

District Review Report

School District No. 23 (Central Okanagan)

February 16 - 19, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Julie MacRae, Superintendent, School District No. 72 (Campbell River)

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District Name:	Central Okanagan
District Number:	23
Superintendent:	Dr. Ron Rubadeau
Date of Visit:	February 15-19, 2004
Team Chair:	Mrs. Julie MacRae, Superintendent, SD 72 (Campbell River)
Team Members:	Bruce Beairsto, Superintendent, SD 38 (Richmond) Ron Broda, Parent SD 63 (Saanich) Agnes Casgrain, Principal, SD 82 (Coast Mountains) Corrine Gilchrist, Director of Instruction, SD 05 (Southeast Kootenay) Judy Halbert, Lead Director, Ministry of Education Renee Hislop, Teacher, SD 37 (Delta) Gloria Raphael, Principal, SD 61 (Greater Victoria) Gail Walraven, Vice Principal, SD 57 (Prince George) John Woudzia, Asst Superintendent, SD 40 (New Westminster)

Context

School District 23 (Central Okanagan) serves the communities of Kelowna, Westbank, Oyama, Peachland, Ellison, Ewings Landing, Winfield and Lakeview. The School District provides a comprehensive education program to 22,000 students in 29 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 5 secondary schools and 3 alternate education sites. Student enrollment is declining by approximately 1% annually, a trend which is expected to continue through to 2010.

The School District has implemented a strategic reorganization of facilities and organizational structures. With the accompanying changes in staff responsibilities, the district is well positioned to move forward with its continuing efforts to improve student achievement.

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Summary of Process

The purposes of the district review are to:

- Review school district and school achievement data;
- Review the school district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- Determine the capacity of the school district to support schools in improving student achievement;
- Make recommendations to the school district and to the minister about improving student achievement; and
- Identify promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools in their plans to improve student achievement.

In conducting the review of the Central Okanagan, The District Review Team:

- Were introduced to members of the district staff on the first evening;
- Participated in an initial meeting focused on an overview of key programs and the accountability contract. The district leadership team including members of the Board of School Trustees, representatives from the CO Principals and Vice Principals Association, the CO Teachers' Association, the CO Parent Advisory Committee. Westbank First Nations, the Okanagan Nation Alliance, and the School Planning Council from Mount Boucherie Secondary School.
- Reviewed school plans and the 10 points of inquiry with the School Planning Councils at the following schools, South Rutland, Pearson Road, Bankhead, Peter Greer, Rutland Elementary, Belgo Preschool, Quigley Preschool, Rutland Senior Secondary, Central School Storefront, Shannon Lake, George Elliot Secondary, Glenrosa Middle School, Dr. Knox Middle School, Rutland Middle School, Anne McClymont Elementary School, Raymer Elementary, Casorso Elementary, Ellison Elementary, Black Mountain Elementary, Glenmore Elementary, South Kelowna Elementary, Peachland Elementary, Chief Tomat Elementary, Rose valley Elementary, Dorothea Walker, Okanagan Mission Secondary, Spring valley Middle School, K.L.O. Middle School, and Hudson Road Elementary;
 - Met with the Aboriginal Education Committee;
 - Met with the Westbank First Nations;
 - Attended a meeting with the First Nations Advocates; and
 - Met with representatives of the COPAC.

The Team provided a de-briefing to the district leadership team and the Board of Trustees at the conclusion of its review.

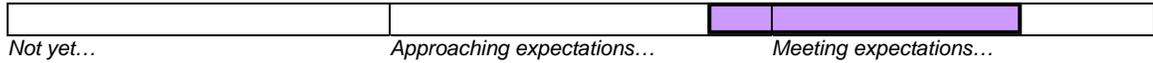
The District Review Team appreciated the warm hospitality of the district and the comprehensive material provided by both the district and the schools.

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Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*

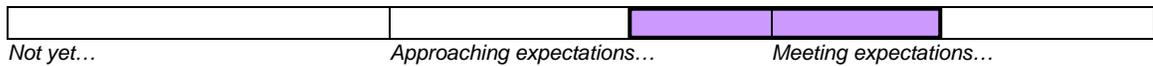
Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



- The district and schools have goals that are based on evidence, relevant to their local context and focused on student achievement.
- Some schools have specified measurable objectives to support the achievement of their goals.

2. *Rationale:*

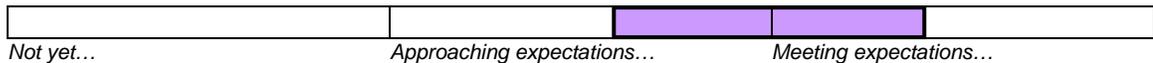
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



- District goals are derived from relevant data.
- Most schools based their goals on an analysis of data.
- Some schools were unable to explain the connection between their data, their goals, and their objectives for improving student achievement.

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.



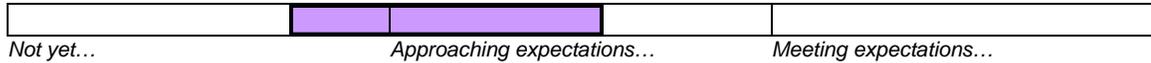
- The district uses a wide range of data including school marks, provincial assessment, standardized tests and other summative measures to periodically evaluate progress.
- A few schools are using curriculum based classroom assessment information to monitor progress and inform instruction in an ongoing way. This is a practice upon which the district could build.

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4. *Strategies:*

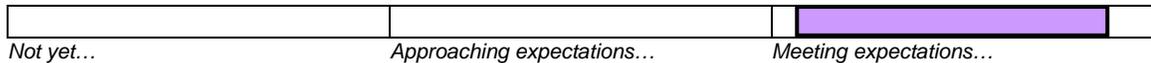
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



- The district has articulated ambitious and relevant organizational strategies and processes.
- To maximize the effectiveness of these organizational strategies, the district needs to be explicit in identifying and promoting instructional strategies connected to student achievement goals.
- Although most schools have goals focused on improving student achievement, few schools have defined specific instructional strategies to realize these goals.

5. *Structures:*

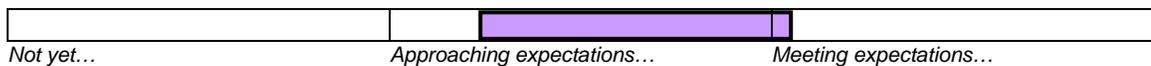
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



- The district has differentiated funding and staffing formulas to meet the diverse needs of individual school communities.
- The “Achieving a Necessary Future” initiative has reduced primary class size in selected schools to address the needs of the most vulnerable children.
- A three-year rule has been implemented to improve graduation rates.
- The district needs to monitor the impact of these structural changes for both intended and unexpected results.
- The district has recently reorganized the responsibilities of the district leadership team to support the student achievement goals and to improve linkages K-12.
- Many schools have made structural changes (time, resources, personnel) to support the implementation of their goals.

6. *Results:*

Improving districts and schools monitor results at the classroom, school and district levels, and make adjustments accordingly.



- The district has established some clear performance targets.
- The district is using standardized norm-referenced assessment to monitor progress on an annual basis.
- The district has centralized mechanisms to provide performance data to schools.
- Some schools are beginning to use performance standards as an important source of data to both monitor results and to inform instruction.

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7. *Communication:*

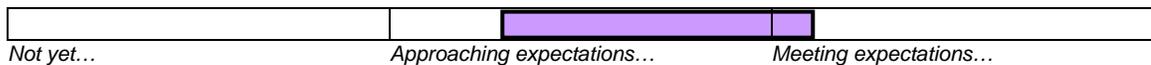
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



- The district has a variety of ways to share information with families and the community.
- Some schools have developed effective means of soliciting input from parents and the community.
- The district and schools need to be diligent in sharing with Aboriginal advocates the responsibility for two-way communication with Aboriginal families.
- The district and schools need to make student learning a central focus of communication.
- The district can enhance student achievement by developing more systematic ways for schools to learn from each other through sharing goals, strategies, and promising practices.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence:*

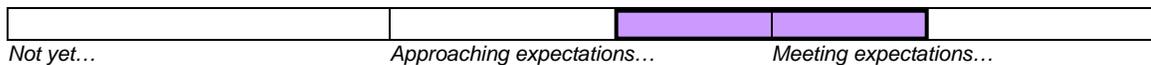
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.



- While there is a strong connection between school and district plans, school plans also reflect the unique needs of their community.
- The focus on student achievement would be strengthened if there were sustained opportunities for purposeful dialogue among schools about their goals, strategies and results.
- School planning councils expressed appreciation for the willingness of trustees, the superintendent and the leadership team to engage in meaningful dialogue about the school growth plans.

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.



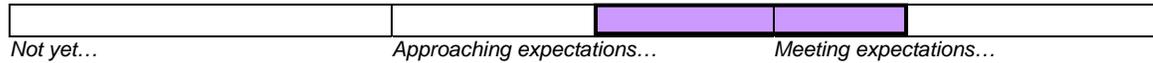
- All schools have well-established school planning councils and there is an inclusive approach for improving student achievement.
- Few schools have developed strategies for engaging aboriginal parents.
- The district has provided leadership for the development of school planning councils.
- The support of COTA has been acknowledged as instrumental in the effective implementation of school planning councils.

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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.



- District leaders have a powerful vision for improving student achievement.
- Increased opportunities for systematic and shared professional inquiry would strengthen the District as a learning community.
- The new K-12 district leadership structure may help develop the capacity for collaborative learning between and among schools.
- Principals are providing effective leadership focused on student learning.
- More district-wide teamwork will enhance the strong leadership displayed by principals, parents and teachers in individual schools.
- Some schools are functioning well as collaborative learning communities.

Strengths

Central Okanagan is a district with a clear vision for improving student achievement. The team observed many strengths. They include:

- There are caring, committed and capable people at all levels in the district community.
- Partner groups display a respectful, constructive relationship with each other.
- There is a constructive bias for action on the part of the board and senior staff in implementing the vision articulated in the superintendent's position papers.
- The superintendent and trustees meet with every school planning council for substantive dialogue about their improvement plans.
- Aboriginal Advocates have played a key role in developing a positive connection between schools and aboriginal students and their families.
- Central Programs and Services provides a comprehensive, innovative and well-organized set of services to students.
- The district has developed a strong communication mechanism for the home learners' program.
- The apprenticeship and career programs provide a wide range of opportunities for students.

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Promising Practices

The team observed a number of promising practices that may be useful to other districts in improving student achievement. They include:

- American Sign Language as a Second Language option for students
- Development and implementation of a Kindergarten / Grade One Screener to identify “at risk” children at the earliest possible age
- Consortium of on-line learners (COOL Schools)

In addition, the team believes that the following initiatives are worthy of note. These initiatives are in the early stages of development; their impact has yet to be fully assessed.

- The “Achieving a Necessary Future” initiative in primary classrooms in selected schools (lower class size; no combined grades; targeted staff development; no student teachers)
- The “Raising the Bar” initiative (grade ten students having a maximum three years to graduate in their secondary school)
- The School District Pre-School Partnership initiative

Recommendations

To strengthen and intensify the efforts and focus of the district, the team offers the following recommendations.

Assessment

To improve student learning and to inform instruction, there needs to be a balance between assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning. The district has a well-developed approach to assessment of learning and assessment for learning is beginning to emerge.

The team recommends the district actively promote the concept of assessment *for* learning by supporting teachers and principals in increasing the use of classroom-based assessment to inform instruction on an ongoing basis.

Instructional Strategies

In order to have an impact on student achievement, carefully selected instructional strategies, connected to the school goals and objectives, must be implemented.

The team recommends that the district increase the focus on instruction and support all schools in identifying and implementing instructional strategies that connect directly to their goals. Further, the team recommends an on-going dialogue about the effectiveness of strategies to improve student learning.

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The team recommends that schools identify instructional strategies in the school growth plan template.

District Learning Community

The team notes that there are many examples of outstanding practices in schools.

The team recommends that the district develop an inquiry-based approach to improving student learning by building mechanisms that enable schools to learn from each other.

Aboriginal Achievement

The team recognizes that there have been deliberate efforts to improve relationships with the Aboriginal community. These efforts must be sustained.

The team recommends that the district recognize that improving the achievement of all aboriginal students is a shared responsibility and must continue to be a major focus.