

SD58

Nicola-Similkameen

Final Report Draft

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“go as we mean to be”

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TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGMENT

SD58

We respectfully acknowledge the unceded territory of the Coldwater Band, Lower Nicola Band, Nooaitch Band, Shackan Band, Upper Nicola Band and Upper Similkameen Band which SD58 serves.



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INTRODUCTION


In their book, *The New School Rules*, Anthony Kim and Alexis Gonzales-Black write of school district planning processes, “We labor over these plans—sometimes over the course of 12 to 24 months—dreaming up the path ahead and detailing the resources we will need... Unfortunately, once we are set to go, we find the situation has changed before we’ve gotten started.” They refer to conditions like staff turnover, technology change and economic condition – all things which can be somewhat planned for. In the case of this planning process the changes required by the COVID-19 pandemic were more dramatic and singular than anything anyone might have ever expected. Yet it also created a great opportunity to see how a system and the players within an organization responded to d u r e s s .



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INTRODUCTION

“We labor over these plans—sometimes over the course of 12 to 24 months—dreaming up the path.”



After meeting with students, parents, community members, staff, and leaders of SD58, we were about to have final meetings with groups of teachers and EAs to complete the first draft of this report and suggest recommendations to be made to the SD58 Strategic Planning Committee when our province, and the world, went into emergency lock-down because of COVID19. In fact, an emergency SD58 planning meeting in response to COVID19 reports from Italy, the destination for a graduating student trip, occurred while we were meeting across the hallway with community members at the Princeton High School, and some folks who had attended our meeting left to attend that meeting. None of us had any sense of how big the impact of the pandemic would be, and the cancellation of the trip was one of the examples we had of how SD58 leaders were responsive and addressed possible issues in a good way.

We had no foreknowledge of how much the pandemic would change things for everyone over the next months, particularly for schools, and our next meetings were cancelled. We were not sure whether our early findings would change a little or a lot when data from teachers and EAS was finally added to the report.

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INTRODUCTION

“ We had no foreknowledge of how much the pandemic would change things for everyone over the next months, particularly for schools.”

In June 2020, a decision was made to draft a survey that would go out to all teachers and EAs in September/October, to be followed up by a sequence of interviews and small grade based meetings with the same groups. These meetings and the survey feedback did not substantively change our sense of the themes and directions that other groups had brought forward.

It has been interesting to us to see the same themes come up for different groups, and it is powerful to observe how people from Grade One students, to prospective employers, to teachers are looking at the future and seeking ways to work together to move forward in the same directions. The language and metaphors change, but the ideas overlap. For us, we have been struck by what a hopeful thing this is.

We were gratified to be part of this work and excited to understand more of what is happening within SD58. As we met with various stakeholders it was evident that the processes were as important as any final plan that would arise out of these interactions. At its essence, everyone wanted to understand everyone. Community members learned about what was really going on in schools and they got to ask questions, students got to have a voice for the futures they will be part of, leaders got to share their work and problem-solve how to focus on several levels of needs. An interesting aspect of this was to hear something from children in the morning – “We want to learn practical skills that will make us capable adults that can give something back to this community if we can figure out how to stay in the area”, and then to hear from community members in the evening,



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INTRODUCTION

“The Pandemic only created a more focused sense of this as people found alternative ways to find a sense of belonging.”

“How do we make sure students are learning practical skills that will be useful to them as adults? How can we help?”, and then again hear similar themes in our meetings with principals and school staff.

It has been interesting to us that in every group we have met with people want to be involved and help move things forward. Schools are one of the last bastions of community focused groups, and the SD58 students, families, and staff all identify as part of this generative whole that is central to their community. The Pandemic only created a more focused sense of this as people found alternative ways to find a sense of belonging. Many people talked about how strategic plans were often kept in binders on a shelf and dusted off only when it was time to renew them, they appreciated being invited into the conversations, and wanted to know how they might be involved in next steps in authentic ways. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to creatively explore with the SD58 community what the future might look like.

Dr. Aaron Johannes, on behalf of the imagineacircle team.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

British Columbia's Ministry of Education estimates more than half a million full-time equivalent school-age students will attend public schools during the 2019-20 school year, in 1,578 public and independent schools. We met with more than 200 representatives of the approximately 2500 students of the Nicola-Similkameen School District and to visit the dozen schools of SD58 including Distance Ed and Alternate Schools. We also met with principals and vice principals, teachers, education assistants, First Nations Support Workers, staff from every department, administrative staff, community representatives ranging from parents, local businesses, employers and prospective employers, youth workers, police, and health services, and SD58 Trustees and the SD58 Strategic Planning Committee, which is made up of a wide range of representation from all sectors.

An impressive theme of SD58 is the diversity of the families served in the schools and this ran through all our interactions. First, they are located in two communities - Merritt and Princeton - and this is seen as a strength in that it increases the diversity of perspectives and gives students more choice. Second, within those schools, there is a wide range of programs and supports including French Immersion, Aboriginal Education, Distance Education, students with support needs and Alternate and Distance Education programs, with very capable and engaged leaders in each part.

Throughout our conversations with nearly 500 students, staff and community partners, we were glad to see this diversity of offerings reflected in a real interest in and respect for diversity as an appreciative lens on belonging to a community.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is in keeping with B.C.'s "new curriculum", which proposes an "Education for the 21st Century":

British Columbia has one of the best education systems in the world. Teachers are skilled, facilities are sound, and students are performing near the top of international assessments. Yet it is an education system modelled on the very different circumstances of an earlier century — when change was much more gradual than it is today. Conditions in the world are changing greatly and rapidly. Today's students will grow into a world that is very different from and more connected than that of generations before.

To maintain high achievement, British Columbia must transform its education system to one that better engages students in their own learning and fosters the skills and competencies students will need to succeed. One focus for this transformation is a curriculum that enables and supports increasingly personalized learning, through quality teaching and learning, flexibility and choice, and high standards.

This individualization of student learning and outcomes was strongly present in each of the groups as a theme. For EAs it was a question — how do we support the learning and outcomes for individual students? For teachers it was a reflection — how do we do our work and keep up with these new goals? For students it was a need they already perceived as part of their futures as decision-making citizens and employees: how do we ask questions of a future we do not yet know about, within these systems? All these groups showed a consistent faith that they could figure things out together as a community.

For government, the approach has been through curriculum development that is responsive to changing needs:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today we live in a state of constant change. It is a technology-rich world, where communication is instant, and information is immediately accessible. The way we interact with each other personally, socially, and at work has changed forever. Knowledge is growing at exponential rates in many domains, creating new information and possibilities. This is the world our students are entering.

British Columbia's curriculum is being redesigned to respond to this demanding world our students are entering . . . the curriculum must be learner-centred and flexible and maintain a focus on literacy and numeracy, while supporting deeper learning through concept-based and competency-driven approaches.

The redesign of curriculum maintains a focus on sound foundations of literacy and numeracy while supporting the development of citizens who are competent thinkers and communicators, and who are personally and socially competent in all areas of their lives. British Columbia's redesigned curriculum honours the ways in which students think, learn, and grow, and prepares them for a successful lifetime of learning where ongoing change is constant.

"Curriculum Overview, Education for a New Century"

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/overview>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reflecting on these meetings I am struck by the levels of trust and goodwill that were involved. From the willingness of the SD58 Strategic Planning Committee to hold space for a different understanding of what community-based, research-focused planning could look like, and who could be involved, to the citizens who gave up their evenings because they were invited into a conversation that was interesting to them – sometimes because they had a child in the school system, or had some role in the lives of students, but sometimes just because they know these students are part of a community that they care about. Students came to our meetings with things to share – the younger the students, the more excited they were and the more open (and the bigger their idea for a new playground!), the older they were, the more hesitant – and, yet, present and willing. And after a few minutes to gauge how much they could trust us, they would pull out notes they had made in preparation – in one case, a two-page list and that was from a graduating student, wanting things to improve for students coming after her. Hers was a list about the different kinds of supports students needed to become their best selves, but it was rooted in what she felt was a really good experience of her education in the District.

In a recent article about planning, the authors suggest, “Rather than attempt to precisely predict the future, we have tried to make the case for designing systems that favour robustness and adaptability – systems that can be creative and responsive when faced with an array of possible scenarios.” The creation and support of students who are knowledgeable about their options, what they need, and how they might help, seems to be the product of a healthy, dynamic, future-thinking system that SD58 has created.

It seemed to us that the District had much to celebrate in their responsiveness to community, diversity, and student centred practices. When issues of concern arose, we addressed them with the District leadership right away, with the idea that our participants needed to know we would support them to resolve problems as soon as possible. None of these issues were surprises to those we brought them up with, and all were already in the process of resolution - everything from building renovation to school leadership – quiet interventions were happening in each case. When interventions were not working; they were being rethought in preparation for a next step.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More problematic was the issue of organizational communication. Students we met with, from various grade levels, talked about the reduction of bullying in schools and how this had been turned around in various ways, with good examples of changed behaviours. Yet, on a day when we had more of these conversations the local newspaper published a letter to the editor from a parent about a prevalence of bullying that had caused her to withdraw her child from the school. These situations must be confusing and demoralizing for those working on addressing the issues.

Good intentions, ambitious leaders and resourceful teams were evident, but our processes also made it evident that more resources were available in the student bodies and in the community, while for SD58 leaders there was a need for space to talk and plan and let go as they made plans for new projects and ideas. While an initial conversation with strangers is daunting, many people showed up with courage and things to share it made us wonder how similar meetings might continue and how those problem-solving groups, from students to citizens to SD58 staff, might grow in numbers and strengths if they were supported to meet in ongoing ways. Such meetings became one of our prioritized recommendations.



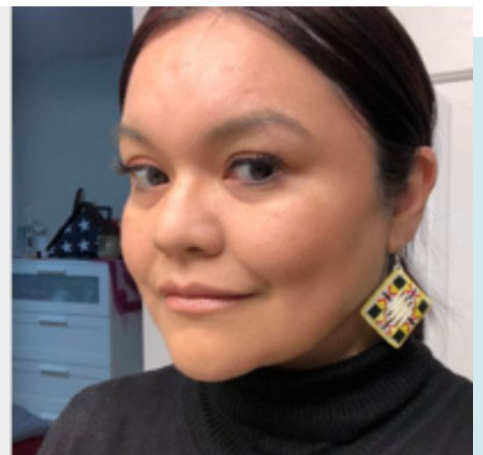
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PROCESS AND METHODS

WHO ARE WE?

The meetings and conversations that inform this strategic planning work were facilitated by imagineacircle, a collaborative engaged in community-based research, workshop and curriculum development and initiatives.

The collaborative is led by Dr. Aaron Johannes, who works in partnership with a small group of facilitators and community experts. Aaron also teaches at Douglas College and the Justice Institute, where he teaches Education Assistants and Community Support Workers, Indigenous students intending on careers in social work-related fields, and prospective police and justice-involved personnel. He is regularly in schools of different kinds in various roles, but most recently as a Practicum supervisor for Douglas College. As the former Director of Spectrum Consulting, he worked with agencies all over B.C., as well as in a number of other provinces and states. His focus is on art-based inter-cultural dialogue as a research strategy, bringing to bear the potential of early adopting changes for people and organizations.



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Rhona Segarra, M. Div., comes from a background in business management and uses this and her experience as a congregation minister to help those in support professions clarify and strategize in holistic ways.

Priscilla Omulo, of the Tsartlip First Nation, brings two decades of experience with Indigenous and marginalized youth, parenting supports, and community work in Truth and Reconciliation to this project.

Eilidh Nicholson is a facilitator of choice for many people and for dialogic events such world cafes and dialogues. Her focus is helping people identify the questions that matter most to them and then develop processes that allow solution focused discussion.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Our approach comes out of appreciative inquiry, which is closely interwoven with Social Constructionism. We focus on what is working well, and then try to imagine with our partners how we might expand and grow these things, within a cycle of learning, reflection, planning, and iterative improvement. Sometimes, in this approach to this work it is only a small thing we can focus on and hope to grow, but in this case, there are so many good things already going on in SD58 it seems to us that this has been a really powerful of creating a snapshot of a successful present that, we hope, will be useful in focusing on what might happen in the future. It is also important to us that we involve those we are planning “for” in the planning processes, and we were excited to have so many students and adults from various parts of the school system and community participate.

Appreciative inquiry has been successfully used in planning and organizational development for decades. As a lens, it asks “what is working here?” in hopes of building on successes. We do not ignore issues or problems, but focus on increasing and expanding best practices and seeing challenges as opportunities to generate communication and change.



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**CULTURALLY ROOTED APPROACH**

Priscilla Omulo is a constant force in our work and her focus on putting Truth and Reconciliation principles into action has been a motivating factor in what we do. Aaron has been working with Indigenous students for the last few years, studying Indigenous pedagogy and finding out more about his own family history (Metis/Cree, from the Garden River Metis Settlement), as well as teaching prospective allies in social work and law enforcement about the “real” history of Canada and introducing them to local leaders and elders. Part of our interest in this project was the involvement of Indigenous people within the District, ranging from the Aboriginal Advisory Council to the work of Shelley Oppenheim-Lacerte, District Principal Aboriginal Education, and all of the circles she is part of. From our first meetings we were clear that we wanted to use Indigenous methodologies – circles, interdisciplinary practices, storytelling, conferring with Indigenous people and students – as a lodestone for our processes. This was clearly noticed and appreciated by Indigenous students and those who support them.

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COMMUNITY BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

We used this methodology as it has a 40-year history of evidence in social health and other fields. It requires the participation of community users (students, families, teachers, employers, etc.) and involves dialogues that are somewhat open-ended, so good ideas that might be otherwise ignored are heard and can be included and built on, while we generate more good ideas that we can put into practice sooner.



Figure 1,” from “How Can Primary Health Care System and Community-Based Participatory Research Be Complementary?” March 2010, International journal of preventive medicine 1(1):1-10

These ideas are returned to representative citizens (SD58 trustees) and, in this case, might form part of the strategic plan as well as giving an appreciative assessment of what is working well, and can be built on.

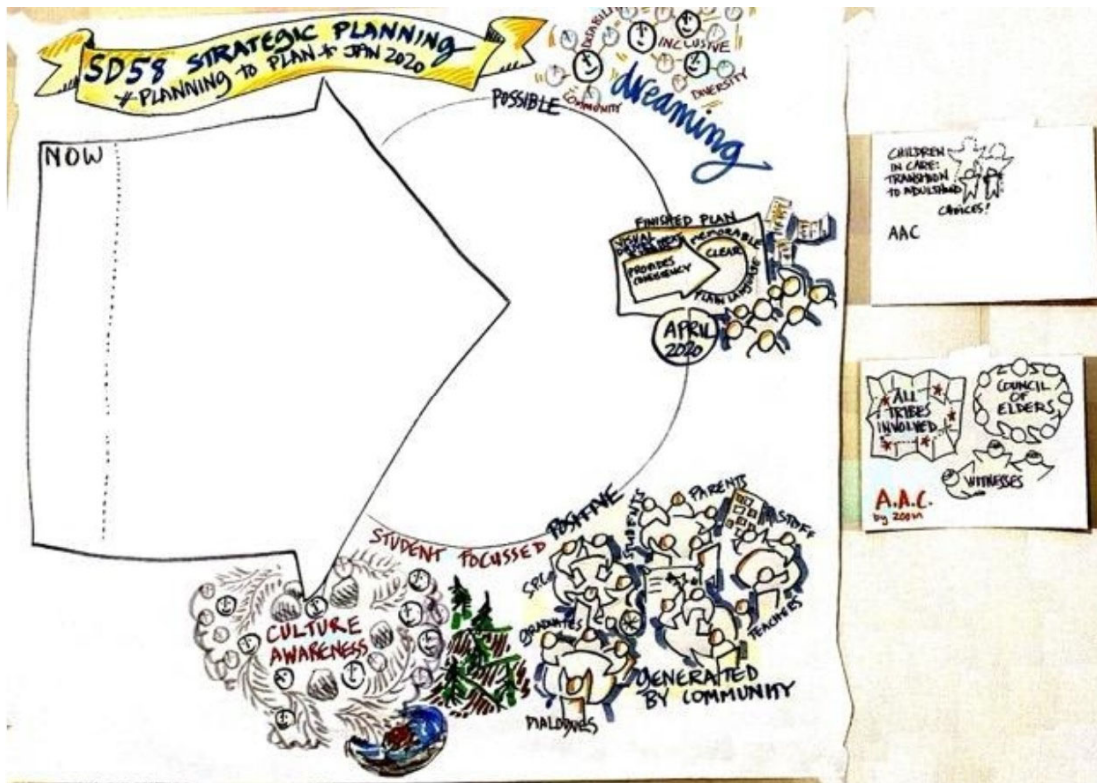
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We were excited by SD58's support for the idea that this planning would begin with the children and young adults attending schools there, and this idea was exciting to everyone we met with, even though it was quite new to some participants. We visited all the schools in the District. Students were so excited to be part of these conversations! We met with two small groups of 5 – 12 students in each of all twelve schools, from Grades 1 – 12, as well as students in the alternate schools and an observation of a Strong Start program. Student groups were organized using the Shelley Moore "bowling pins" metaphor – a continuum of students who loved school and were good at it, students who did not feel that way, and everyone in between, in equal groups of boys and girls, in what seemed to be culturally representative participation of each school. These groups were created by principals and vice-principals, some of whom stayed for the meetings out of interest.

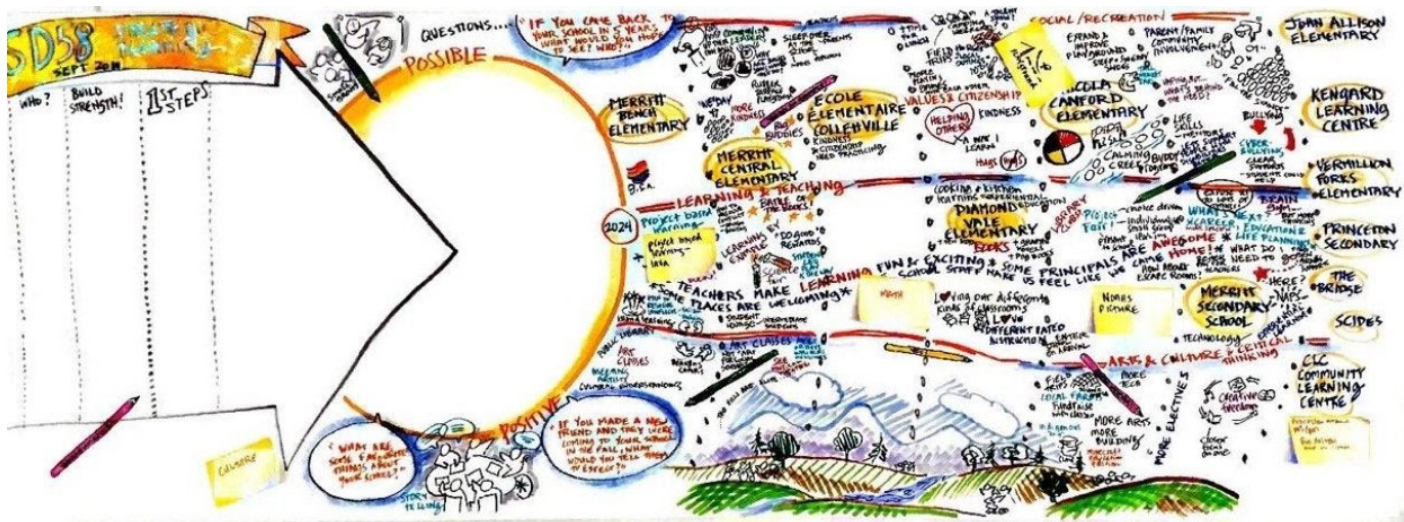
Frankly, we could have returned to meet with more students once we had gone through our initial meetings and word got out that we were there to engage and listen (and draw!). Students who had not been part of the conversations requested that we come back and talk to them, students who had met with us sent messages in various ways saying they had more to add. We also met with community partners in both Merritt and Princeton for engaged conversations during World Cafes, with police, health representatives, parents, youth workers, employers, and businesses. We met with or observed more than 200 students, about forty "partners" (employers, civic leaders, police, community nurses and mental health workers and businesses), about sixty community members and representatives, and about 100 SD58 staff, school and District-based admin, and received survey responses and/or met with more than 100 educators including teachers, librarians, EAs, SSTs, counsellors and TTOCs.

PLANNING METHODS

In almost all our meetings we began with the idea of a PATH, a planning format with about 50 years of history, that begins with the idea of identifying and clarifying the dreams of the group, and then looks at identifying possible and positive goals, and further expands on the means by identifying who will do what, when. It is rooted in appreciative inquiry – if we can find occasions of best practice, we can expand on these, personally and professionally. As we met with different groups, we used an example of this format to explain our intentions and then sought to help people dream together, with the intention of clarifying possible goals. These iterative conversations began to accrue themes.



We showed and demonstrated this model of planning in each of the sessions.



We put some of the themes together from the first eight schools visited. For example, this shows how many of the same themes were coming up in different places – Social / Recreational themes, Learning and Teaching, Arts & Culture and Critical Thinking.

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We hosted World Cafes in Princeton and Merritt to which community was invited through radio ads and other communication venues, in an open invitation to anyone. These small groups of people gathered to ask and answer questions about the future of SD58 as well as share their experiences, and at each table data was recorded, and gathered to later be synthesized and incorporated into our work. As the evening progressed, we moved participants into new groups of people they might not know, to build on their conversations.

We estimate that we have talked to almost 400 stakeholders, prior to getting the input of approximately 110 teachers and educational assistants. Almost from the start, as we talked to someone in a restaurant early on, we heard how important schools are to a sense of community and how appreciated the schools of SD58 are.

METRICS

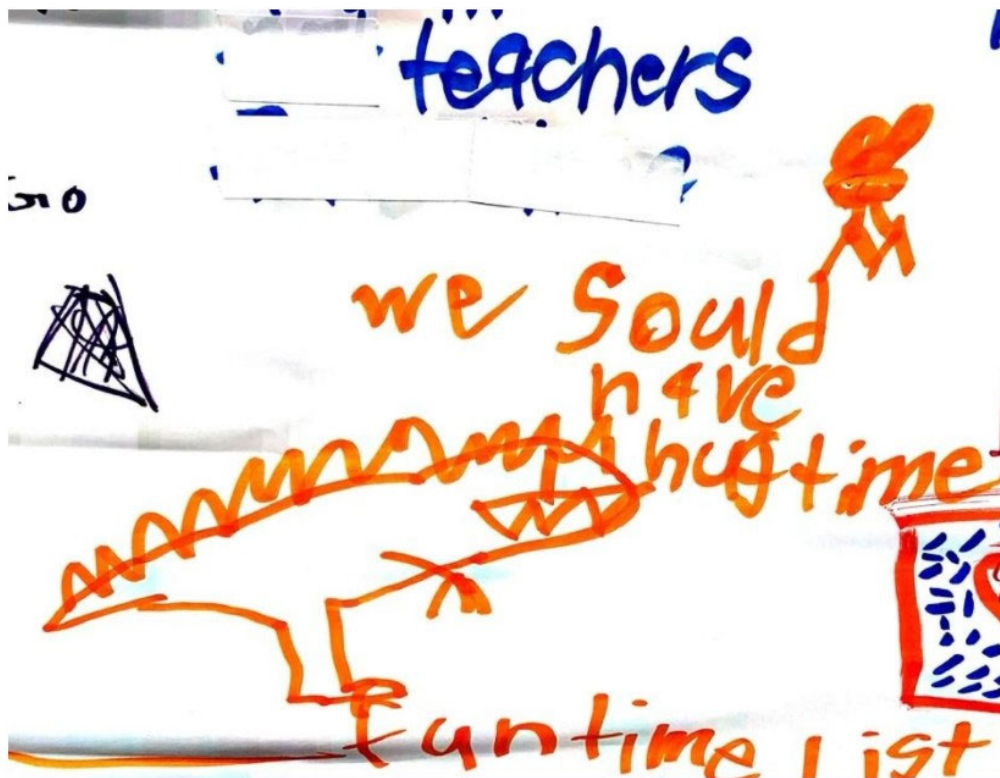
The Ministry of Education shares with SD58 a concern to understand goals and work towards better educational services and supports. We tried to understand how smaller goals might fit into larger future goal statements so that we could imagine evidence-based metrics for the resulting strategic plan: what can be made explicit, and counted?



DATA COLLECTION

Notes were taken in every meeting, and often art was used to generate and clarify ideas and discussions. Children would draw what they wanted to talk about or tell stories; sometimes we would draw their stories, and this led to open, expansive, generative conversations that built on each other's voices.

Notes and art were analyzed thematically as “meaning units” when they appeared consistently or seemed to be important outliers worth holding on to. We continued this iterative process until the draft strategic plan recommendations weremade.



Elementary students at Diamond Vale suggested “hug time” but then decided against that because it made one child uncomfortable so their next idea was a “fun time list” that teachers and students could consult when they needed a break before refocusing on their studies.

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INITIAL STAGES

GOAL

An early goal of the Strategic Planning Committee was that the resulting new strategic plan would be in plain language, with graphics, understandable to all, inclusive, and give all of the players – parents, teachers, staff, and students – a common set of ideas and language out of which to envision a possible future that would lead people into the next three to five years.

See recommendations.

INITIAL FINDINGS AND DOCUMENTATION

School District No. 58 Website "About Us"

School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) encompasses two distinct communities, Merritt and Princeton. The two communities are joined by Highway 5A, which curves through beautiful ranchland and around numerous lakes. Both communities are approximately three hours from Vancouver, with quick freeway access to the Okanagan and Kamloops regions. Reflecting our multicultural diversity, our District offers language instruction in two First Nations languages and Punjabi, as well as ESL and French immersion.

Our two communities are located in the Similkameen and Nicola Valleys. We offer peaceful community living in close proximity to exciting urban centres. Caring and passionate District and school personnel have developed strong relationships and partnerships with parents and the community, resulting in innovative, supportive educational programs. Our unique multicultural community fosters acceptance and cooperation.

We offer a range of learning opportunities for students including an independent directed studies program, a continuing education centre, adventure tourism program, AVID and a regional distributed learning center. A teacher-student laptop program and secondary alternate programs are available. Students' educational experiences are enhanced through diverse programs in fine arts, trades, athletics, and K-12 French immersion that is offered in Merritt.

Note: this is also used in information for prospective teaching staff and other employees. We found it to be representative of all our interactions and conversations.

See recommendations for more.

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CURRENT VISION STATEMENT

"Success for ALL Learners Today and Tomorrow"

CURRENT MISSION STATEMENT

The District will do this work by:

- Supporting **excellence** in teaching and learning
- Challenging and supporting staff and our students to pursue their **personal best**
- Recognizing and celebrating **cultural diversity** and the **heritage** of our communities
- Encouraging **parental involvement** with students at home and school through meaningful relationships with families and communities
- Fostering **resiliency, resourcefulness, respect, and independence**
- Inspiring **curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking** in all students and staff to achieve their full potential
- Providing **safe** and **nurturing** learning environments for ALL students to achieve their full potential
- Recruiting the best qualified personnel, providing ongoing, systematic professional development, and retaining outstanding staff
- Providing timely, relevant, and useful information and data to students, staff, parents, and partner groups

VALUES STATEMENT

The District values:

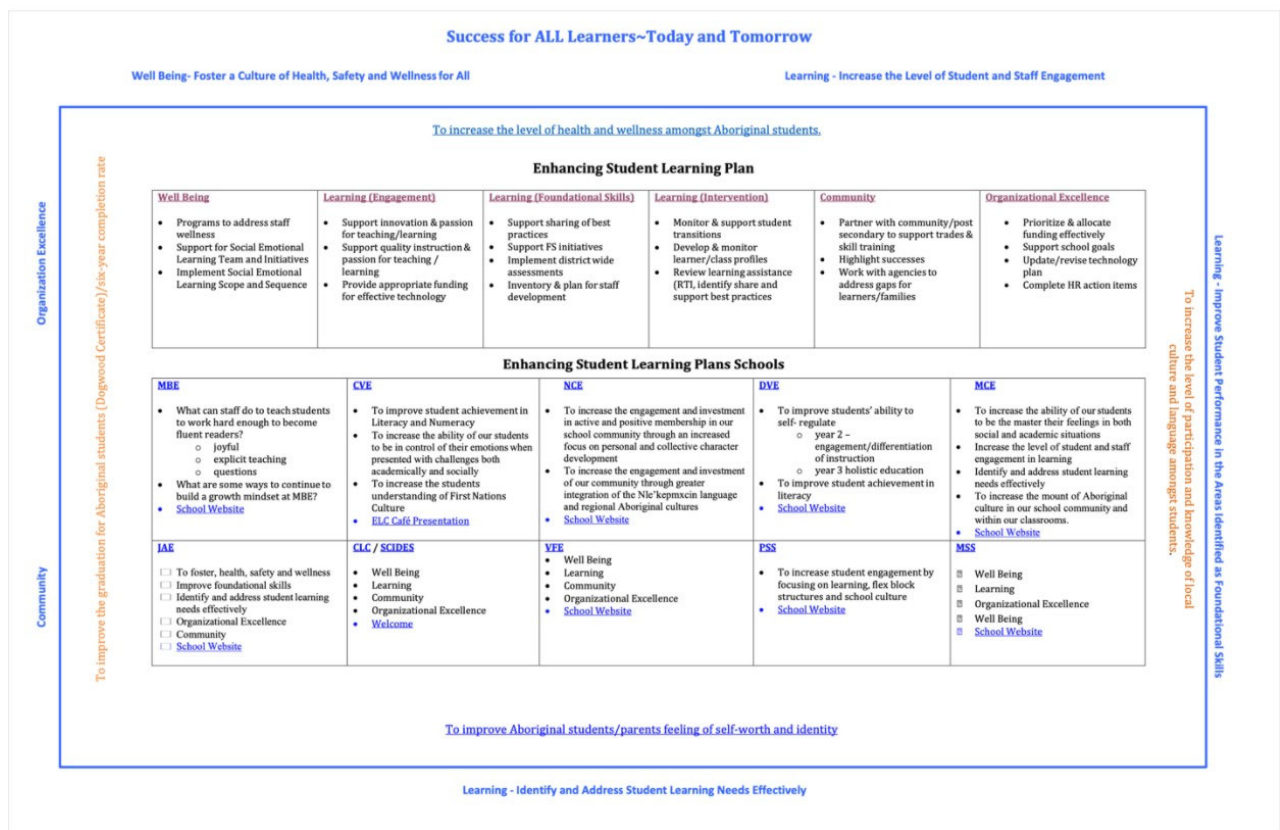
- **Inclusive** education and partnerships
- The **diversity** of our communities
- **Fairness** and **due process** in decision making
- The **heritage** and **culture** of Aboriginal (Inuit, Indian and Metis) and First Nations people, with **recognition** of the traditional territory of the local Nle'kepmx and Syilx peoples
- The **dignity** of all individuals
- The important role of parents and caregivers in **support** of their child's education
- The pursuit of **excellence** and **personal best**
- The **well-being** of students and staff
- Parental and student **choice with respect to how, when, and where learning takes place**
- Responsible **Citizenship**
- Regular, effective, and relevant communication
- Positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect
- Innovation and promising educational practices

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Note: different organizations organize this information in various ways, but our sense as strangers coming in, hosting conversations in which people seemed to be honest and forthright, was that the Vision, Mission and Values statements, although they are very ambitious, were represented in the practices we witnessed and reflected in the experiences and stories of participants.

See recommendations re. clarifying diversity / supported students.

EXISTING STRATEGIC PLAN: ENHANCING STUDENT LEARNING



GOOD PLANNING = EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

In many ways, our work was able to capture the successes of this previous strategic plan and it feels really positive to look at where people were, where they are now, and what next steps might be. The District has accrued good evidence that what is planned for, and attended to, leads to successful outcomes. Under “well-being” for example we can see that the previous plan was to support an initiative that has grown and matured, and when we met with the SELT team we could see that they have a vision for the future in which they are even more proactively and intimately involved at a number of levels.

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Under NCE (Nicola Canford Elementary) there are specific cultural goals and community goals which have been addressed and were reflected in our observations, meetings with students, landscaping, food preparation, and culture workers – what was a goal has become, in our opinion, a centre for excellence and a great feature for SD58 but also an example for how Educational systems can reach for such goals and succeed.

MEETING WITH COMMUNITY, STUDENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Overall impressions

Everywhere we went, people were welcoming, glad to have us, and excited to participate in imagining what the future of SD58 schools would be. People were interested in the idea of an appreciative approach and being able to see their ideas in graphics, whether we documented them in drawings or they did. They were proud of their work and wanted to show us what they were doing, and what they were doing was impressive. Everyone, from so many different parts of SD58, at all different levels, was working hard towards common goals, although there was also a theme of people feeling they often worked in isolation and wanted more opportunities for collaboration and sharing.

Student input

The District Admin and the Strategic Planning Committee were excited about the idea of beginning with students' feedback and ideas for the future in this strategic plan. These processes are often driven from the top.

Students were hungry to talk about their possible “school of the future” and what was working for them, and what was challenging. Almost everything seemed on track in a good way and there were very few concerns from more than 200 participants. People were invited to contact us later if they had more to add, and a couple of them did.

- Students were very aware “consumers” of different pedagogical stances and concerns and the intersection between content, their own character and that of the teachers/school.
- They knew what worked for them in individualized, thoughtful, articulate ways – this in itself is a good indication of their education in critical thinking skills.
- They wanted to show us things that would explain what they talked about, like different kinds of classrooms/spaces.
- A common response to the question of “what do you imagine here in the school, five years from now?” was that students imagined younger siblings getting to be in their classrooms, with the teachers and principals, and they were excited about that.
- Many of the themes that came up, such as reading/books/literacy are the direct result of work done in these areas – which means that a plan previously put into place had been successfully executed.

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- Some themes from the previous plans, such as anti-bullying/kindness/community connection were now ready for new questions such as “What do I actually say? What do I do when X happens? What language do I use and how do we practice it before we need it?” Interestingly, when we met with the SEL team they also felt that they wanted to explore these practices with students and teachers.
- Students at every level were interested in the idea of “risk” – elementary students wanted playgrounds that incorporated risk, or those who had those playgrounds celebrated them; secondary students talked about not focusing on being risk-averse but on preparing for the kinds of decision-making they would be doing as adults, including sexuality education.

Indigenous Students

Indigenous students were included in the groups created by school leaders in proportions that seemed to resonate with the populations of the schools; our sense was that the principals were trying to reflect the cultural composition of their schools. The students seemed glad to see Priscilla, who is Indigenous, and to notice the graphic of smudging on the planning graphic that said “cultural awareness”. We also met with the Aboriginal Advisory Council and the First Nations Support Workers.

- While there were family and cultural issues that children shared with us, there seemed to be no specific educational issues shared.
- In many schools there was lots of evidence of cultural knowledge being valued and implemented.
- The Aboriginal Advisory Council had concerns around Children in Care being supported to continue on in their education, and this also came up for some high school students.
- We later spoke with Shelley Oppenheim-Lacerte about our experience of the students (and of the FNSWs) and about other ways we might get more information.
- See recommendations.

Alternative Schools – CLC the Bridge and SCIDES

We met with a small group of students at KLC and toured the building and contacted SCIDES students by phone for interviews. In general, these students were really pleased with their alternate school experience and felt, from their own experience, that more students who might be frustrated with high school might be more successful in these settings.

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- Some students had particular learning issues – pacing, taking time out and returning to studies, needing to physically move, social issues, confidence as learners, etc. – that they felt were well addressed by the site and the teachers.
- An influx of more students, they felt, would allow for expanding programs around sports and arts.
- They were particularly interested in land based and cultural teachings.
- They wanted more sports and arts education but recognized that their numbers may make that difficult.

Supported Students - Draft

An interesting aspect of this project was that we specifically deferred talking to supported students for a future project of its own, and yet many of the groups we met with included supported students because they are assumed to be part of the school communities they go to. We were very excited about this, and excited about how they were supported by their peers. It would be easy to overlook this, but it is notable that in two other School District projects supported students were simply left out or were in segregated settings on their own and expected to respond within those settings.

Previously, in a small 2019 SD58 project, we looked at concerning rates of school completion for supported students. We worked with families and SD58 staff and partners to identify what had worked for these students and their families. We discovered powerful stories and connections and deep relationships at various levels, and there was a decision to follow-up this work with its own Strategic Plan. That project was put aside to create the larger Strategic Plan in this report but will resume when this is done. Thus, this section is an interim report based on interviews and discussions with Jane Kempston. The full report on the previous project is in the appendices. Notes on our conversations are below.

The goal for a Strategic Plan for supported students is something that is clear in its expectations for the rights and associated responsibilities for diverse students. It would involve vulnerable students, who are sometimes currently left out of conversations which should include them.

There have been excellent examples of successes in inclusion, and it would be good to document these to build on them, with a goal of inclusion happening every day, all the time: “It’s just how we are.” “We want to demonstrate our fundamental belief in the values and choices of every person.”

A cited example of a model for how this might look is the Ministry of Education Early Learning Framework.

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To accomplish this the following should be considered:

Creating a culture where EAs have a voice, are accountable, have PD plans, and are valued consistently and supported to meet high, consistent expectations. Support Services Teachers need to be recognized for their diverse specializations and be able to work in alignment with their school community. A particular need is training and support in difficult conversations, as often these folks find themselves in tough places with little preparation.

Another area is good positive working relationships with administrators and colleagues with a goal of consistent expectations for how Support Teachers work and how supported students are treated. This would require more time for support services teachers, who have often taken on the unofficial role of vice principals in their schools. There is a clear idea about what support could / should look like, but this is not yet supported in schools and requires school-based teams' conversations about processes for inclusion.

Similarly, inclusive classroom teachers need recognition (celebration), and a sense of the deep appreciation for their work, supported by good pro-D. An example of success in the area is Literacy 2021 (Joyful Literacy), which brought teams together, but was expensive and time-consuming. A similar learning series might involve Support Service Teachers who would each bring 2 classroom teachers. This might build on the previous project's concept of supporting and growing the "bright lights" of inclusion in the District.

An area of need is a focus on mental health supports for teachers, so that they become more educated about their own needs, the needs of their colleagues, and of their students.

A plan for strategic planning for this area of services is being created and will hopefully begin soon.

Interestingly, all of these ideas came up in our meetings with students, teachers and EAs. See recommendations.

27

World Cafes - Bringing community in

On behalf of SD58 we hosted two World Cafes, one in Princeton and one in Merritt. We asked the same open-ended questions we had asked of students: if they went five years into the future what would they hope to see schools look like? What did they think the main issues were? Each world cafe was attended by about 30 people – a mix of parents, teachers, community members and students, for about two hours each.

Themes in these were very similar to those expressed by students – an awareness of risk in various ways, and the desire to address this, a desire to deepen community connections, and people wanting more understanding of community and school resources, which they were able to share in the moment.

A theme of the meetings was communication, and people appreciated that part of the world cafe process was that they had an opportunity to ask questions and get more information. The number of respondents who came out to investigate a new-to-them process was an indication of the interest of community in what was happening at schools.

Partner Meetings

Invitations were sent out to selected partners, and were also advertised on local radio stations etc. About twenty representatives gathered in each city, from a range of places – In both Princeton and Merritt we hosted meetings of employers, parents, community nurses and mental health workers, a youth worker group, Indigenous groups, police, justice, employers, businesses, civic leaders, and parents.

A theme was “adult-readiness” – that students know what they need to know to be prepared for citizenship, employment, and community membership. Again, these were also concerning for students. Many partners were seeking ways of being more involved with students, and many students wanted to be more involved with community partners. In one group of partners they asked the question, “How do we access and find students who want to come work with us? We can’t seem to find them to hire.” The next day the students asked, “How do we get hired by local companies?” Finding better ways to support these connections is a recommendation of our report.

28

Meeting with Principals

We talked to almost all of the principals one on one before or after the meetings with students and some principals also attended the World Cafes. Principals were also invited to a dinner meeting for a focus group discussion at which we used some other dialogic processes to look at intersections of goals and challenges. While everyone we met with in SD58 works hard, we were struck by how many hours and how many different duties and roles principals took on. One good conversation about goals was “what will you let go of?” in order to take on some of the work that student feedback would require them to make changes for. This also related to a conversation about work/life balance that was important to many of them.

- Principals are school and community leaders and opportunities for discussion of their strengths and challenges were valued.
- Principals were supported by their teams and seemed to feel good about this, as well as by the Superintendent. See recommendations under leadership.



29

Meeting with First Nations Support Workers

Our meeting with Shelley Oppenheim-Lacerte, District Principal Aboriginal Education, and the FNSWs was excellent as there are so many good things going on in this part of SD58, yet some continuing challenges remain. There was general agreement with the idea stated by one FNSW that “I am getting to teach what I should have learned” and pride in accomplishment: “I taught them something and they are now all doing so well – they were grounded by the teachings.” We felt that these folks were doing exemplary work and wondered how they might be supported to realize their strengths, while addressing constant needs and challenges.

Some needs that were identified were for,

- ♦ More Indigenous foods programs to build on current successes.
- ♦ More land-based classes and activities.
- ♦ “Planning for a cultural event within the system is hard.” There were a few challenges with including cultural events. First, scheduling events outside schools was complicated and who needed to be communicated with was sometimes uncertain. Second, when events were scheduled within the school day, other priorities often interfered with pacing, timing, and roles of Elders. More flexibility in terms of timing (a ceremony would take as long as it took) and a better understanding of roles by teachers and principals was necessary. An alternative suggestion was that local tribes might take responsibility for some of these functions, but it seemed important that some of the work and events were open to both Indigenous students and their allies within their classes.
 - Priscilla: “To bring in Indigenous cultural teaching and events there needs to be more flexibility in the pace and time of classes. To respectfully bring in these teachings is challenging to do on a rigid structural timetable. The entire team needs to work together to have this be successful and that includes teachers, Principals, students, staff and the community.”
- ♦ “We are working out of schools, but with community” – how to have closer, better relationships with the Indigenous community.
- ♦ Elders need to be supported and respected when navigating the school system.
- ♦ More FNSW supports and debriefing was needed. “The work can be hard – physically (drumming) and emotionally”.
- ♦ “More Indigenous teachers would be great – the students need to see this.”
- ♦ “I am concerned about the Indigenous ... students – they are lost.” A common message that needs more investigation.
- ♦ Some issues with “pan-Indigenization” – what works for one tribe is different than for another. This is particularly an issue given the number of different tribes in the region.

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Meeting with Social Emotional Learning Teachers

“I dream of a kind of strong structure that exists within our systems and supports both students and teachers to come together in ways that move us all forward – something that is not vulnerable to changing ideas about what one parent who is forceful wants, or changing ideas about what something should look like, but is stable and consistent.” This articulate and experienced group has a certain overview of the schools they work out of and also of the social conditions of the region, so they were very interesting.

- “What if every teacher was a mental health support leader/teacher, just as we’ve said that every teacher is a reading teacher?”
- “What if every class had a [mental health] informed EA to support the teachers?”
- “breathing and treating yourself like your best friend are things that I do for myself that I can teach kids”

“Breathing and treating yourself like your best friend are things that I do for myself that I can teach kids.”

Meeting School Board Office Staff

The School Board Office Staff were prepared and ready to talk about ambitious changes in many areas. A theme was, “People step up; they work really hard here,” and Board Office staff were very concerned to support teachers and schools: “There are so many layers to the jobs here; what they do is really hard, and we want to support it.”

Technology: Would like to see 21st Century Technology in use. More storage space/ digitized files. Integration of MyEd in more processes so things are online and readily accessible (with self-serve options in some cases).

Finances: Crisp, clear understanding of how we spend money; better coding for accounting would allow for this.

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Human Resources: Clearer roles and responsibilities were being worked on, and people were looking forward to this continuing (i.e., job descriptions, reporting structures). More consistent communication between SBO and schools. Change management supports.

People work weekends and evenings - more efficiency might allow more focus on wellness. Being able to cross over roles would be helpful: "Want to understand the nuances of each other's jobs." Before and after school care would help lots of people who have jobs and kids. In general, people felt "Grateful for our present conditions and happy in how far we have come."

Many of the employees talked about how this was "the best place I have ever worked," partly because of positive team dynamics and also the variety of tasks, many of which included interactions with students.

Meeting with Maintenance Staff and Bus Drivers

This group was brought together not least because it was felt that they have a different understanding of student lives through their particular lens(es). Many participants agreed that this was the best job they had ever had. Things they liked were working with students; flexibility; getting to do different things ranging from trapping a muskrat to regularly scheduled maintenance

When the question was generated: "This is a good place to work; what would make it a great place?" the responses were really interesting, and in keeping with that of students and community members: Lots of ideas about what students might be learning to support them to be effective, healthy adults; "More real life experiences so they know what to expect" (Many work placements had been supported by these folks); Creating positive first employment experiences for students was a great experience for them.

Concerns for this group were also interesting: they were intent on trying to support teachers in what was perceived to be "a really hard job."

- It is hard to say "no" to good ideas of Principals and teachers because of budgets or structures that cannot handle more.
- A lack of respect from some students and perceived lack of consequence to problematic behaviours were concerns.

In practical terms, they felt that more security would be necessary in future (knowing where students were so that everyone was safe), and some playgrounds need replacement or renewal (there was agreement that playground aspects that have "a bit of risk" are most attractive to students), and also electrical panel upgrades – "as all are at capacity."

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Meeting with Human Resources

“Everybody gives all” was the clear summary of how SD58 employees work. The HR Coordinator is a new position within SD58 and there was excellent feedback from many different corners on what a difference it has made to the ability of others to work attentively at their own jobs. Previously, many of the HR duties were done by the SD58 leaders, and there was agreement that the new HR leader had taken on these functions and was performing them very capably, to a higher standard, with a vision of what the future might be like.

Goals for this department were:

- ♦ Improve connectivity in the office and across the offices.
- ♦ Implement on-boarding and off-boarding processes, including job descriptions.
- ♦ New employee general orientation and safety orientation.
- ♦ Create HR section online which would include
 - Collective agreement, job descriptions, wellness tips, occupational health and safety documentation and information.
 - Staff portal with contact information for employees to clarify who to go to for specific admin questions
- ♦ On Pro D days, training that included,
 - respectful workplace training for teachers and maintenance workers.
 - an Indigenous culture aspect in every training session. Observation - training of staff is a benefit to all students when it comes to awareness of Indigenous culture.
- ♦ Evaluation of cultural issues at some schools. Educate / create... programs, policies, and further training.
- ♦ BCPC training for bargaining and collective agreements.
- ♦ Organize and streamline medical processes - leave, etc.
- ♦ Build trust - HR goal is to support but given that this is new role with proactive potential this is new to people.
- ♦ Address EA training. EAs can sometimes have interpersonal issues: some are trained online with no practicum, and thus have not had experience working through issues with others.
- ♦ Communication training might offset this.
- ♦ Safety orientation.

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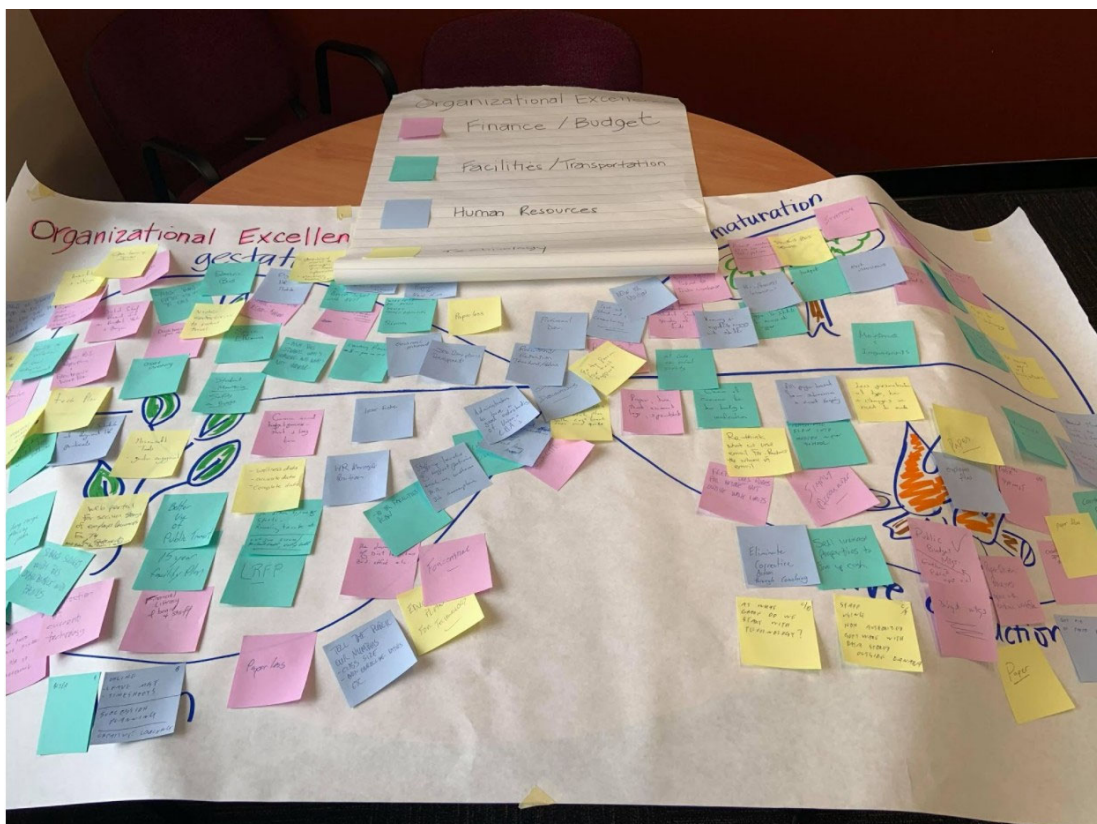
Meeting with School Trustees - Strategic Planning Committee

There were two scheduled opportunities to meet with School Board Trustees, at which we interviewed people in Princeton and Merritt, and then other trustees attended the world cafes, as well as a pre-planning meeting and update by video. Superintendent Steve McNiven also led them in an examination of the Eco cycle of SD58 that replicated something we did with Principals and Vice-Principals.

Trustees seemed well informed of both areas of excellence and challenges. They brought to their roles deep understanding of their communities.

Feedback from the community and staff was both that “It’s great to have a working board that’s involved” and “The board might want to consider their governance role to see if they need so much involvement.”

We met twice online with the Strategic Planning Committee to focus on what they envisioned in the planning. Their focus on involving students was particularly great.



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TEACHER SURVEYS

We had a very good response rate to the surveys sent out to SD58 teachers and received 39 responses. In general, the themes can be summarized into 5 themes, all starting with the letter “C”:

1. CURRICULUM EFFECTIVENESS

Includes academic consistency, resources, access to technology, class sizes

“If every child were to receive what they need, then there would be a more highly trained adult to student ratio.”

2. CONSIDERATION FOR TEACHERS

Includes teacher stress, work-life balance, planning time, appreciation, specialists

“Acknowledgement and support of teachers and their mental health, workload, balance, and opinions.”

3. COLLABORATION

Professional Development, teacher to teacher collaboration

“...asset that shone the brightest [during pandemic] was teachers helping each other...”

4. CONNECTION /COMMUNITY/CARE FOR STUDENTS

Counsellors, emotional care for students, basic needs for students School culture, Outreach with larger community

“What is great is the genuine caring for the student.”

“More school culture, community and community connection.”

5. CLARITY - GOALS AND PLANS

Clarity/goals/involvement/communication

“A high functioning learning community that supports each other to exceed... goals with a clear path forward together”

The full document is available in the appendix.



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Small Group Meetings with Teachers

This document shares feedback which arose in those conversations that were previously not noted or were not as clearly identified by the survey. In order to remain consistent with the themes identified in the survey, the feedback is grouped into the same 5 broader categories, all starting with the letter “C”. The feedback is broken down further IN GENERAL by grade level/area of responsibility. The full document is available in the appendix.

Clarity

Includes administrators/ board/ teacher relationship.

Clarity/ goals/ involvement/ communication/ consultation/ conversation

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Grades K - 3 | <p>Understanding how budgets are set would be positive.</p> <p>Appreciate that Superintendent and District leadership are approachable and care about students.</p> <p>Want to be involved and have input with initiatives.</p> <p>Summer Institute a great example of union and District working together.</p> |
| Grades 4 - 7 | <p>Appreciate meaningful consultation opportunities.</p> <p>Like to feel like we are all working together as a team.</p> <p>All schools should have equal access to resources, can be a challenge for small ones.</p> <p>Like to see teachers having a voice and feeling safe to share.</p> <p>Curious about the changes this process will bring.</p> |
| Grades 8 - 12 | <p>Want to feel like we are working as a team.</p> <p>Like staff meetings to include robust discussions.</p> <p>Like shared vision and working as a team.</p> <p>Appreciate being able to ask for and get help from admin in a timely manner.</p> <p>Value admin and teachers working together proactively.</p> |
| EAs | Value trust between teachers, admin, District and EAs |
| Librarians/SST/SELT | Want to understand how schools are funded. |

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Collaboration

Professional Development, teacher to teacher collaboration

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Grades K - 3 | Value pro d and workshops that address current and relevant needs in the classroom |
| Grades 4 - 7 | Loved Changing Results For Young Readers Want team teaching opportunities with SSTs Benefit from cross-school, cross-grade learning opportunities for teachers |
| Grades 8 - 12 | Value Pro-D that allows for teacher to work and learn together Value planning together Like staff meetings to have a discussion and planning purpose |
| EAs | Value daily interaction with SST Appreciate being valued as team members Want to be a part of setting goals that make sense and are collaboratively determined for kids Value ongoing, open sharing of information, in order to be a part of wrap around support for kids |
| Librarians/SST/SELT | Value new librarians being given support to understand role and best practices See collaboration and debriefing as a critical part of processes Felt strongly that mentorship programs are valuable |

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Consideration

Includes teacher stress, work-life-balance, planning time, appreciation

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Grades K - 3 | Professional autonomy and choice important Mental health support with Dr Carrington appreciated Recognize the importance of teacher well-being in then creating student well-being Being appreciated and recognized feels positive and is needed Financial support for classrooms needed rather than having to spend out of pocket |
| Grades 4 - 7 | Appreciate being able to meet during school time as opposed to after school Important that data collection and reporting be simple and related to classroom Need more support in purchasing resources necessary Feel that work being done during work hours maintains teacher wellness Appreciate feeling cared for so that they can then care for students |
| Grades 8 - 12 | Teachers appreciate having genuine input on decisions being made for student Value teachers being looked after; Jody Carrington work Want positive behavior support for students available to ensure positive and respectful learning environment for all Value school communities that are accountable to and for all Need administrators to be able to support positive behavior both in the moment and proactively. |
| EAs | EA relief list that is adequate for absences is important Value continued training opportunities Appreciate being valued members of the team Value positive and appreciative relationships with SSTs, learn from and with each other |
| Librarians | Appreciate time for the administration of library responsibilities/tasks |
| SELT/SST | Community partners valuable in supporting kids Work and caseloads that feel manageable are important Mental Health days would be valuable and appreciated Recognize and address the stress of families in crisis and learn to not take it home with you |
| TTOC | Consistent expectations across schools would be helpful COVID a concern working school to school Value parental support of schools |

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Curriculum

Includes academic consistency, resources, access to technology, class sizes, specialists

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Grades K - 3 | <p>Appreciate time with ELT</p> <p>Value shared teacher resources and learning</p> <p>See two goals: academic and mental health as both being important</p> <p>Working hard on Literacy and Numeracy</p> <p>Appreciate time to do assessments from which planning happens</p> <p>Value being given freedom to decide what support is needed</p> |
| Grades 4 - 5 | <p>Value shared resources and learning</p> <p>Support of “Battle of the Books” by District appreciated</p> <p>Value specialist teacher and ELT support when possible</p> <p>Valued literacy and numeracy specialists and library coordinators when positions were in place</p> <p>Important to have a librarian getting the right books into kids’ hands</p> |
| Grades 6 - 7 | <p>Want more resources in math, socials and science</p> <p>Want supports to continue throughout grades for designated students</p> <p>Value time available to spend on enrichment</p> <p>Advocate for the middle years to be visible and important in continuum</p> <p>Focus on learning and success both important</p> |
| Grades 8 - 9 | <p>Important to be able to teach students why attendance and learning are actually important to them at this time in adolescence</p> <p>Recognize the Zone of Proximal Development for this age; importance of resilience</p> <p>Want to prepare early secondary students for the senior years and the increased pressures that come with successful transitioning into next steps</p> |
| Grades 10 – 12 | <p>Want to be able to hold kids accountable for their learning because we DO care about them and want the best for them</p> <p>Want graduation to genuinely reflect the commitment and passion of both teachers and students</p> |
| EAs | <p>Value diverse kids getting the support they need</p> <p>Need to see integrated supports continue for secondary students if required</p> <p>Want to be valued as team members and open to EA contributions</p> <p>Need space available to work safely with kids during COVID</p> |
| Librarians | <p>Library coordinator was valuable in maintain consistency and programs across District and organizing professional development; love “Battle of the Books”</p> <p>Healthy library budgets show that libraries are important to District</p> <p>Recognition of MyEd and library tech roles</p> |
| SELT/SST | <p>Want to be able to serve diverse spectrum of kids</p> <p>Recognize need for more SLP and counseling support</p> <p>Recognize the need to support kids in meeting the challenges of grade ten that are critical to ensuring school completion and access to next opportunities</p> |
| TTOC | <p>Want students to be prepared for world outside of school</p> <p>Technology valuable and needs to be available</p> <p>Enrichment opportunities important</p> <p>Celebrate research and love of learning</p> |

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Care, Connection and Culture

Counsellors, emotional care for students, basic needs for students, school culture, outreach with larger community

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Grades K - 3 | Value the importance of indigenous communities being invited into schools; things like community breakfasts a big success Value FN voices, proud to be a part of a District that does Excellent SELT support and Mental Health recognized in District |
| Grades 4 - 7 | See it as important to have programs move into culture of school through long term commitment; value ongoing pro-d See good job of embedding FN culture Assessments need to be meaningful, including for kids Kids are cared for as seen by turn out for Strat Plan meeting |
| Grades 8 - 12 | Teachers value understanding what is happening in their students' lives, especially those in crisis, open wrap around support Teachers do this work because they care. |
| EAs | Feel it is important that they be a voice for kids |
| SELT | Would like a family referral system Would like more professionals on every student's team, including community Advocate for strength-based approach to students by all school community throughout grades Always can use more counselling support in every school; hard to leave kids Want to build capacities of all teachers to be Mental Health teacher/support |
| SST | Need to be able to connect students with social emotional supports in and out of school |
| TTOC | Recognize the impact of school leadership and staff on the culture of every school |

40

EA'S SURVEYS

In general, the themes can be summarized into 5 themes, starting with the letter "T":

1. TRANSPARENCY

Includes clarity and communication

"Transparency, as well as a visual or language around what the common goals are."

2. TRUST

Includes support and relationship building

Want team members to be respected. EAs need to be appreciated for the roles they play in students' lives.

3. TEAMWORK

Includes appreciation, information sharing and consultation

"Nice group of people that really care about students. Would like to see a more rounded team approach."

4. TECHNOLOGY

support, access, and communication

More support for the children doing distant learning would be a positive.

5. TRAINING and CURRICULUM

Includes Professional Development, curriculum

"I would love to see more opportunities for EAs to participate in professional development days."

The full document is available in the appendix.



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BUSINESS PRACTICES

LONG RANGE FACILITIES PLANS

The draft long-range facilities plan describes each school building in detail within a context of socio-economic conditions and school usages and patterns and prospective maintenance, etc. for the next decade. It seems to us excellent in its depth and ability to provide an overview from multiple perspectives. However, the writers state that it was the completed prior to the pandemic conditions and,



...it is necessary to review the Long-Range Facility Plan as an accurate snapshot in time before the outbreak of COVID-19 in Canada.

The recommendations cited will need to be reviewed with new COVID-19 realities in mind.



It does appear that SD58 is well positioned to be able to make choices that will keep students and staff safe until Stage 4, as conditions around physical distancing and also real estate values settle (see School District 58 Nicola - Similkameen Long Range Facility Plan, 2019 – 2029: A Report by Cascade Facilities Management Consultants Ltd, appendices).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

REFLECTIONS

Overall, my colleagues and I were very impressed by SD58 in every way. A great deal of hard work by some incredibly dedicated players has gone into supporting a community of complex issues and needs, with a focus on students and youth, but a realization that education is a community activity. It is remarkable that during about 400 interactions with different stakeholders from various viewpoints within the SD58 system everyone was passionate, hopeful, welcoming, and excited about what was next. What could not have been foretold is that COVID 19 was “next,” but even in this, people we met were already responding and making presumptive alternative plans based on information coming out of Europe.

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The Educated Citizen

The B.C. Ministry of Education “BC’s New Curriculum” document states,

“Achieving British Columbia’s social and economic goals requires well-educated citizens who are able to think critically and creatively and adapt to change. Progress toward the achievement of these goals also depends on the province having citizens who accept the tolerant and multifaceted nature of Canadian society and who are motivated to participate actively in our democratic institutions. “To ensure the development of an educated society, government is responsible for providing all youth with the opportunity to obtain high-quality education. To that end, British Columbia’s schools assist in developing citizens who:

- Are thoughtful and able to learn and to think critically, and can communicate Information from a broad knowledge base;
- Are creative, flexible, and self-motivated and have a positive self-image Are capable of making independent decisions;
- Are skilled and able to contribute to society generally, including the world of work Are productive, gain satisfaction through achievement, and strive for physical well- being;
- Are co-operative, principled, and respectful of others regardless of differences’
- Are aware of the rights of the individual and are prepared to exercise the responsibilities of the individual within the family, the community, Canada, and the world.

The redesigned curriculum captures these qualities, both implicitly and explicitly, in the core and curricular competencies. The concept of the educated citizen will continue to guide educational decisions for years to come, ensuring that students across the province are supported and that future generations of British Columbians are empowered by their school experience."

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/overviewTimeline>

Many student statements reflected very well on their understanding of the new curriculum and of the expected progression of their learning, or of how that learning had occurred.

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While we have divided these up into sections (Education, Leadership, Community and Business Practices) there are many overlapping areas. For example, a perceived theme is “risk and change management” - the interest in “supports to change management” that comes up for administrative staff is similar to the need for sex education that comes up for the Youth Workers Advisory group who attended a community input event and for high school students we met with, is similar to the desire for “engaged risks” without punishment in elementary school students: “How do we best handle change and differences in approaches and ideas?” We felt this example was remarkable in that it indicates the kind of aspirational critical-thinking culture that permeates SD58 and is supported there in many ways. A goal that might arise out of this would be that this kind of theme and thinking be more clearly defined, trained for, and supported to increase the consistency of responses to new ideas.

We have tried to limit these to 15 broad ideas out of which would come goal statements.

EDUCATION

CLEAR PATHWAYS TO ALTERNATIVE SUBJECTS

Students are taught how best to follow personalized learning plans, but follow-through can be uneven, given a lack of access to what might be identified, because of the size of the school and resources of the region. Even in this, there was an awareness that other possibilities existed online in other regions that could be supported, but a need for guidance and support to find and access these. **Identify existing ways that students access this information and clarify, with identified supports.**

ARTS IN CURRICULUM

Students were grateful to what was often their introduction to the arts – drama, music, and visual arts, but they hungered for more. Some students in particular, who were particularly focused in these areas, wanted ways to be successful and to grow their skills and knowledge. **Create a regional cultural access plan that students can understand so they know where their opportunities will be, in schools, through local resources and in field trips.**

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RECREATION: PLAYGROUNDS AND SHARED SPACES

A theme of the conversations with students was the replacement of old playground equipment with new; for students in schools where this had already happened, their involvement and that of their local community was a matter of some pride. A related idea was that of clearer playground rules and authority. **Initiate conversations in the schools that include playground supervisors and clarify authority, what risks exist, why rules have been made and what future plans are for the recreation areas.**

COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION

Requested by groups at both high schools and also at the community meetings and world cafes. **Identify existing resources and work with someone with expertise in this area to create a learning plan students and parents understand, with a focus on liaising with other interest groups such as youth workers.**

INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGY

SD58 seemed to us a great example of a district with the intention of really working through the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action. In terms of the pedagogical implications of these, they are significant as they are, unfortunately, new to how we think of schools and educational plans and involve developing new skills and relationships. **Identify what has happened in SD58 and document in ways that community can understand and consider how to celebrate the successes in this area. Consider a strategic planning project that is specific to this area of education.**

LAND-BASED LEARNING

The idea of land-based learning came up for school leaders, students and FNSWs. There was a range of conversations from puberty transition ceremonies and transitions to adult roles to field trips to hunting and fishing, and how the bureaucratic needs of the system sometimes interfered with these goals and with necessary ceremony. **Clarify existing supports to this idea and processes to streamline possibilities.**

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COMMUNITY LEARNING AND INTERACTIONS

Indigenous peoples have a distinctive and problematic historic relationship with school systems, and this was being addressed in various ways, at various levels. One of these levels was educating the community, both Indigenous people and allies, about what was actually happening in these areas and what the successes have been. The High School's contemplation room, for example, was spoken of in both disparaging and informed ways – students were perceived as going there “just to hang out” and others perceived it as the place where students were able to feel safe and “stay in school” in the ways that they could, given circumstances in their own lives. **Have consistent public and internal messaging around these ideas and events that can be accessed by the community.**

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Many of those who attended the community meetings were hungry for more knowledge about what was happening in schools. They came out in the evening and were excited to be asked for their input and had great ideas, but also great questions about what was happening. They loved having some of the teachers and school staff at their tables so they could hear first-hand about local education. Many said that they would like more involvement, or that things they had been hesitant about were now more resolved, and they wanted to take a more active role in schools. **Consider how to genuinely bring community into schools, and school into communities.**

STUDENT REQUESTS FOR LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND RELATIONSHIPS

One student, who represented several different voices in different meetings, said, “Not everything is a bus trip away from here. We have lots to learn right here.” Students talked about visiting farms, businesses, environments, and organizations. **Create expedited planning tools for such local visits might make them more likely, particularly if it made the idea of risk assessment less cumbersome and create a portfolio of possible places for fieldtrips and a budget that is transparent.**

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FUTURE PLANNING AND TRANSITIONS SUPPORT

A significant concern for students was being prepared for their transition from high school into adult roles. They felt school counselors (the SEL team) were, quite rightly, busy with the needs of students who required supports to stay healthy and safe, and this left little time to support their own planning. They wanted more information about what possibilities existed beyond their community, and some also talked about wanting more information about how they might continue to be part of their communities in new adult roles. **Create a role to support this, possibly with post-secondary and business partners.**

INCLUSION AND SUPPORTED STUDENTS

It was decided early on that supported students would benefit from a separate planning process and would not be included in this data collection and planning. From work we did with SD58 last year (see Merritt and Princeton Schools Research Project: Final Report, A. Johannes, 2019) we had some understanding of the local issues and goals. Some supported students, however, were included in the small groups by the Principals and school representatives who organized the groups, and this was itself a really interesting indicator of inclusion. These offered valuable insights into the cultures and actions of the schools themselves. Further, supported students was a topic for other students – they were consistently positive about inclusion and some of the supported students were considered as important characters in their school lives. **Develop a strategic plan for consideration of supported students from a provincial and local viewpoint, from pre-school to graduation, and leads to a snapshot of current strengths and needs, as well as a plan for implementation.**

BULLYING

Bullying is an example of how communications might assist the District in moving forward without distraction. During the week of one of our community events a letter was sent to the Editor of the paper that talked about bullying at the Merritt High School. The content of the letter was almost entirely opposite to what students had told us – that bullying used to be problematic but was no longer the issue it had been, with examples given of how the student culture had mitigated and turned around attempts to bully others, including students with disabilities. Students felt proud that bullying was “less than half” of what it had been and that those who had been involved seemed

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to have learned from the reactions of others that they needed to develop new strategies of influence that were respectful. Further, no one at either of the community events talked about bullying as a problem. A clearly communicated update on different platforms about what was being done to support student learning around bullying might have reduced the impact of the letter.

Related to this, students were concerned about growing incidents of cyber-bullying and felt that teachers and parents were ill-equipped to counter these, whereas students were well-equipped to help out. **Clarify existing strategies to deal with bullying, the status and success of these, and involve students in planning next steps.**

LEADERSHIP

VUCA

Arising from Warren Bennis' studies of organizational leadership, the concept of VUCA looks at how to prepare for new things that are currently unimaginable, volatile in that they need to be addressed right away, complex, and possibly ambiguous.

A current example is the Corona Virus and media around this, and within SD58 an example was the cancellation of planned trip to Europe which was done at the end of a day by Principals, meeting with families and students. This was done proactively and while it was hard, it seemed to be well handled.

Another example would be the assumptions about what a new NDP government might bring to education, and the reality of problematic union and BCTF negotiations and increased expectations of metrics and tracking.

A good example of how complexity and ambiguity is addressed is the work of Shelley and how she is addressing overt and subtle issues around Truth and Reconciliation while ensuring Indigenous students receive the supports, they need to succeed. We felt she demonstrated exemplary leadership in her addressing of daily issues while always being mindful of what was not spoken and of a vision for the future.

The idea of engaged "risk" came up in many ways in many places. Students at a school where fighting had been a problem wanted wrestling lessons, so they could "use up their

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energy” and learn to fight safely but were told that it was too risky. However, the alternative was fighting and detentions. There were several stories about the dream of a future playground with a “shaky” ladder, but also about the existing shaky ladder on a playground site and how it allowed for students to care for and protect each other.

Leadership within SD58 and within school systems in general fits within a traditional hierarchal model that is often described as coming out of Napoleonic thought as it is based on the idea that ranks of leaders can move forward as necessary. However, in the middle layer of this (Principals and Vice-Principals) the most common “intersection” was the negotiation of work/life balance. We frequently saw these leaders working long, hard, nearly endless days as they addressed the needs of their schools and then worked to address “bigger picture” needs of the communities of those schools. In one discussion, the idea that if one took on “more” one had to let go of something was quite hard for people to wrap their minds around and for many this is a new idea.

The difficulty is that without building in capacity for reflection and innovation, managing new ideas and projects while continuing to support good work being done within the schools, becomes ever more challenging and requires new ways of leading.

Consider a project to educate school leaders and students on what current leadership and planning theory can look like, and from this new conversation begin to build new plans with prospective and existing District leaders.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP

At every grade level, students talked about wanting more involvement in school leadership. Where leadership groups and projects were in place, they felt that other needs of the school precluded student leadership being an ongoing priority. One group talked about not having opportunities to be heard, and another group talked about being on a school leadership team and having their meetings constantly cancelled. Some students talked about wanting to interact with other District school student leaders to work together more effectively. Students were involved in the SPC and had great input, and it was obvious that they were considered important and equal members and supported to be there. **Prioritize student leadership plans and supports for each school.**

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COMMUNITY

CONSISTENT MESSAGING

SD58 has taken up the challenges of education in a volatile time in Canada's history and demonstrated leadership in various areas resulting in some best practices, particularly around literacy, alternatives to traditional school-based education, graduation rates and Indigenous supports.

Communication of these best practices on a macro level is problematic. This can lead to slanted and demoralizing perceptions that "there's no consequences" or "bullying is out of control" when students report that bullying in schools is much reduced from 5 years ago. Similarly, on a micro level, school events are sometimes not well advertised, or notices are sent out in ways that do not work for everyone. Some suggestions were for newsletters or a single social media platform that worked for everyone.

Clarify and publicize what is happening in terms of organizational communication within the District, at each level. Some schools have had a terrific Twitter presence and could be used as examples. **Make a communication plan with dedicated leaders and implement it proactively.**

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

This looms as an upcoming goal given its appearance in almost every conversation, from younger students to those about to graduate, and from community partners and parents. Schools are one of the last bastions of community gathering and Merritt has socio-economic factors which make this particularly important. It also might be that the good work of the local Indigenous populations has demonstrated a new potential for connection that non-Indigenous people want to follow up on.

Throughout the various discussions a theme in every single meeting was community involvement: bringing local people into schools to support learning and students wanting to go out to local places to meet people and hear about what they do and how they came to be in their positions. A theme for community was that they wanted more knowledge of and involvement in schools; at least a couple of the participants made connections that quickly turned into planning for more involvement.

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Assign a “community development” role to either a new or existing employee and use this lens to foster connections, support, and reciprocity. As community development leader David Wetherow has said, “Make connections as natural as brushing your teeth” – so, in all that everyone does, ask how it is either deepening or expanding connections between the school, other organizations, neighbours, families, etc.

SCHOOL SPECIFIC STRATEGIC PLANNING

In the previous strategic plan, each school had a specific plan. This is a placeholder for that idea. This would be a way to involve local schools to think of ways they might each participate in the larger plan. **Consider ways (such as World Cafes) to create school specific strategic plans.**

COMMUNICATIONS

A theme for students was wanting their families to be more involved in their schools; a theme for families was that they did not know about events until it was too late to plan for them. There are many interesting things going on in many places in SD58, communicated in various ways by schools, Principals, teachers, media, etc. **Do an assessment of current communication strategies (Twitter, newsletters, handouts, phone calls, events, etc.) and spend some time planning, probably with Principals, about how to develop, embed, grow, and monitor these communication strategies for effectiveness, making sure families know how communication works in the district.** This focus on connecting has mental health implications as we know from gathering evidence that isolation is a destructive force in every way, while growing connections leads to great resilience, opportunity, physical and mental health (Cacioppo, J. T., & Cacioppo, S. (2018). The growing problem of loneliness. Lancet).

BUSINESS PRACTICES OF SD 58

PUBLIC PRESENTATION OF SD58

SD58’s presentation begins with the introduction on their website, which is also used in hiring materials when the District seeks teaching staff. We felt we would not be disappointed by the reality of the schools and District after reading it. One suggestion would be to consider these ideas from the viewpoint of prospective employees and clarify what supports are in place that will allow teachers to engage in these aspirational ways in terms of training and their own future leadership.

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Develop an introduction with the specific intention of hiring people who will share the vision of the District by being explicit about how they will be supported. A particular focus might be on innovation, community and belonging, making these things – which appear throughout the district’s work – seminal and explicit rather than tentative and implicit.

BUSINESS PRACTICES/FINANCES

This is an impressive department that touches many aspects of the organization. Leaders here were really interested in what was happening for schools and students, and how to support best practices and innovation. We received a copy of the approved budget for next year and were impressed by the thoroughness and the concern to break expenses down in ways that would be transparent to the School Board. All in all, we had the impression of a tightly run ship doing the best it could to manage assets and expenses while being concerned with thinking strategically about not only money but also technology, human assets, and organizational behaviours.

Goals for the department would be to create a tighter system of expense allocation so that funds could be better tracked, and to provide a closer analysis of staffing expenses that would be useful in planning and decision making.

We felt strongly that the example of hiring someone into an HR position to free up leaders to better attend to their specific responsibilities would be a model for what might happen if this department had more staffing supports. They had a ready list of technological improvements and necessary training, and important decisions to make around finance programs, but little time and capacity to implement these. **More staffing supports dedicated to this department would allow for future oriented plans to be implemented.**

HUMAN RESOURCES

This new department is finding its feet impressively and, again, has great ideas that are ready to implement. We were unsure if HR needed more staffed supports. **We felt that a meeting dedicated to thinking through what HR has done, how it has benefited others, and what is being considered for the future and how it might be supported to implement these plans would be of benefit.**

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MORALE AND LEADERSHIP

Employees from various groups attended the World Café Community Conversations, of their own volition, and also talked in individual meetings about their interest in the community, schools, and students and how they liked the opportunities offered by a workplace culture that invited them into events and discussions outside their realm of interest that exposed them to wider conversations. In all groups of employees so far there was a unanimous feeling that “this is the best job I’ve had” or “the best place I’ve worked.” **In a future communications strategy paying attention to highlighting some of these employee’s stories might be of benefit.**

WELL-BEING

Teaching is a field where over-work is common and work/life balance can be problematic. This can be addressed in wellness plans and there is an intention to do that in the future, but in the end what people see us do is what they will perceive the expectation of their own work to be. While, frankly, we were concerned about how hard people were working, when we approached them, they were not concerned. One said, “We work hard, and we play hard when we are not working.” This aspect may need more consideration and when HR implements some of their wellness supports that will gather data about things like sick and mental health days and supports accessed for these, this may become clearer. Organizational leaders may have to change their own work habits to set a good example of boundary setting. **Continue to monitor well-being in ways that can be considered through metrics.**

NEXT STEPS

to be completed

CREATION AND DISSEMINATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

There are some great examples of strategic plans that can be posted, copied, and distributed for discussion and alignment. Graphic recorder Avril Orloff’s visioning of the Delta School District is one example.

<http://outsidethelines.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Delta-Mar-9-FINAL-CHART.jpg>

Another example that is quite different but also effective is from Education Elements:

[https://www.edelements.com/hubfs/2017%20website/Strategic%20Planning%20page%20\(new\)/South%20Brunswick%20case%20study/South%20Brunswick%20School%20District%20-%20](https://www.edelements.com/hubfs/2017%20website/Strategic%20Planning%20page%20(new)/South%20Brunswick%20case%20study/South%20Brunswick%20School%20District%20-%20)