

District Review Report

School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast)

May 14 - 17, 2006

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Don Truscott, Superintendent, School District No. 35 (Langley)

District Review Report

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District Name:	Sunshine Coast
District Number:	46
Superintendent:	Stewart Hercus
Date of Visit:	May 14-17, 2006
Team Chair:	Don Truscott, Superintendent, SD 35 (Langley)
Team Members:	Dan Boudreault, Superintendent, SD 85 (Vancouver Island North) Dana Arthurs, Parent, SD 79 (Cowichan Valley) Patricia Horstead, District Principal, SD 42 (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows) John Pusic, District Coordinator, SD 35 (Langley) Deborah Ralston, Teacher, SD 74 (Gold Trail) Gillian Wilson, Principal, SD 69 (Qualicum) Afton Wright, Senior Evaluation Advisor, Ministry of Education

Context

School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) last received a District Review in 2002/2003.

The Sunshine Coast is located 30 kilometres northwest of Vancouver and stretches 96 kilometres along the picturesque eastern shore of Georgia strait. The District serves a student population of 3,965 students with enrollment in 10 elementary and 4 secondary schools. There are 3,803.3 FTE which includes 14 fee-paying students. Enrollment has declined by 176 students this year and further predictions of a decrease are expected in the future. Approximately 11 percent of students are of Aboriginal ancestry including 170 from the Sechelt Indian Band.

The District offers full programs at the secondary level in each of the extended communities: Gibsons, Sechelt and Pender Harbour. The Sunshine Coast Alternative School offers students educational opportunities across the coast through a variety of locations and programs.

The ten neighbourhood elementary schools are nestled in the core areas of Langdale to Madeira Park. Generally, school-based decision-making, budgeting and local context contribute to the uniqueness of each school.

The District's 400 plus skilled employees work as a team to create a learning environment that fosters respect and increases the opportunity for ongoing success. The District's education partners value the importance of nurturing positive working relationships and appreciate the diversity of each community and neighbourhood school.

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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. The specific purposes of the review are to:

- review school district and school achievement data;
- review the school district accountability contract, Aboriginal Education enhancement agreement (if applicable) 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 the Minister about improving student achievement;
- identify promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools in their plans to improve student achievement.

At the beginning of the visit, the Team met with senior management, district staff and school administration representatives and the chair of the Board of Trustees.

The Team was presented with a comprehensive overview of the District, its programs and its 2005/06 District Performance Plan.

The Team visited all 14 schools and met with School Planning Councils (SPCs).

Meetings were also conducted with the following groups:

- District Support Staff
- District Parents Advisory Council (DPAC)
- District Senior Management
- Board of Trustees, Chair and Vice-Chair

At the conclusion of the review, the Team Chair met with the Superintendent of Schools. The chair and members of the Team then met with representatives of the district and Board of Trustees to provide an overview of the District Review Report.

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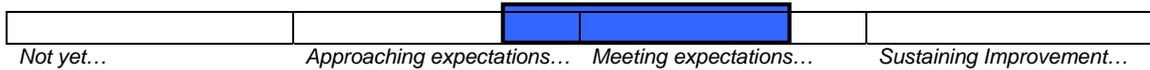
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Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Setting Directions: Goals and Objectives*

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

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
Goals and objectives have little focus on student achievement.	Some goals and objectives are based on evidence and focused on student achievement.	All goals and objectives are relevant, based on evidence, and focused on student achievement.	All goals and objectives are relevant, based on a range of evidence, and focused on student achievement. Goals and objectives are systematically reviewed and revised. Consideration is given to all students.



- The district goals are focused on student achievement.
- The District Performance Plan is very broad in scope.
- Most school goals are based on evidence and focused on student achievement.
- Some school plans have broad goals but have not identified specific objectives (the Team observed that provision for objectives has been added to the 2006/07 school plan template).

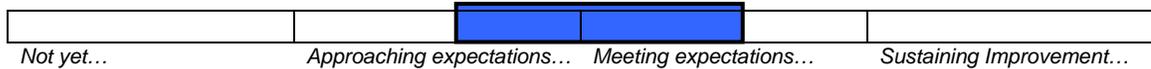
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2. *Setting Directions: Rationale*

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

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
Reasons for the selection of goals and objectives appear to be based on little consideration of evidence from data.	There is some evidence that the reasons for the selection of goals and objectives are based on relevant data.	Reasons for the selection of goals and objectives are based on evidence from a variety of sources and focused on student achievement.	Reasons for the selection of goals and objectives are consistently based on evidence from a variety of sources and focused on the achievement of all students.



- The District uses a variety of data for goal selection.
- In some schools, an evidence-based rationale for selection of some goals was not clear. In many cases, unclear rationales and related evidence were explained in conversations.

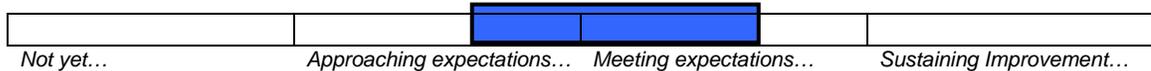
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3. *Setting Directions: Data (Evidence)*

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 objectives and is used to monitor progress.

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
It is unclear what data are used to determine areas of need and plan for improvement.	Evidence from data is used or beginning to be used to determine areas of need, plan for improvement, and monitor progress.	The district and schools consistently analyze classroom, school, district, and provincial data sources to determine areas of need, plan for improvement, and monitor progress.	The district and schools consistently analyze classroom, school, district, and provincial data sources to determine areas of need, plan for improvement, and monitor progress of all students. Data are disaggregated, participation rates are considered, and trends are tracked over time.



- District and most school goals are based on a variety of evidence.
- Schools are starting to have conversations around authentic assessment (Performance Standards, PM Benchmarks, DART, DRA).
- The District is in the process of implementing a district-wide assessment program (Northwest Evaluation Association - NWEA).
- Some schools are beginning to disaggregate data to respond to student learning.
- The District is moving to support schools with their analysis of evidence and implementation of relevant strategies.

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4. *Organizing for Improvement: Strategies*

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

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
Strategies are not connected to school and/or district goals and objectives.	The district and schools have improvement strategies in place with some connection to goals and objectives.	The district and schools have practical, research-based strategies in place to achieve goals and objectives. Strategies link to staff development and other improvement efforts. There is evidence of monitoring and adjusting strategies as required.	The district and schools have practical, research-based strategies in place to achieve goals and objectives. Strategies are in place to address areas of highest need and link to staff development and other improvement efforts. The district and schools consistently monitor and adjust strategies as required.

		[Progress Bar]	
<i>Not yet...</i>	<i>Approaching expectations...</i>	<i>Meeting expectations...</i>	<i>Sustaining Improvement...</i>

- Literacy strategies are well developed and varied. These are being introduced in the Primary grades.
- The Learning Community Team structure provides for flexibility in developing and implementing best practices relevant to school needs.
- The District and schools promote individual and school professional development.
- The District provides specialized training for teachers and support staff in identified areas of need.
- Monitoring and adjusting of strategies has lead to the creation of additional staff support from the District to improve student achievement.
- Preschool and school readiness programs are well established, highly regarded and valued across the district and community.

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5. *Organizing for Improvement: Structures*

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

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
The district and schools have not aligned structures to support school and/or district goals and objectives.	The district and schools have some structures in place to support school and/or district goals and objectives.	The districts and schools have structures in place to support school and/or district goals and objectives. Structures support areas of highest need and align with strategies.	The districts and schools have structures in place to support school and/or district goals and objectives. Structures support the areas of highest need and align with strategies. Structures are consistently monitored and adjusted as required.

<i>Not yet...</i>	<i>Approaching expectations...</i>	<i>Meeting expectations...</i>	<i>Sustaining Improvement...</i>
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- District positions, resource allocations, and professional development were created and are focused on student achievement.
- The District’s Learning Community Team provides a structure that promotes best practices in schools.
- Many schools have differentiated time and resources to develop structures to support goals and objectives.
- The District is implementing a district assessment instrument to identify trends in student achievement for deeper understanding of student needs.
- Aboriginal technology funds provide equipment for teachers to support students.

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6. *Organizing for Improvement: Coherence/Alignment*

In improving districts, there is a connection between school and district goals and objectives. School uniqueness and district directions are both valued. Schools connect with other schools to build capacity.

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
There is little connection between school and district plans, and there is little evidence of efforts to develop connections.	The district and schools are developing connections between school and district plans.	Connections between the district and schools are interactive and reflect both school uniqueness and district directions.	Connections between the district and schools are interactive and reflect both school uniqueness and district directions. Schools connect with other schools to build capacity.



- The District allows for individual autonomy of schools in pursuit of meaningful and relevant goals for their students.
- Opportunities exist for schools to connect and share best practices.
- The district goals reflect school plans.
- SPCs present plans annually to the school board for feedback and approval.

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7. *Building Learning Communities: Dialogue and Communication*

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

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
There is no consistent approach to communicating about student achievement.	The district and schools communicate about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made.	The district and schools communicate in multiple ways about improving student achievement. There are opportunities for dialogue, and community input is valued.	The district and schools communicate in multiple ways about improving student achievement. There are ongoing opportunities for dialogue, and community input is actively sought and valued. These practices are embedded in school and district culture and are sustained over time.



- The District collaborates with a variety of community agencies and partners to support children and families.
- Alternative, Aboriginal and Special Education programs partner with various agencies to support the needs of individual students.
- The District and many schools use a variety of multimedia strategies to communicate with the community.
- The District reports annually to the community through the media.
- A number of schools are finding effective ways of communicating with their community.

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8. *Building Learning Communities: Parent Involvement*

Improving districts and schools work with all parents to improve student achievement.

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
There is little evidence of parent involvement. Few ideas are sought or heard in setting goals and working collaboratively to improve the achievement of all students.	Some groups of parents have a role in setting goals and working collaboratively with schools and the district to improve the achievement of all students.	Parents, individually and collectively, are actively involved in setting goals and are working collaboratively with schools and the district to improve the achievement of all students.	Parents, individually and collectively, are actively involved in setting goals and are working collaboratively with schools and the district to improve the achievement of all students. Efforts to engage less active parents as well as specific groups of parents are evident. Parental involvement is embedded in school and district culture and sustained over time.



- At most schools, SPCs are actively engaged in the formulation and implementation of the school plans. Some schools have exemplary practices.
- Involvement of DPAC in the development of the District Performance Plan was not apparent.

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9. *Building Learning Communities: Leadership*

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.

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
There is little evidence of collaborative leadership.	There is some evidence of collaborative leadership.	Leadership is collaborative at all levels of the system with a shared commitment to improving student achievement.	Leadership is collaborative at all levels of the system with a shared commitment to improving student achievement. Efforts to build and sustain leadership capacity at all levels are evident.



- Exemplary educational leaders were observed at the district and school levels.
- The Learning Communities Team (LCT) structure provides opportunities for district and school-based leadership.
- Many schools have parents providing leadership and support in a variety of areas.
- Opportunities for student leadership exist through a variety programs.
- The District has leadership programs to build capacity.
- In some schools, evidence of distributed leadership was not observed.

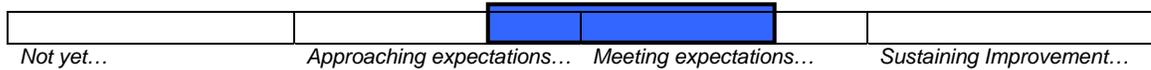
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10. Achieving Results

Improving districts and schools improve results. They monitor and make adjustments in key areas of student achievement – in classrooms, schools and the district.

Not yet	Approaching expectations	Meeting expectations	Sustaining improvement
There is little evidence of monitoring results and adjusting to improve student achievement.	The district and schools are beginning to monitor results and make adjustments to improve student achievement.	The district and schools monitor results and make adjustments to improve student achievement. There is evidence of improving results.	The district and schools consistently monitor results and make adjustments to improve student achievement. There is evidence of improving results over time.



- Schools use assessment data to plan for and adjust teaching and learning.
- The District annual monitoring system report includes recommendations for the board, District and schools to improve student results.
- There is evidence of improving student results in some areas.

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Strengths

The team recognizes the district for the following strengths:

- The District Overview Committee's support of best practices in Special Education
- The District's alternative support programs and interventions
- The Learning Community Team program
- The commitment to ongoing professional development
- Aboriginal student support programs
- Healthy active living programs
- Respect for the uniqueness of schools and support for local autonomy
- The active engagement of schools in meaningful discussions and reflection around assessment and data sources
- The positive relationship between schools, DPAC and the district leadership team.

Promising Practices

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

- Comprehensive alternative programs (K-12)
 - meaningful prevention, intervention and support in life's transitions
- Early Years Programs and Services – birth through 6 years old
- School-based partnership with a local cable television outlet highlighting communication between district and community
- Innovative aboriginal programs, such as:
 - TRACKS
 - Sechelt Nation language instruction – *Sháshishálhem*.

Recommendations

The team respectfully offers the following recommendations for the district:

Setting directions

- review the format of the district accountability contract template to reduce complexity and increase clarity;
- narrow district goals and include specific and focused objectives;

Organizing for improvement

- expand the use of performance standards to support achievement goals;
- engage in further dialogue regarding the analysis of district and school data to identify trends over time and monitor/adjust for student achievement;

Building learning communities

- continue the use of technology to promote communication of district and school plans;
- expand the sharing of best practices in communication within schools and amongst schools;
- increase parent and partner involvement in the development of the district performance plan.