather data and evidence to track and support student achievement within the Nisga'a language and culture program.
- Examine strategies and data that focus on specific sub-groups (gender, transfers).
- Continue to investigate a district-wide classroom literacy assessment that is easily administered and valid.
- Continue to infuse a prominent presence of Nisga'a language, culture and knowledge in schools.
- Continue to explore ways of supporting the Nisga'a language development in community settings.
- Explore methods of strengthen the oral language component for secondary students.

Priorities (Optional)

The Team recognizes that the focus, support and direction taken by the District and schools, in improving student achievement, is resulting in positive growth and the Team encourages them to continue with this valuable work.