



# District Plan *for* Student Learning 2009/2010



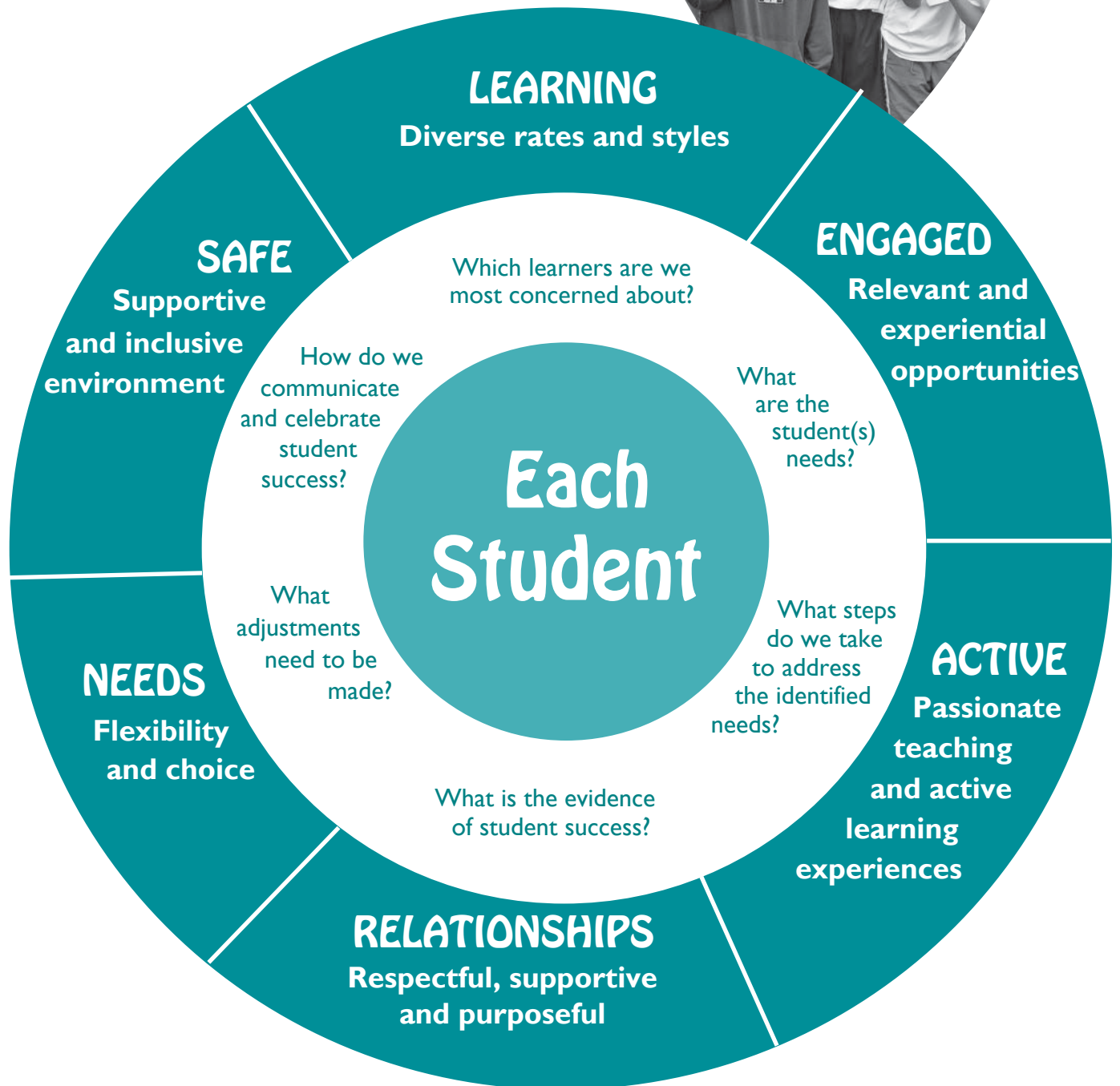
# Core Purpose

It is our collective responsibility as a school district to ensure the highest quality of learning experiences for all students, with a focus on student engagement, learning and development in a safe, inclusive environment.



# Assessment for Learning

Success for each student



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## Our Mission

To enable students to reach their intellectual, social, aesthetic and physical potential in challenging and stimulating settings which reflect the worth of each individual and promote mutual respect, cooperation and social responsibility.



## District Context

We value childhood as a unique and special time.

### Our Students

#### Enrollment

31,000	elementary students
25,000	secondary students
3,000	(FTE) adult education students
48,000	students in continuing education programs
3,000	students in distributed learning programs

#### Diversity

- 25% of K-Grade 12 students are designated ESL
- 60% speak a language other than English at home
- 126 languages have been identified in our schools
- 7% of elementary and secondary students are special education learners
- 9% of elementary students are French Immersion learners
- 4% of secondary students are French Immersion learners
- 16% of students participate in a school meal program
- 2,000 students attend full day kindergarten
- 4% of elementary students are Aboriginal learners
- 4% of secondary students are Aboriginal learners
- 2000 Aboriginal students representing 600 bands attend Vancouver schools

### Our Schools

- Our schools reside on Musqueam and Coast Salish Traditional Territory
- 74 elementary schools and 17 elementary annexes
- 18 secondary schools
- 7 adult education centres
- 1 Distance Education School at 2 locations  
1 elementary and 1 secondary
- district programs include early and late French Immersion (18), Mandarin bilingual, Fine Arts, Gifted and Montessori
- 56 district programs connected to our secondary schools addressing a wide range of needs from remedial to enrichment
- 12 Community School Teams
- 3 Junior Kindergarten classes

The Vancouver School District is a large, urban and multicultural school district that includes some of the most affluent and impoverished urban neighbourhoods in the country. This setting provides wonderful opportunities as well as serious challenges. The Vancouver School District is among the most diverse of public school systems in Canada, with an annual enrolment of approximately 56,000 students in Kindergarten to Grade 12. In addition, the Vancouver School District provides educational programs and services to full-time Adult Education and Continuing Education students. Our programs and services address extraordinary combinations of challenge, need, opportunity and potential that exist in every student we serve.

On the one hand, many children, due to poverty and other inhibitors, are excluded from the choices and opportunities that a city the size of Vancouver can offer. On the other hand, many students living in this urban environment are able to take advantage of opportunities to experience and learn from diverse cultures and reap the benefits of involvement with highly sophisticated and experienced arts and recreational groups that you would expect to find in a world-class city. Vancouver schools are involved in a wide range of partnerships with cultural, arts and service organizations. The district also offers a multitude of services and program options to meet student interests and needs.



“A safe and caring school is one in which there is a deep personal commitment to the core social values of justice, respect and compassion. Students must be able to observe and encounter these values in action in their daily lives, especially in the school setting.”

BC Ministry of Education. (2008, November). Diversity in BC Schools: A Framework

# The District Plan for Student Learning

**We believe in the provision of a wide range of programs, services and resources to meet the needs, interests and abilities of all learners.**

As indicated by the District Review Team, School District No.39 (Vancouver) has many excellent programs and initiatives either in place or underway. One of its challenges is to coordinate, connect and sustain these promising projects - to incorporate them into the culture of the district to enhance the success of each student.

Specifically, the Review Team recommended that the district articulate long term strategic directions to guide district work to improve student success. They noted that coherence and alignment with district directions and expectations were not clearly understood at all levels in the system. The Team recognized the strong focus on individual students in schools and observed that many schools are using formative assessment to inform decisions, actions and planning to support students. It was recommended that the district establish a consistent way to assess, monitor, and communicate the progress of all students and use formative and summative assessments combined with professional judgement to establish baselines for each student and school.

To this end, the district has refined the School Plan template to focus on success for each student and incorporate assessment for learning and the conditions for learning (LEARNs) as revealed in the district's Appreciative Inquiries. To align the goal setting and planning in schools with that of the district, the District Plan has been reformatted to follow the same template.

The focus on success for each student encompasses the district's diverse student population, inclusive of English Second Language, Special Needs and Aboriginal learners. This expectation of success for each learner is a collective responsibility and is integral to the core purpose of the District Plan. With a shared commitment in closing the gap in student achievement, increasing literacy for all students, the district will enhance the learning experiences for those whom the school system has been less effective.

Overwhelmingly students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members repeatedly told us that optimal learning takes place when the following conditions are in place:

**L**earning

**E**ngaging, Experiential

**A**ctive, Passionate Teaching

**R**elationships

**N**eed for Flexibility & Choice

**S**afety



## We value the diverse and evolving multicultural nature of Vancouver.

**We believe**  
that schools should  
provide a safe, secure  
and hunger-free  
environment.

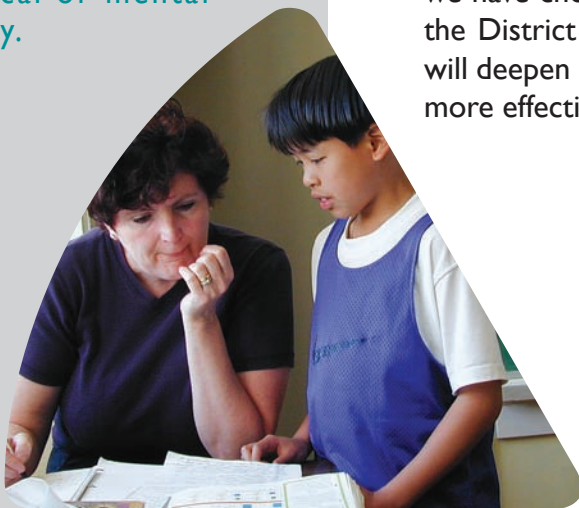
**We believe**  
that children should  
be empowered to  
recognize and exercise  
their rights.

**We believe**  
in equitable treatment  
for all individuals  
regardless of race,  
culture, gender, religion,  
socio-economic status,  
sexual orientation or  
physical or mental  
ability.

The district recognizes the achievement for many Aboriginal students is not at an acceptable level and is addressing this with a shared responsibility of commitment outlined in the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. The goals and strategies of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement are applicable and beneficial for all learners.

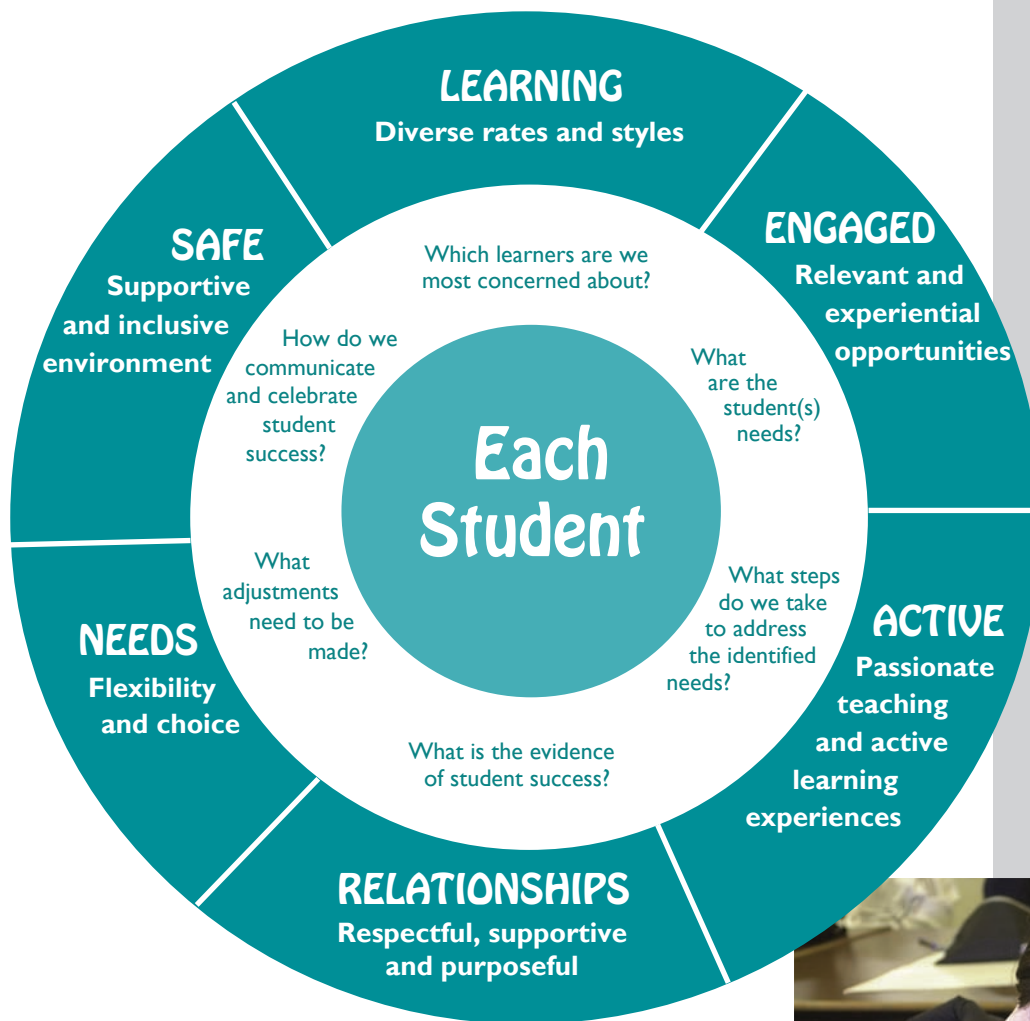
The District Plan identifies the district's expectation that strategies to support social-emotional learning and the maintenance of a safe, inclusive, socially responsible school climate be in place for all learners. As noted by the Review Team, Social Responsibility has been embedded in the culture of the district and is recognized by all partner groups as an area of strength. Social/ emotional learning, promotion of the mental health of our students and school climates that support social responsibility and diversity are recognized as being foundational to student success, rather than a stand alone goal. Focus on these areas is integral to student success in the district literacy goal. Data will continue to be collected through such strategies as school-based assessments, surveys and Ministry Satisfaction Surveys.

In the 2009/2010 District Plan, we focus on Literacy as our primary goal. We have chosen literacy for two reasons. The first is that it relates to our moral purpose. A persistent 15 to 20 % of our students are not yet meeting expectations in reading and writing. This is an area of significant concern as we know that the life chances of our students are seriously limited if they do not have Literacy skills. Our emphasis on Literacy is intended to increase the number of students who are able to meet and exceed expectations. The second reason we have chosen literacy as our goal is that it builds on a strength in the District as noted by the Review Team. In our District Plan we will deepen our focus and collect data in a consistent way in order to more effectively track students.



**We believe in equal opportunity and equal access to the best possible education in a supportive, positive and challenging environment.**

The major strategy we are going to emphasize is *assessment for learning*. We know that good classroom assessment practices have shown to be one of the most effective ways to improve achievement of all learners – and particularly those who are most at risk for not succeeding. Our intention is to provide support for schools in a sustained plan for in-service and professional development.





We value the contribution of each individual.

## What is Our Vision of Success for Learning for Each Student?

Our vision of success for each student, illustrated in the *Success for Each Student* graphic, is based on two complementary conceptual frameworks: Response to Intervention and Effective Behaviour Support. Each tier of this model represents increasingly intense services that are associated with increasing levels of learner needs. Interventions at all three levels are aimed at improving student response to instruction and improving student outcomes.

At the **Universal Intervention** level, each student refers to every student enrolled in a regular classroom. Assessment for learning, as well as summative assessments are components of teaching practice. Tier one represents high quality instruction and monitoring of student success to support social emotional functioning and cultural learning to enrich or extend learning experiences.

**Targeted Group Interventions** are determined by a collaborative School Based Team process. The assessment focus is increasingly narrow to determine the specific areas that are interfering with a student's ability to learn or demonstrate learning. Instruction is designed to increase success. Small group instruction may support learning, support social emotional functioning, enrich or restore cultural learning, and enrich or extend learning experiences.

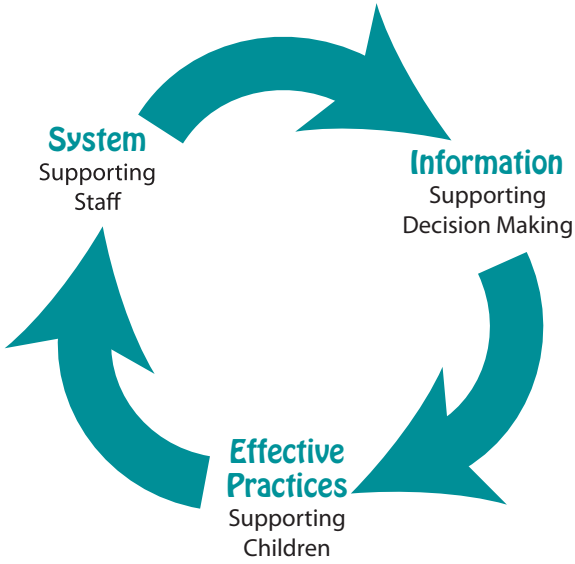
The *Success for Each Student* graphic represents an engagement of the entire system on the purpose of student success. Each tier represents the ways in which we organise our assessment and instruction cycles to monitor for student success.

**Intensive, Individual Intervention** refers to the set of services, supports, strategies and instructional approaches that are required to create conditions of success for students whose needs are highly defined. At this level, a highly individualised approach is taken to both assessment and instruction. Each intervention is carefully monitored for its effectiveness.

Children and youth need a wide variety of positive, engaging experiences and opportunities in order to learn and develop to their full potential.



# Success for Each Student



## Learning Systems

## Social Emotional. Behavioural Systems



**Intensive, Individual Intervention**

- Individual Students
- Assessment-based
- High Intensity
- May include a District class placement

**Targeted Group Interventions**

- School Based Team processes
- Some students
- Rapid response
- Learning Assistance,
- English Language Learner Support
- Aboriginal Education
- Gifted
- Early Intervention in Literacy

**Universal Interventions**

- All settings, All students
- Preventive, proactive
- Whole class assessment for learning
- Universal design for Learning/ Differential Instruction

**Intensive, Individual Intervention**

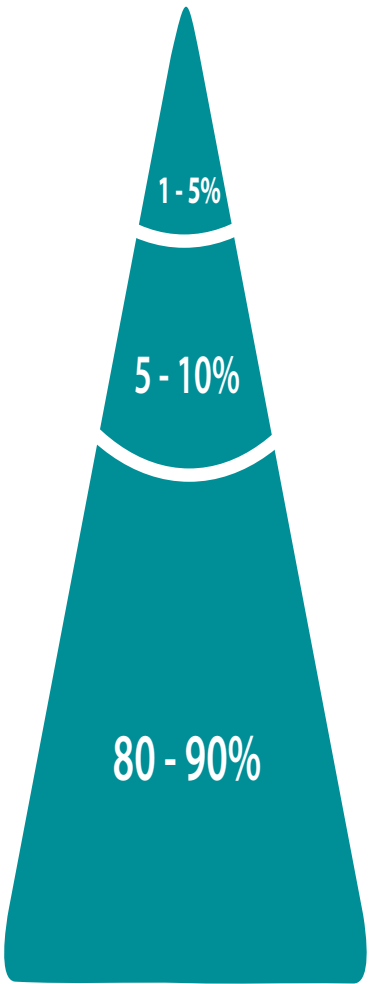
- Individual Students
- Assessment-based
- Intensive, durable procedures
- Wrap around
- May include a District class placement
- Support from Behaviour Strategies
- Consultant and/or STIBS workers

**Targeted Group Interventions**

- School Based Team processes
- Some students
- Rapid response
- Social Emotional Learning
- Restorative practices
- Social Skills instruction
- Functional Behaviour Assessment

**Universal Interventions**

- All Settings, All Students
- Preventive, proactive
- EBS school wide systems
- Positive Behaviour Support
- Social Emotional Learning
- Conflict resolution – Second Step
- Classroom Management – Alert Program





# Reflections on the 2008 - 2009 District Plan

We believe in a commitment to excellence.

## What were our goals?

The 2008-2009 District Plan focused on improvement of student achievement and development in each of these three areas.

- Social Responsibility
- Aboriginal Learners
- Literacy





# Social Responsibility

**We believe in cooperation, respect for others and development of social responsibility.**

The district's Social Responsibility goal was that "all students will demonstrate growth in social/emotional competence within a safe, socially responsible, inclusive school learning community". Our objectives focused on improving students' sense of safety and belonging, increasing students' active participation in their school communities, and improving the social/emotional development of all students, particularly those identified as vulnerable.

In 2008/09, the District Review Team's recognition that social responsibility was successfully embedded in our school cultures, along with the outcomes of our Appreciative Inquiry Process, confirmed that attention to the social/emotional needs of students and the maintenance of socially responsible school climates should no longer be a discrete district goal, but rather a district expectation for each school to maintain as it is so fundamentally important to success for each student.

On-going district support and school-based initiatives continue to support student safety and sense of belonging; assist schools in addressing the social/emotional and mental health needs of our students; and ensure that diversity is embraced and celebrated. Evidence gathered through our Safe School and Social Responsibility Survey of over 16,000 secondary students demonstrates that we have established increasingly positive school climates, increased adult responsiveness and increased student sense of safety and engagement; however, we must attend to students' skill development in key areas of respectful relationships and resisting risk behaviours. Through Ministry Satisfaction Surveys and various measures at the elementary level we have better understood the interrelationship between school climate and student development of social responsibility (see Appendix 1 and 2). Our success in these areas will be reflected in the achievements our students make in literacy and other areas of their learning, as well as in our on-going assessments of student social responsibility.



A recent analysis of more than 300 research studies on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) revealed that students enrolled in an SEL program ranked at least 10 percentile points higher on achievement tests than students not participating in SEL programs. Furthermore, students in these programs had significantly better attendance records, displayed more constructive and less disruptive classroom behaviour, liked school better, had better grade point averages, and were less likely to be suspended or otherwise disciplined.

*Weissberg & Durlak, 2005.*

*"According to a growing body of research, addressing the social and emotional needs of youth not only prepares students to learn, but also increases their capacity to learn."*

*Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2003).*

**We believe in the dignity of the individual and development of self-esteem.**

“A new meta-analysis reveals that SEL can improve academic performance by at least 11 percent!”

Weissberg, R.P. (2007, December). *Social and emotional learning for student success.*

## Social Responsibility as a District Expectation for All Learners

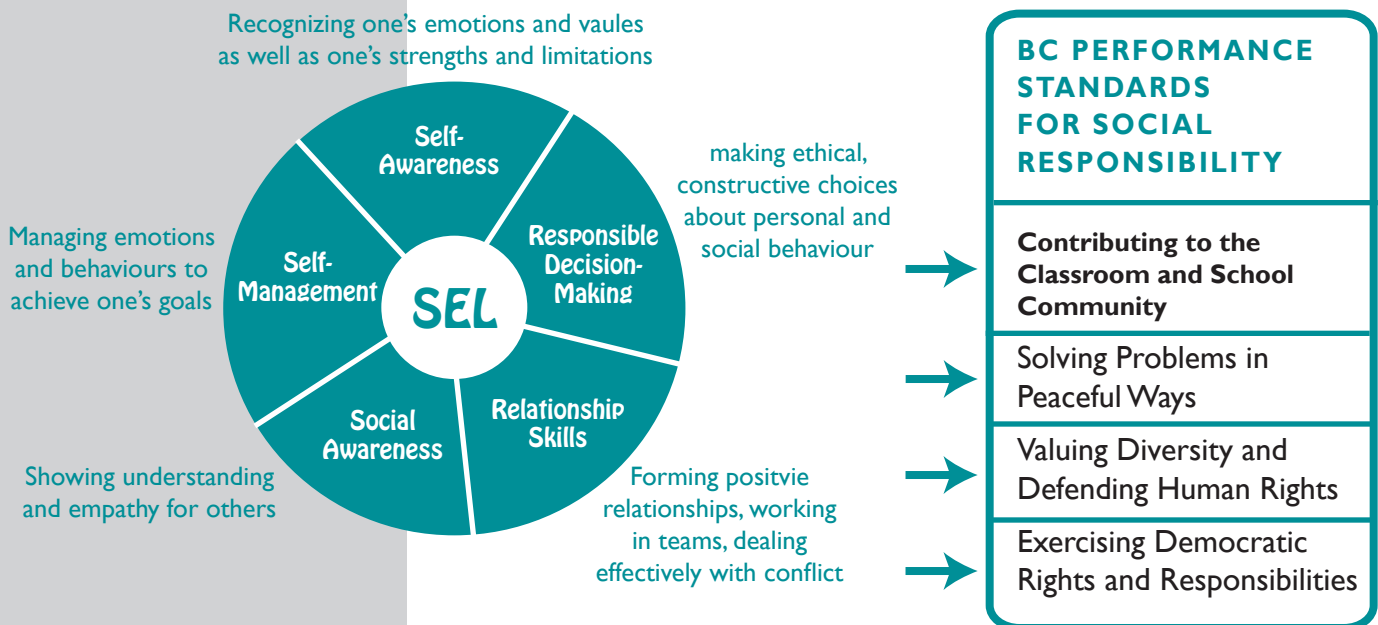
Research indicates that there are two interrelated core elements which, when intentionally addressed, strengthen students’ long term academic, social and vocational outcomes. The first element is creating and maintaining safe, positive and inclusive learning environments. The second is ensuring that direct instruction supports each student’s development of social/emotional skills in the five key competencies which underlie socially responsible behaviour.

### Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL is the process whereby children and adults develop essential social and emotional skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to:

### EXPECTATION:

All students will demonstrate growth in social/emotional competence within a safe, socially responsible, inclusive school community.

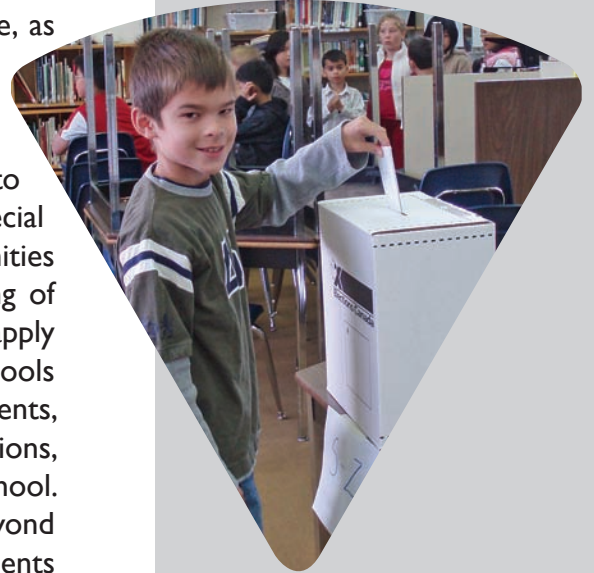


Research clearly demonstrates the significant role of SEL in promoting the healthy development and academic achievement of all students.

## We believe in fostering a sense of community

In our district, social responsibility has long been a core value, as reflected in the District Mission Statement. For the last five years social responsibility was a district goal, and for the vast majority of schools, also a school goal. Schools focused on creating inclusive, socially responsible learning communities while aiming to increase each student's sense of belonging and safety, paying special attention to the needs of vulnerable students. School communities emphasized a positive school climate, increased direct teaching of social/emotional skills, and provided students opportunities to apply those skills throughout the school and in the community. Schools established strategies to address the needs of vulnerable students, increase equity and inclusion, and support successful transitions, particularly the transition between elementary and secondary school. In the area of diversity, schools are continuing to move beyond tolerance and toward celebrating differences, such that students value diversity and appreciate their own unique qualities. Learning provides both a “window” to see other's lives and a “mirror” to reflect one's own culture and environment. Mental health promotion continues, as the district seeks to both align with emerging provincial and federal initiatives and to increase staff awareness and capacity to respond to student needs. (Please see Appendix 1 and 2 for key social responsibility district initiative findings at the elementary and secondary levels.)

As a result of the initiative in social responsibility, we have learned that the healthy development of students is best addressed through a continuum of promotion, prevention and intervention strategies, which are appropriate to each student's current level of development. Activities focus on building students' strengths while promoting resiliency and addressing issues of concern as they arise. School-based strategies aim to build students' sense of personal and social responsibility and engage students in contributing to their school, their neighbourhood and the broader community. Consistent with the BC Human Rights Code and district policies, schools and classrooms are inclusive environments which value all students and families regardless of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex or sexual orientation. Classroom programs and individual interventions are planned, both at the classroom level and as necessary for individual students, in collaboration with school, district and community resources.





**We value the strong commitment of staff and believe in their participation in all facets of the school system.**

*“Whether examining academic performance or involvement in a range of health behaviours, young people who feel connected to school, that they belong, and that teachers are supportive and treat them fairly, do better”*

*Libbey 2004, Journal of School Health*

In fact, key outcomes of the district-wide learning inquiries, as communicated in the acronym LEARNS reflect the widely held commitment to social responsibility. The learning inquiries confirmed that a key condition of learning is “strong relationships and a sense of belonging”. Relationships are at the core of a socially responsible learning community. As described in the final report of the Learning Inquiries, the relationships between staff and students are “inclusive, non-judgemental, respectful, encouraging, caring and compassionate, and trusting”. These relationships contribute directly to safe, supportive and responsive learning environments. In fact, the kind of school environment expressed in the acronym LEARNS supports the “process of social/emotional learning (SEL) through the creation of a safe, caring, and highly participatory learning environment where the SEL competencies are modeled, taught, and reinforced. SEL is based on an understanding that learning is a social process; therefore, relationships and emotions are central to the learning process. SEL is also based on the realization that feelings, thoughts, and actions are interrelated. For learning to be effective, the needs of the whole child must be addressed.” (Research Brief for Schools, University of Illinois, 2008)



# Aboriginal Learners

**We believe in being strong advocates for the rights of children.**

The 2008/2009 school year has been a transition year for the district, moving away from a 'stand alone' goal for Aboriginal learners to a shared responsibility for all learners. With a district focus on success for each student, the district commits to enhancing the academic success and ensures an inclusive and respectful environment for all Aboriginal learners. Therefore, the district's goals for literacy, social and emotional learning conditions and assessments of learning are inclusive of all learners.

The Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (AEEA) is an agreement between the Aboriginal Communities, the Vancouver Board of Education, and the Ministry of Education with a commitment to enhance the overall school experience for Aboriginal learners. The Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement will provide the direction for the district, focusing on three main goal areas: Belonging, Mastery, and Culture and Community.

The current data collected by the district indicates minimal academic success, low levels of participation and low graduation rate of Aboriginal learners compared to those of non-Aboriginal students. However, these data do not reflect the stories of hope, and belief in their children and the desire for change expressed by the Aboriginal community. Through the strength of the AEEA commitment, the district will commit to improve the educational system, enhance the community partnerships, engage community leader thus enhancing the experience for all learners within the Vancouver. Please see Appendix 3 for the complete AEEA.

“Parents must have a vested interest in their children’s education in order to foster success”... “Students should be taught tools for choice so that each student can find success in his or her own way. Schooling should not be one dimensional but rather should offer many skill sets that kids can acquire”.

*Musqueam elder, 2006*



# Literacy

**We value the role of the teacher as central in the provision of the learning program.**

*Literacy has traditionally been viewed as basic reading and writing, but this definition has evolved to reflect the many life skills required for achieving personal goals. Literacy is now viewed as a set of skills that enable people to participate more fully in social, economic, family and community life.*

*Read Now BC: District Literacy Planning Guide (2006)*

*The International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (IALLS 2005) has defined literacy as “the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” This means literacy can include social, emotional, and interpersonal communication skills, the use of technology, and arts and creative expression.*

*Read Now BC: District Literacy Planning Guide (2006)*

Literacy has been a key area of focus for the Vancouver district over a number of years and, in the current year, has been identified as our primary focus. A range of programs has been put in place to address the literacy needs of different learning cohorts. A majority of district elementary and secondary schools had selected Literacy as a school goal for the 2008/2009 school year, and a few schools are now approaching the district Literacy goal of having no more than 10 per cent of students ‘Not Yet Meeting’ in reading and writing.

## Early Learners

The District works in partnership with community organizations to support early learning initiatives, such as:

- All elementary schools offer Ready Set Learn events for pre-schoolers in the community,
- Two Strong Start Centres were developed in partnership with the community in 2007/2008, eight more were developed for 2008/2009, and nine more are confirmed for 2009/2010.
- The District signed an Early Childhood Development Memorandum of Understanding with Vancouver Public Partners to enhance integrated planning and service delivery,
- The District has completed Phase I of a VSB Early Childhood Development Strategic Plan.
- The District is undertaking a Refugee Project with Ministry of Children and Family Development and the United Way to support refugee children aged birth to 5 years old and their families.

## Kindergarten Through To Grade 12

At the Elementary Level, the Literacy Team made significant changes this past year in how we supported schools and individual teachers in developing effective Literacy instruction. We redesigned the way that our Team worked with schools to allow for more targeted and individualized support. This adjustment was made based on research around best practices that has emerged in the past few years.

## We believe learning is enhanced by learner involvement and commitment.

Schools in the project selected one of three strands: (Building Content, Working Together or Breaking Through) and a literacy focus: (Reading, Writing or Oral Language). Each teacher or team of teachers selected a Literacy Goal/Question that would form the basis of their inquiry. They were supported by regular visits from a member of the Literacy Team who had been assigned to facilitate learning at their school. The model promoted teacher collaboration and using action research and inquiry. District support included demonstration lessons on current instructional methods, sharing current professional resources and materials, attending meetings with teacher learning teams and helping teachers refine their assessment and instructional practice. 44 schools have been part of the pilot this year and a further 22 schools have expressed interest in joining next year.

In addition we continued to expand the support given to our Early Primary Learners. Early Intervention targets the youngest and most vulnerable learners. Research supports that the intervention in literacy has the greatest effect when given to struggling students in Kindergarten and Grade 1. This model uses the three tier Success for Each Student approach: Strong classroom instruction for all students, small pullout resource support for students at risk and intensive daily one to one support (Reading Recovery) for our most vulnerable learners. The Early Intervention model was in place at 11 school sites during the 2008 – 2009 school year and will be expanded to 17 schools beginning in the Fall of 2009.

High School Literacy is supported in several ways. Five literacy meetings for High School teachers and administrators are held this year at the school board. Release time is provided for each high school to send at least one teacher to attend various topic focused discussions. Often guest speakers have been brought in for these meetings Areas of focus have included Formative Assessment, Using Assessment to Drive Instruction, Media Literacy, Cultural Diversity and Sensitivity, Non-Fiction Literature Circles and “Using Marks so Marks Don’t Use You”.

We value the active participation of parents in the education of their children.



## We believe in fair and equitable distribution of resources

Work has been done to move the instruction of literacy beyond the English department and into the content areas. Ongoing Professional Development at various schools has included How to Enhance Vocabulary Development and using Non-Fiction Reading Assessment and Strategies. The literacy team has worked in classrooms with Social Studies teachers to introduce them to the idea of using Non-Fiction literature circles with their students and with Science teachers on how to use assessment to guide instruction.

### Adults

The Vancouver School Board operates six Adult Learning Centres in Vancouver providing adult students with educational opportunities from the literacy level to secondary school completion.

The Adult Education system is very successful and continues to grow. In fact, we serve as many students as some of the largest high schools in the province and last year graduated approximately 500 students. Students at the Centres come from a diversity of language and cultural backgrounds and range in age from 16 to seniors. Each of the Centres responds to the specific needs of its community, and program offerings reflect student course requests and enrolment patterns in each Centre. Some of the Centres also offer out reach programs at off-site locations. These out reach programs cater to a specific student population with specialized educational needs.

A unique Adult Education Program is the Elementary Outreach program operated in a number of elementary schools in our District. The students are parents/caregivers of the elementary school attendees and have not yet achieved BC High School Graduation. Parents/caregivers attend a class during the school day and follow a specific Graduation Plan designed by an Adult Education Advisor. One of the objectives of this program is to promote a Family Literacy Model.

### English as a Second Language

Vancouver has a diverse multilingual and multicultural student population. 100 different languages other than English are spoken in the homes of 60% of our student population.



## We believe in being accountable to the community and we value and promote open communication.

A number of initiatives and programs have been developed to provide greater support for our ESL learners and their teachers. These include:

- District ESL consultants who provide professional development and ongoing support to elementary and secondary teachers,
- Multicultural Liaison Workers who provide outreach, cross-cultural education and individual and group support,
- ESL Mentorship Program to provide additional support for teachers and their ESL learners,
- Assessment Teacher who provides information to schools based on language and math assessment results, the child's educational history and other relevant details,
- District Placement Administrator who makes recommendations regarding equivalency credits, math placement and appropriate elective courses,
- Area ESL classes,
- Secondary/Adult Education program to support ESL learners at all ability levels,
- Intensive secondary ESL program for older newly arrived ESL learners (17-19 year olds), which includes language contact experiences, work experiences, and volunteer opportunities,
- Secondary ESL Literacy class for students who have little or no formal schooling in their countries of origin, and
- Settlement Workers in School Program to support newly arrived youths and their families cope with settlement issues. This program compliments the work of the Multicultural Liaison Workers.

The District Placement and Reception Centre serves as a hub for activities that assist in the continued development of new initiatives to support ESL learners.



We believe in educating the whole person.

## Reflections on Literacy Data

Various assessment tools are used to gauge performance, including the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) administered by the Ministry and district tools, such as the Development Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Reading Assessment District (RAD).

Data is collected for the Early Intervention project from both Kindergarten and Grade One students. Grade One students are assessed using the DRA or Benchmarks assessment in September and June. Kindergarten students are given an assessment in January and again in June that looks at the students' phonological awareness, letter/sound identification and concepts of print and oral language. The data gleaned from these assessments is used at the school level to inform classroom practice and to decide which students need small group instruction and which students will receive Reading Recovery one to one support. The data is also used to decide which interventions would best suit the needs of these struggling readers.

At the district level, members of the Literacy team use the data to track students' progress. They work with teachers (both classroom and resource) at each school, to help them become more precise with their teaching in both whole class and small group instruction. They also facilitate meetings of these teachers at the VSB and give professional development on topics relating to Early Intervention. In addition, students who have been part of the Early Intervention project are tracked until the end of Grade three so that the Literacy team can see if this intensive intervention results in a reduction in

the number of students who are Not Yet Meeting expectations in Reading. Data from the schools involved in the project is currently being collected and analyzed.

The most recent Foundation Skills Assessment results, based on 2008 scores, show that a persistent 15 per cent of all district students in grade 4 are 'Not Yet Meeting' expectations for reading skill; for students in grade 7, this is 18 per cent. For writing, 13 per cent of grade 4 students tested are 'Not Yet Meeting' expectations, compared with 14 per cent



## We believe in lifelong learning.

of grade 7 students tested. Numeracy scores show that 19 per cent of grade 4 and 12 per cent of grade 7 students are 'Not Yet Meeting' expectations.

While the scores for the District point to areas where improvements are needed, they nonetheless compare favourably with those of all students in the province (Public and Independent schools). Among the province-wide population of students, 17 per cent of grade 4 and 22 per cent of grade 7 students had FSA scores of "Not Yet Meeting". For writing, those 'Not Yet Meeting' represented 18 per cent of Grade 4 and 14 per cent of Grade 7; for numeracy, 21 per cent of both Grade 4 and Grade 7 students are in this range.







# Literacy Goal

2009 - 2010

Each student will read, write, speak and listen with competence, confidence and enjoyment.





# Literacy Goal

**Each student will read, write, speak and listen with competence, confidence and enjoyment.**

## Objectives

1. To improve student reading comprehension
2. To improve student written expression
3. To improve oral communication skills

## Which learners are we most concerned about?

In our district there is a persistent 15 – 20 % of students who are Not Yet Meeting Expectations in reading and writing. These students are our greatest concern. We know that without strong literacy skills, the opportunities available to them are severely limited. We believe that it is our moral imperative to make sure that each student that we teach reaches his or her full potential. Our goal is that when they leave our schools, they are ready to fully participate in society.

Although 80% of our students are making successful progress in Literacy, we continue to strive for greater proficiency. We have identified numerous factors that contribute a student's lack of success. These include:

- English as a Second Language students whose language proficiency is an obstacle to learning
- English as a Second Dialect students whose language proficiency is an obstacle to learning
- Some students who are indentified in Ministry Special Students who are considered “at risk” according to the Early Developmental Index (EDI)
- Students who have Social and Emotional learning challenges
- Students who perform poorly when assessed using a variety of assessment tools.
- Education categories.

It is important to emphasize that not all learners in the above categories struggle with literacy.



**Each student will read, write, speak and listen with competence, confidence and enjoyment.**

### **What are the student's needs?**



The students we teach live in a world that is ever changing, digital, fast paced and visual. They need to be able to access information from traditional texts, newspapers, websites, blogs and a multitude of other formats in this multi-media society. We need to empower each of our students by making them more aware of the purpose of developing strong Literacy skills. They need to see that literacy is fundamental to living in the world and not just something we do in school. Literacy instruction needs to be a part of all teaching, not just the Language Arts period or the English block. Literacy instruction needs to be relevant to our learners but it also must give them the specific tools necessary to be able to successfully read and comprehend any text that they encounter.

All students need to develop strong reading skills. At the early primary level, this includes developing phonological awareness, concepts of print, decoding skills as well as the ability to read fluently and learn how to use comprehension strategies to deepen understanding of what they read. At the intermediate and high school level, students continue to develop their fluency and ability to use various comprehension strategies. At all levels students also need ongoing support to develop their vocabulary. They need the content specific vocabulary of subjects including Math, Science, and Social Studies, the vocabulary used in instructions and explanations as well as the vocabulary of academic language. Academic Language is found throughout all subjects and used to describe complexity, to be able to describe ideas in an abstract manner and for higher-order thinking.

All students need to develop strong writing skills. Within the writing process, students work on strengthening their writing skills when they pre-write, draft, revise, edit and publish pieces of writing. During this process students need modeling and experience with using the Writing Traits to make their writing stronger. They need opportunities to write in different genres and to write technical and content specific writing in all subject areas.

All students need strong oral communication skills. Peer discussions help support students' learning and give them the opportunity to develop oral vocabulary skills as well as improve their grammar. They need to learn how to use oral language as a thinking tool across the curriculum.

## Each student will read, write, speak and listen with competence, confidence and enjoyment.

In addition to these specific literacy skills, students have other needs that must be met in order for them to be successful in Literacy. All students need to feel safe at school. They need to work in compassionate, caring schools and classrooms and feel a sense of belonging and attachment to the people and the environment in which they spend their school days. Teachers need to continue to value the diversity of each student in their classrooms and explore ways to acknowledge and teach about the diverse cultures represented in their classrooms, including the availability of culturally relevant and accurate learning materials. Each student needs the choice to show their learning in multiple ways. They also need to feel that their teachers believe they can be successful; that their strengths and differences are recognized and valued. Meeting the Social and Emotional needs of each student is a major key to their progress in Literacy.

### What steps do we take to address the identified needs?

To begin to address the varying student needs in our classrooms is that teachers must assess each student to obtain information that will support their precise teaching. Assessments in reading and writing will give information about students' literacy levels. Social Responsibility Performance Standards and checklists as well as observations will help teachers determine students' social and emotional level.

It is important that the assessment tool selected measures concepts of print and oral language, phonological awareness and letter-sound correspondence at the kindergarten level; decoding skills, fluency and reading comprehension strategy use at the Grade 1 – 3 level and fluency and comprehension strategy use at the 4 – 8 level. DRA and PM Benchmarks are common primary assessment tools and the RAD and Whole Class Reading Assessment; Grades 3 – 8 (Vernon Assessment) are used in most intermediate classrooms to assess student reading skills. For Writing assessment teachers generally use the Provincial Performance standards at each grade level to assess School Wide Write samples. Once teachers

### Arising question:

How can we include more Aboriginal content in our literacy programs to benefit all students?

“Good literacy instruction is vital for vulnerable students but valuable

for all.”

*Vancouver Elementary  
Administrator*



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*“Classroom assessment can fundamentally transform the way a teacher teaches.”*

W. James Popham

have a clear picture of each student’s literacy levels, they provide explicit instruction to move the students along in their learning using the Gradual Release Model.

For our youngest learners who are not yet part of the school system, there needs to be access to programs for children aged 0 – 5. Current programming includes: Ready, Set, Learn, Welcome to Kindergarten, Strong Start Centers and Family Literacy Initiatives.

### What is the evidence of student success?

Student success will be evident in multiple ways. There will be an increased number of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations in reading and writing. They will be using various reading strategies to tackle print in a variety of formats and writing to show their understanding throughout the day. Student work will reflect the choices they have been given. Students will show their learning using many different modes of communication. Visual, digital, blogs, websites and multi-media work will exist along side more traditional reports and presentations. Library circulation will grow as students increase the amount of time they spend reading. Additionally, as students gain skills and see improvement in their literacy levels, their self confidence will improve. Research shows that students who feel successful have increased engagement levels and a more positive attitude towards school. Indirectly this should diminish behaviour problems that arise in our classrooms and out on the playground and community.

The District Review Team noted that data collection and reporting in Vancouver was weak. While we have always reported on the work of schools that are in the Literacy Projects have provided, we have not put systems in place to support schools in this work or to ensure the meaningful use of data in the District. For this year, we are reporting only our results for the Early Intervention and Literacy Innovation Schools because we have been collecting those data consistently and systematically. See Detail in Appendix 5.

In January of this year, the Board passed a motion requesting the District Assessment Committee to develop a long range plan for supporting schools to engage in meaningful assessment practices and to develop tools for use in teaching and learning, and for reporting student achievement broadly. While this work is underway, we are not asking schools to provide data at the district level. School will continue to collect information for school planning.

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Over the next school year we will be developing systems so that we can support all schools to collect information from formative assessments that can both inform the teachers and students and provide system wide information that is meaningful. Please refer to Appendix 4 for critical evidence and multiple measures used to analyze student success in literacy

### What adjustments need to be made?

To meet the needs of each student and help them develop strong literacy skills, we are continuing to monitor and adjust in five key areas.

First, we need to make sure that all our classrooms and schools are safe and supportive environments for children to work in. School staff must work with students to develop a sense of community within the school that makes everyone feel welcome. Differences must be celebrated and everyone's contribution must be valued. Students must be given a voice within the school and in their individual classrooms and know that their ideas are valued. When students feel safe they are open to learning; they thrive, they take risks and they are able to realize their full potential.

Second Assessment for Learning needs to be a part of each classroom. Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how to get there" (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). As teachers and administrators, we will need to increase our understanding of the best way to use this type of assessment and work towards full implementation in our classrooms and schools.

The 5 big principles of Assessment for Learning include:

1. The provision of effective feedback to students
2. The active involvement of students in their own learning

### Arising question:

*How can we expand a systematic early intervention model across the district?*

### Arising question:

*How successful are we at using assessment to guide literacy instruction?*





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3. The adjustment of teaching to take into account the results of assessment
4. The recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of students, both of which are critical influences on learning.
5. The acknowledgement of the need for students to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve. (Assessment Reform Group, 1999).

*“Enough already! Reading, writing, speaking, listening – they’re all connected. We teach them like they’re separate and then wonder why our kids aren’t learning.”*

*teacher at a literacy forum*

*“The real work of knowledge building happens on site, day by day and week by week, thoughtfully, over time.”*

*Regie Routman*

Third, we need to continue to refine our ability to differentiate instruction for all students according to their learning and behaviour needs. Each student is at a different place along the continuum and needs a combination of individual, small group and whole group instruction to gain the skills needed to progress. In addition, each student requires teachers to look at how we structure the learning environment in our classrooms. Some students work best in groups, while others are more productive when they have the opportunity to sit away from distractions. Each student brings different skills and strengths to our classrooms and we must make sure that we differentiate assignments and projects and include opportunities for choice to allow students multiple options to show their learning.

Fourth, we need to provide intervention early. Early Intervention (EI) targets the youngest students in our school system. Research has shown us that if we are able to close the gap in Kindergarten and Grade One, the need for intervention at later stages is dramatically decreased. Our district supports a three pillar approach: Strong classroom instruction for all students, small pullout resource support for students at risk and intensive daily one to one support (Reading Recovery) for our most vulnerable learners. Currently (2008-2009) there are 11 schools that are offering Early Intervention. In the next year (2009-2010) 6 more schools will be offering the program. In addition, several other schools are planning to train Reading Recovery teachers next year with hopes of implementing the full program in the future as funding allows. At each school collaborative teams, including the Resource, Kindergarten and Grade One teachers with their administrator, meet to assess the needs of each child. Support is then provided at the appropriate level. Teachers are given opportunities throughout the year to meet with other EI staffs to

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further their own professional development and discuss pertinent issues.

Finally, we need to continue to build strong relationships with the parents/caregivers of the students we teach. Research consistently shows us that when parents/caregivers are involved with their children's education and learning, both at home and at the school, their children do better and achieve more. These benefits can be long-lasting and extend to better health, relationships and improved employment opportunities. Schools and parents/caregivers both benefit when they have relationships of mutual respect and trust.

The more clearly schools can communicate with parents/caregivers about the progress that their children are making, the better parents/caregivers are able to support their children's learning at home. Information that parents/caregivers share with teachers can assist them in adapting and targeting their teaching to suit the learning styles of each student.

The adjustments that need to be made can be summarized in the acronym LEARNS. Learning Diversity must be recognized, Engagement of students, especially using the framework of Assessment for Learning, Active learning experiences, Relationships between students and staff that are supportive and respectful, Need for choice and flexibility is accommodated and Safe and supportive schools and classrooms exist in each school.

### How do we communicate and celebrate student success?

In classrooms and schools that are following the principles of Assessment for Learning, students are receiving daily feedback on their progress. They know what they have mastered and where they need to go next and what skills they need to be successful. Ongoing informal communication helps keep parents/caregivers informed about the progress their children are making at school. This communication occurs



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when teachers encounter parents/caregivers at classroom doors, on the playground and from conversations between children and their parents/caregivers at the end of each day.

Schools celebrate successes with both students and parents/caregivers when the post student work in their hallways and on bulletin boards and also when they include student writing in monthly newsletters sent home to each family. Some schools also celebrate and share student learning by inviting parents/caregivers and the community to cross-curricular events such as Writer's Festivals, Cultural Celebrations, Student Performances and Science Fairs. In addition to informal sharing of student success, schools formally let parents/caregivers know about the progress their children are making. This occurs five times a year during teacher conferences and on the three report cards that are sent home.

At the district level we celebrate our success in Literacy when we bring schools together. Three times a year teams of teachers from each school share their ongoing learning. At our final celebration in May, teachers use artefacts (pictures, student samples, professional resources, book club experiences, etc.) collected through the year to highlight their Literacy Journey. District staff, board members, and staff from other interested schools are invited to attend. We also celebrate success stories through district publications, such as VSB News, and the homepage of the district's website.

