



Superintendent's Report to the Board

July 2020

Preamble

Dear Trustees,

This report is intended to give you an overview on progress specific to the District Strategic Plan and ongoing related projects, as well as some recommendations for possible adjustments or changes in strategic direction. It will also provide some general updates and next steps coming from our departments.

The Strategic Plan Tracking Form is also attached for your further consideration. Note that each set of Outcomes and Strategies comes with Notes/Details where senior staff has commented on District progress. As well, each item's Status has been assessed by senior staff on a four-point scale as follows:

Not started/needing attention=1 Introduced=2 Approaching success=3 Success=4

The intention of the scale is to capture relative progress between Goals, and is not an indicator of true value or outcome completion. Most concepts on the list are abstract in nature and are therefore difficult to assess in this way, and some should not be deemed to be a "Success" because the standard for success should be constantly moving.

It should also be noted that focusing the organization on improving student outcomes in the most effective and efficient way gives employees a true sense of purpose, which positively impacts morale, which then in turn positively impacts both staff and student wellness. Conversely, improved wellness leads to more effective working and learning conditions, which in turn promote efficiency and encourage student growth. For these reasons, the three goal areas were designed to be interlocking and in full support of each other, and were not intended to be considered separately or in a particular rank order.

The 2019-20 School Year

I will start by saying that 2019-20 was quite a year. In addition to the so-called "normal operations", there were several significant events requiring our full attention. Right away in September there were several building issues, the most profound being the appearance of a mysterious odour in Parkview, which required the temporary closing of the school and the relocation of 190 students to available learning spaces in three other District school sites. This was followed by the transition to the provincial demographic system known as MyEducationBC, which on its own, is enough of a challenge for a school district to absorb in a given year. January found us immersed in the Long Term Facility Plan consultation process, with more than 30 public events to attend and volumes of stakeholder feedback to absorb. Then, of course, the COVID-19 arrived, vacations were cancelled, and staff poured themselves into preparing for Stage 5, Stage 4, and then Stage 3 in successive months, with all of the related communications between government, district, schools, and parents.

As much as this was a distraction from our regular work and the overall impact to student learning will take years to understand, there were some takeaways that will inform our practice going forward. First, we quickly got better at technology use. Even teachers who had been reluctant to use email were on-boarded to Teams and meeting with students online within a week. Second, our assessment conversations improved dramatically across the school district, especially at secondary. Teachers grappled with the new expectations and were soon reflecting on evidence of learning from a holistic and student-centered perspective, rather than just considering which tasks were completed and calculating what they were numerically worth. Third, the phone calls home at the beginning of Stage 5 were an incredible boon to relationships between schools and families. Some parents have reported that these were the longest conversations they had ever had with an educator. As one of our FNEC reps stated, “It’s too bad it took a pandemic to make that happen.” My hope is that the practice of calling homes becomes normalized across the District throughout all age groups, and not just something that happens in the primary years.

We are all heading into the summer break in a state of unknown. As mentioned in my various communications, we will be watching the pandemic evolve over the next several weeks and waiting for direction from the PHO and the Ministry of Education, at which point we will begin more specific planning and messaging. Each school has already undergone initial sessions to consider what Stage 2 and Stage 1 will look like, and if conditions in British Columbia remain intact, I am confident that we will be back to something approaching regular learning for most of next year. However, with neighbours to the south continuing to respond poorly to the crisis, many more variables remain in play, and it will be critical for us to stay flexible in our thinking.

Students First

The distraction of the pandemic (as well as the other fore-mentioned items) kept staff from getting at a number of initiatives in a more focussed manner. Still, there has been some progress in the Student’s First Goal area, with a revised current numerical rating of 3.0. The specific Outcomes have been mentioned in the spreadsheets, and recent revisions appear in green.

However, the stakeholder support for how much the District puts students first showed a strong gain over previous years, with 15% more responses appearing in the more favourable “Much and All” categories for a total of 78% of respondents indicating that we put Students First in our actions and decisions. It is likely that our more invitational Home Learning Opportunity strategy, coupled with thoughtful and supportive communications with students and parents, all helped move these perceptions forward.

Strategic Plan Survey Responses 2020

	Rarely or Never	Some of the time	Much of the time	All/nearly all of the time	Total Much and All
Students First	3.01%	19.19%	45.02%	32.78%	78%

There have been some encouraging gains in regard to student achievement. As described in the Strategic Plan Tracking Tool and on the Education Plan website, our [District results](#) vary depending on the Target. Six-Year Graduation Rates in the All Student category moved up slightly but remain below the provincial averages. The calculation metric was changed for this year to only include students who are residents of

British Columbia, which eliminated the thousands of international students who came to BC and did not graduate, effectively buoying the rest of the province by about 4%. This also at least partially explains why previous Grad Rates were at or above the provincial Graduation Rates as they were previously presented; we did not have enough foreign students to interfere with our results! On a very positive note, the Six-Year Graduation Rate for Indigenous students showed a nice gain, as did our Rate for Students with Special Needs, so that those local results are currently both above the provincial average.

Support for student reporting on Core Competencies will continue through the MyBlueprint program. Additional structures and strategies continue to be in place for literacy and numeracy, including the numeracy team and a full-time numeracy principal, and we remain optimistic about making gains in all areas due to improvements shown in our local assessments. It is too bad that the COVID-19 interrupted this year's learning progress, as we believe that the next round of FSA tests had the potential to be a breakout session for our students.

For the second year in a row (and for probably much longer than that), Inclusive Education was a category of interest during the budget conversations and beyond. Again, I believe the appropriate path for the Board to take would be to make specific revisions to the Strategic Plan that will help guide the District going forward in regard to Inclusive Education.

Again, the Education Plan will need to be updated to be in line with the Ministry expectations when these are published, and any specific assessments required should be included as well. Remember that the intention to also have local assessments included in our Plan, as these are easier to use formatively and therefore typically preferred by educators.

Recommendation: Changes to the Strategic Plan impacting Inclusive Education should be considered for the 2020-2021 school year.

Recommendation: Include the specific assessment strategies in the next iteration of the Education Plan.

Organizational Efficiency

This goal area has improved incrementally to an average score of 3.4. This was the area where we improved most dramatically over the last two years, therefore it makes sense that progress would taper for this year, especially with other pressing concerns so much at the forefront.

Again, Communication was deemed to be a strength in the most recent survey, with responses in the "Much and All" categories now up to 79%. In addition to our social media presence, the new websites, and the use of Constant Contact as key tools, there was an increased emphasis on getting the

word out regarding Parkview through the fall, and then again in the spring through the COVID-19 stages, which the stakeholders seemed to have noticed.

Decision-making also improved in the stakeholders' eyes, perhaps again due to heightened awareness and sensitive risk management in response to COVID-19 as well as the extensive consultation process in support of the Long Range Facilities Plan. Giving staff and the public a chance to meet the Board and staff goes a long way to building a relationship that is founded in trust. Considering where the District was in this regard not that long ago, getting 71% of responses in the "Much and All" category is an achievement.

Strategic Plan Survey Responses 2020

	Rarely or Never	Some of the time	Much of the time	All/nearly all of the time	Total Much and All
Information	2.22%	18.99%	40.40%	38.38%	79%
Decisions	3.12%	26.27%	49.53%	21.08%	71%

Other endeavours deserve mention. We have transitioned to MyEducationBC, which was a massive undertaking. The clean-up of the GL Coding has improved our understanding of actual costs. Several new Atrieve modules have been introduced. Operational plans for Education, Education Technology, and Communications has been joined Wellness Plan, and work on the Long-Term Facilities Plan has progressed. After dabbling with Teams as a communication tool during the MyEd transition and for much of the COVID-19 remote work, staff is considering adopting the platform for all internal communications, so that work files, emails, and texts would be housed in one place and easily organized and accessible. Note that the computer in the Mable Lake room is being replaced, as this is the most likely source of the recent Teams teleconferencing glitches.

The Board now has an approved Charter, and may wish to consider continuing with branding work recommended in the Strategic Plan now that stakeholder perceptions have moved forward. We are a new School District now and it may be time to think about a new identity.

The changes to the Budget Consultation Process were appreciated by most involved. Starting earlier and streamlining the process further may pay dividends, though this may also prove to be challenging if significant reductions are necessary due to the newly struggling economy.

Recommendation: Commence with branding work in the spring of 2021.

Recommendation: Move the Budget Consultation Meetings to earlier in the year, then streamline further if possible.

Culture of Health and Wellness

This goal area had seen the least amount of progress of the three prior to this year, but it has gained relative ground over the last twelve months for a current score of 2.8. The Wellness Plan has now been completed and approved. The formation of a District Wellness Committee has helped focus attention on this topic, and that committee is going to split into a Staff Committee and a Student Committee so each area of focus can get the full attention of its members. Activities have been ongoing to support staff, including expanded onboarding and mentorship activities, increased awareness of EFAP, the recent PATH workshop, as well as new staff appreciation events. There will be a second round the Guarding Minds Surveys this coming winter for all employee groups.

The LRFP may net some changes that will help improve student wellness. Currently, a typical Salmon Arm student will attend different schools for K-5, 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12, a series of transitions which leads to additional student anxiety and forces staff and students to constantly recreate supportive relationships. Further to this, space pressures in the Salmon Arm area resulting from increased enrollment and restored contract language will need to be addressed within the next two years, and this too will help alleviate anxiety.

Data from the most recent McCreary study confirms a number of concerns around student mental health. Of particular interest is the possible relationship between technology, sleep, and student wellness, all mentioned in the Technology Plan more than a year ago as an area of concern and future focus. It is time we design and initiate a cohesive District response to this issue.

Health and Wellness saw the biggest increase in the Strategic Plan Quick Survey. Making student wellness a priority rose 15% to 76% in the “Much and All” response categories. Again, this was likely a result of the thoughtful invitational approach to Home Learning opportunities, as well as the phone calls home and the overall sensitivity shown by the school staffs in regard to their COVID-19 supports and interactions with students. Making staff wellness a priority was the biggest growth area this year, with a whopping 26% increase up to 66% of responses in the “Much and All” categories. Again, it was likely that the pandemic responses, messaging, our accommodation processes, and a strong commitment to the “Gold Standard” safety plan developed by our Health and Safety Committee may have helped to move these perceptions forward in a dramatic fashion.

Strategic Plan Survey Responses 2020

	Rarely or Never	Some of the time	Much of the time	All/nearly all of the time	Total Much and All
Student Wellness	2.98%	21.25%	44.46%	31.31%	76%
Staff Wellness	5.97%	27.65%	40.32%	26.07%	66%

Recommendation: Continue to review the school configuration in the Salmon Arm area as part of the Long Range Facility Plan.

Recommendation: Create a comprehensive approach in support of online behaviour and sleep patterns for students.

In closing, after having two years with just lukewarm stakeholder recognition of District growth in response to the Strategic Plan, it seems a little ironic that after such a challenging year responses would look so vastly different. Distribution in the two previous years followed a normal curve with only a slight positive skew, which I had attributed to three factors. The first was the notion that, in the words of my statistics professor, “the universe reverts to the normal curve whenever it can.” The second was human nature and how difficult it is for people to change their mind. In our case, it would seem that the perception of the District after the DESC scandal and dismissal of the previous Board had been burned into stakeholders’ perceptions to the degree that incremental gains over time were not going to move the needle, and that it was going to take something incredibly profound to change people’s minds. The third, of course, is that we simply weren’t there yet, which is a possibility we must always consider in an organization that serves the public interest.

I am speculating that reasonable handling of an incredibly challenging scenario brought more participants to the survey to give their support, and that accounts for some of the difference. I am also speculating that these new results indicate that in the minds of many of our stakeholders, we are finally turning the corner as a School District.

Strategic Plan Survey Responses 2020

	Rarely or Never	Some of the time	Much of the time	All/nearly all of the time	Total Much and All
Total	3.46%	22.67%	43.95%	29.92%	74%

The Superintendent’s Report and Strategic Plan Tracking form are being shared with the Board of Education in DRAFT form to review at your leisure. I look forward to your questions and comments when we reconvene after summer break.

Sincerely,



Peter Jory

*Superintendent of Schools/CEO
School District No.83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap)*