

District Review Report
School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)

June 1 – 5, 2008

Submitted to the Ministry of Education



District Review Report 2008

District: SD 61 (Greater Victoria)

Superintendent: John Gaipman, Superintendent

Date of Visit: June 1 – 5, 2008

Team Chair: Mike McKay, Superintendent, SD 36 (Surrey)

Team Members: Judy Arnold, Director, System Performance, Ministry of Education
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Dean Goodman, Coordinator, System Performance,
Ministry of Education
Wendy MacDonald, Vice Principal, SD 63 (Saanich)
Debra Martel, Administrator, Aboriginal Education, SD 39
(Vancouver)
Cheryl McCann, Parent, SD 5 (Southeast Kootenay)
Teena Smith, Resource Teacher, SD 39 (Vancouver)
Angus Wilson, Principal, SD 50 (Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte)

Context

The Greater Victoria School District serves students from the municipalities of Saanich, Esquimalt, View Royal, Oak Bay, the Highlands, and the City of Victoria. It is located on the traditional territories of the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations.

Approximately 197,000 people reside within the district. Schools draw from urban, semi-urban, and suburban areas and from families with diverse socio-economic levels.

Enrolment is 19,222 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) students and has been declining since 1996. Approximately 13 percent of students in Greater Victoria School District are in French Immersion, 11 percent are students with Special Needs, 7 percent are Aboriginal, and 7 percent have English as a Second Language.

From 2002 to 2007, the District reconfigured its schools to Grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 within seven families of schools. In response to declining enrolment, the District has closed seven schools since 2003.

The District offers a wide range of Programs of Choice, including French Immersion, Flexible Studies, a Challenge Program for gifted learners, and several sports-based programs; three schools of choice; and K-8 and 9-12 distributed learning programs.

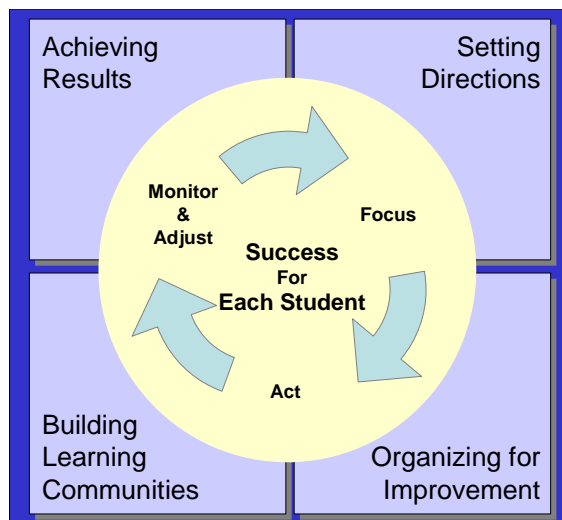
The Purpose of District Review

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:

1. What is most important? – Focus
2. What are we doing about it? – Act
3. 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. Rather, it is a document intended to assist the District in its work to improve success for each student. 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 June 1 and 2, 2008. Present for the meetings were:

John Gaipman, Superintendent of Schools
Sherri Bell, Associate Superintendent
Patrick Duncan, Associate Superintendent
Chris Harvey, Associate Superintendent
Eileen Eby, Learning Initiatives Team
Ingrid Fawcett, Learning Initiatives Team
James Hansen, District Vice-Principal
Donna Harding, District Principal, Special Education
Dennis Harrigan, District Principal, Student Support
Janet Langston, Human Resources (June 1)
Trish Main, Learning Initiatives Team
Judy Mas, Coordinator, Languages and. Multiculturalism
Nadine Naughton, Learning Initiatives Team
Nella Nelson, Coordinator, Aboriginal Nations Education Division
Dave Scott, Career Programs
Leone Sveinson, Associate Director of Planning and BCeSIS
Liz Belanger, Learning Connections (June 2)
Gary Crocker, Coordinator, Aboriginal Enhancement (June 2)
Debra Mackie, District Vice-Principal, Special Education (June 2)
Jeremy Ross, Literacy Lead Teacher (June 2)

2. Met with the Board of Education

Tom Ferris, Chairman
Mark Walsh, Vice-Chairman
Charley Beresford, Trustee
Jim Holland, Trustee
Bev Horsman, Trustee
Elaine Leonard, Trustee
Michael McEvoy, Trustee
Peg Orcherton, Trustee
John Young, Trustee

3. Met with representatives of groups including:

District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC)
Greater Victoria Teachers' Association (via telephone)
School Principals and Vice-Principals
Aboriginal Nations Education Division

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Songhees Nation
CUPE 382, CUPE 947, and Allied Specialists Association
Achievement Contract Advisory Committee

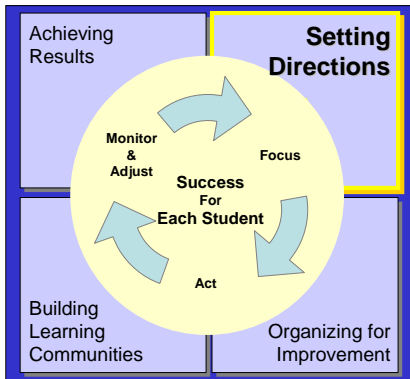
4. Met with school staff, students and parents at the following schools:

Braefoot Elementary
Campus View Elementary
Craigflower Elementary
Eagle View Elementary
George Jay Elementary
Hillcrest Elementary
Margaret Jenkins Elementary
Strawberry Vale Elementary
Tillicum Community School

Central Middle School
Glanford Middle School
Rockheights Middle School

Esquimalt High School
Oak Bay High School
Victoria High School
S J Willis Educational Centre

Setting Directions:



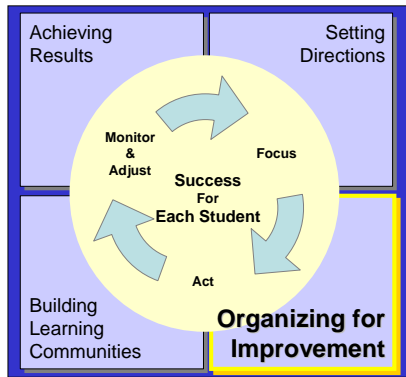
Expectations:

Continuously improving districts set directions that enhance success for each child. District priorities are identified through thorough examination of evidence from classroom, school, and district level sources. The focus on continuous improvement is evident in goals, objectives and related rationale. Goals and objectives are systematically reviewed and revised.

Observations

- A passion for and commitment to each student is evident at all levels in the system.
- The Review Team commends the District for the collective focus on the long-term improvement of graduation rates which is understood in the district as a K-12 responsibility.
 - Strong commitment is evident at schools to keep each student in the system.
 - Early Intervention is a key piece of the district's long-term goal.
 - There is a targeted focus on meeting the needs of each vulnerable student.
 - Staff work together to focus on the needs of each student.
- There is a focus on Literacy and Numeracy as foundational to student success.
- The District effectively uses a wide variety of evidence to inform decision making and establish priorities.
 - The district data collections system (Data At Your Desktop or DAD) which is unique in the province, is an excellent tool for providing schools with data to monitor and support improvement efforts.
- Strong involvement of parents in development of school and district plans.
 - Parents connect strongly to the Social Responsibility objective contained in the District Achievement Contract. However, Social Responsibility evidence is not yet consistently connected to goals and actions documented in school plans.
- Many plans clearly functioned as a road map to improvement and reflected the quality and depth of work occurring within the schools to improve student success. Some plans did not reflect the attention to a variety of evidence required to create a sense of urgency in relation to a continuous improvement for each student.

Organizing for Improvement:



Expectations:

Continuously improving districts organize actions 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. Actions selected to achieve goals are a blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking. These actions also include effectively differentiating resources, time and professional development to get results. The district connects staff and schools to build capacity. Actions are monitored and adjusted for effectiveness.

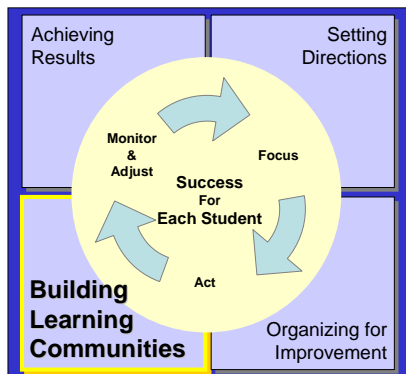
Observations

- Organization is a strength in the district.
 - The family of schools structure enhances coherence and alignment in the district. It is a key foundation to the district's architecture.
- Focus on learning.
 - The learning initiatives team model is highly regarded and its impact, especially with respect to Assessment for Learning, is well recognized in schools.
 - Schools appreciate the training and support provided for many initiatives, such as reading recovery, guided reading, assessment for learning, and restitution.
 - The support of the literacy and numeracy helping teachers (school leaders) is widely appreciated in the elementary and middle schools. Attention is moving to the secondary level.
- The District has a number of efforts in place to improve school completion, including:
 - The Graduation Rate Improvement Project (GRIP);
 - A focus on student-adult connectedness; and
 - A K-12 focus on school completion.
- Strong, coherent actions are in place at the district and school levels to improve the success of Aboriginal students, including:
 - The Circle of Connectedness initiative;
 - Community-based Aboriginal support workers; and
 - Providing funds for Aboriginal students beyond targeted funding.
- There is an induction process and established level of qualifications for special education teachers.
- Flexibility of Alternate Education programming is evident and is appreciated by parents, students, and staff.

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- A decentralized structure promotes flexibility and allows local decisions that reflect the specific needs of the school community. However, there is a potential lack of consistency in program delivery and an understood need to maintain an appropriate balance.
- There is significant growth in the French Immersion program in the district. This will require continued attention to student attendance patterns.
- A variety of Programs of Choice are evident and valued in the district. The Team encourages the District to continue to consider the potential for competition among schools for students and resources, which may distract from the collective commitment required to support the success of each child.
- Efforts to monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives continue to be developed and refined. The District is acknowledged for its efforts to expand the way it tracks evidence as it considers the efficacy of emerging practices.

Building Learning Communities



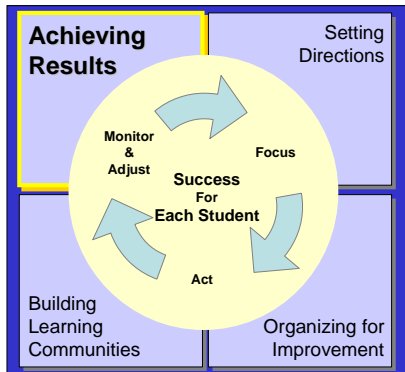
Expectations:

In continuously improving districts there is a shared vision for and a 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. Ongoing parent involvement is embedded in district culture. The district makes public their plans and progress. They collaborate and communicate in multiple ways about their work. Input and dialogue is actively sought and valued district-wide.

Observations

- A strong team-based approach exists in the district.
 - Distributed leadership is evident across district initiatives.
 - The Education Partners Council is a good vehicle for dialogue about issues and the work to improve student success.
- The family of schools model is creating a sense of community within the District.
 - There is evidence of good transition plans and professional development between schools.
- Diversity is respected across programs.
- Positive, collaborative relationships exist to support the success of Aboriginal students.
 - Enhanced Aboriginal Education is embraced by all staff.
 - Activities such as school- and district-based celebrations and dinners are promoting positive relationships with the Aboriginal communities.
 - There is evidence of continued efforts to build relationships and collaborate with the Songhees and Esquimalt nations.
- Parents are actively engaged at the school and district levels.
 - The engagement and commitment of parents goes beyond fundraising.
 - DPAC has a strong working relationship with district leadership.
 - Parents are involved in the development of district and school plans.
- A number of partnerships exist or are developing with community services such as the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Parks and Recreation, Camosun College, and the Lions Club.

Achieving Results:



Expectations:

Improving districts continuously improve results. They monitor progress and make adjustments in key areas of their work to improve results over time – for individual students, groups of students, schools and the district.

Observations

- There are significant examples of improved student success in the district and the District is particularly commended for increased literacy achievement at the elementary level, higher levels of Aboriginal student success, an improving graduation rate and a strong downward trend in school leavers.
- Norms, values and school cultures regarding student retention are changing and students are being supported to stay in school, complete more courses and achieve success. Graduation Rate Improvement Project (GRIP) is an essential component in the District's public commitment to each student's success.
- Schools are increasing attention to the consideration of a range of ways that students can demonstrate success. This is an essential element in the development of an inclusive and supportive environment for the diverse range of learners.
- The District is not satisfied with the current graduation rate. The District is clear in its expectation that achieving results at or near the provincial average "is no longer acceptable" as an indicator of success.
- Efforts are being made to improve school completion rates, particularly for Aboriginal students.
- There is increasing attention at both the school and district levels to disaggregating student results and to considering possible cause and effect relationships. The Review Team supports the District's efforts to ensure that this system-wide effort is fully reflected in all schools.

Recommendations

In order to sustain and enhance the significant progress made and move to the next level in the District's commitment to success for each student, the Review Team believes that students in Victoria will benefit from strategic attention to the areas outlined below. This may require the initiation of new actions or further refinements to initiatives already in place.

- Build common language and expectations around:
 - continuous improvement and, at some schools, a sense of urgency to move beyond average and above average results;
 - vulnerable students and the range of supports required; and
 - Social Responsibility as a condition for learning rather than an end in itself.
- Develop a systematic research and evaluation process to assess interventions and initiatives for their overall impact on the district and their effectiveness in improving success for students. This will allow for timely refinement or elimination of those initiatives that are no longer achieving the expected results.
 - Support schools in using school-based evidence to monitor incremental improvements and assess the effectiveness of actions.
 - Evaluate the consistency and effectiveness of delivery of support for particular groups of students (e.g., special needs, ESL, Aboriginal) across schools.
 - Continue to consider the sustainability of the French Immersion program under its current parameters.
- Ensure that school plans and evidence contained in them focus on the most important priorities to improve student success.
 - Assist schools in refining processes used to consider evidence of student learning, including information from provincial and district levels as well as school-based assessments and teacher professional judgment
 - Deepen the dialogue between senior district administrators and staff within each school about priorities and actions related to improving student success.
- Celebrate and share throughout the district strategies that are making a difference to individual students and learner cohorts at specific schools in order to support the replication of best practices.
 - Enhance the use of assessment for learning and differentiated instruction.
 - Build on the family of schools model to further engage parents and teachers in making connections and supporting transitions.
 - Support efforts at all levels to work collaboratively with community organizations to help vulnerable students and to deepen community engagement in early learning initiatives.

Conclusion

The Review Team commends the District for the focused commitment to each student's success and the demonstrated ability of staff to reflect on the effectiveness of current practices. There is a sense of optimistic dissatisfaction, optimism and justifiable pride with emerging improvements and dissatisfaction with the status quo, knowing that improvement for each student is not yet a reality.

The District has developed a collaborative and dedicated culture that promotes innovative, thoughtful and coherent educational practices and has implemented a number of promising initiatives in recent years. While the overall impact of current initiatives will need to be monitored over time, the Review Team is confident that the District has both the commitment and the capacity to do the work that will lead to continuous improvement for students across the district.

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. 61 (Greater Victoria).

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.