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The Accountability Framework ~ How It Works in BC's Public Schools

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The Accountability Framework ~ How It Works in BC's Public Schools

It's ALL about Student Achievement—
ALL Achievements and Achievements for ALL
BC Ministry of Education's Accountability Framework

Improving student achievement is the Ministry of Education's top priority. To address student achievement, the Ministry has created the *Accountability Framework* for BC's public education system. The purpose of the framework is to refocus everyone's attention and resources—school, district, and Ministry—on improving the achievement of *all* students.

The *Accountability Framework* replaces the six-year accreditation cycle that existed in BC public schools for over a decade.

The Accountability Cycle

What is it?

The *Accountability Framework* creates an annual accountability cycle involving every school, district, and the Ministry of Education. The cycle involves

1. an annual **school plan** for improving student achievement in the school, developed by the school planning council and approved by the school district
2. an annual **district accountability contract** containing specific targets for improving student achievement in the district. The accountability contract is developed by district staff using all the school plans in the district. It is approved by the board and critically reviewed by the Ministry of Education.
3. a **district review** conducted periodically in each district by a Ministry-appointed District Review Team.

"School and district plans must reflect the characteristics, values, and needs of the community they serve."

*Minister of Education
Christy Clark speaking in
2002 of the new
accountability framework*

In addition to the district review, the Deputy Minister of Education visits approximately 20 districts each year. The purpose of his visit is to look at how student achievement in the district connects with the accountability contract and recommendations of the District Review Team. The Ministry of Education closely scrutinizes every accountability contract every year.

The DPAC can request a district review or district visit by the Deputy Minister.

Connections in the cycle

Each element of the accountability cycle takes from and contributes to the other elements—

In public education, we need to know that every school is a good school.

*Ministry of Education
presentation at Provincial
Symposium on the
Accountability Framework,
2002*

- The district examines and uses school plans in creating the year's accountability contract.
- School planning councils use the district's accountability contract as an important source of information in creating the school plan.
- The District Review Team uses school plans and the accountability contract as the basis for its review of student achievement in the district.
- Both school planning councils and the district use the recommendations of the District Review Team in subsequent planning.

The framework is structured so as to give parents and school communities the opportunity to participate effectively in decision-making aimed at improving student achievement.

The School Plan

The School Planning Council (SPC)

The school plan is the responsibility of the school planning council (SPC) in every school. The School Act is specific in defining the job of the SPC—

All sections of the School Act referred to here can be found in **Tab 2, The BC School Act.**

By a date set by the board, a school planning council must prepare and submit to the board a school plan for the school in respect of improving student achievement and other matters contained in the board's accountability contract relating to the school. [School Act, s. 8.3(2)]

The SPC may advise the school board—and the board *must consult* with the SPC—in respect of certain matters:

- allocation of staff and resources in the school
- matters contained in the school board's accountability contract relating to the school
- education services and programs in the school [*School Act, s. 8.2*]

Your school plan is a public document. Your school board is required to make it available to all parents of students attending your school.

It may be posted on your school or district website. Or ask your principal or school district office.

By comparison, PACs and DPACs have a much broader role than SPCs under the School Act—

PACs

- may advise the board, principal, and staff of the school on *any* matter relating to the school, other than matters assigned to the SPC
- at the request of the SPC, may assist the SPC in carrying out its functions under the Act [*School Act, section 8(4)*]

DPACs

- may advise the school board on *any* matter relating to education in the school district [*School Act, section 8.5(1)*]

Consultation

The SPC *must consult* with the PAC during preparation of the school plan. [*School Act, s. 8.3(3)*]

This requirement, in combination with the make-up of the SPC (three parent representatives elected by secret ballot by the PAC), is intended to ensure effective parent participation in preparing the school plan.

To find school district policies on hundreds of topics, go to

www.bcsta.org/policy/polindex.htm

Many school districts have developed policies on SPCs setting out the process for consultation to be used in the district. Ask your PAC or DPAC chair, principal, or school board office for the policy in your district. Many of these policies are available on the website of the BC School Trustees Association at

- ✓ www.bcsta.org/policy/polindex.htm

Timelines

Your school district policy on SPCs may set out annual timelines for establishing the SPC in each school and submitting the school plan to the district.

Because the district *must* submit its accountability contract to the Minister of Education on or before October 31st each year, the timeline for SPCs is important to ensure the district can take all school plans into account in preparing its accountability contract. [*School Act, s. 79.2(2)*]

Once the school plan is approved by the board, it must be made available to every parent of a student attending the school [*School Act, s. 8.3(7)*]. Many schools post the school plan on their website.

For complete information on school planning councils and the school planning process, see **Tab 5, School Planning Councils**.

The Accountability Contract

School boards are elected to represent the public interest in education.

School boards serve the entire electoral area of the school district.

Accountability contracts are the Ministry's way of ensuring school boards remain focused on improving student achievement in their districts.

Every school board must

- prepare an annual accountability contract with respect to improving student achievement in the district and other matters ordered by the Minister of Education
- submit its accountability contract to the Minister by October 31st each year
- make its accountability contract available to residents of the school district and parents of students attending schools in the district. [*School Act, section 79.2*]

Your school district's accountability contract is available on the Ministry of Education's website at

- ✓ www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/sdinfo/acc_contracts/

Guidelines for accountability contracts

The Ministry has created guidelines for district accountability contracts to ensure they reflect the characteristics, values, and needs of the community. Contracts must include

1. a description of the characteristics, strengths, and values of the district
2. a description of the connections between the district accountability contract and school plans
3. clearly stated goals for improving student learning
4. clearly stated objectives focused on specific areas
5. a data-based rationale for the goals and objectives
6. the measures that will be used to indicate progress towards the goals and objectives

7. specific targets for improvement in student performance, both annual and long-term
8. a summary of the progress made and the data used to determine that progress
9. strategies used to achieve the goals and objectives, based on research, best practice, and innovative thinking
10. structural changes made to support student learning (for example, class size, timetabling, personnel)

The Ministry of Education's *District Accountability Contract Guidelines: 2003-2004* are available at

- ✓ www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/sdinfo/acc_contracts/guidelines.pdf

The District Review Process

Accountability means reporting results and progress to education partners and the community.

Accountability is demonstrated through monitoring and public reporting, including districts' accountability contracts and the Ministry's service plan and annual report.

*Ministry of Education's
Glossary for District
Review Teams*

The district review process began in the 2002/03 school year and replaces the external accreditation process. Unlike accreditation, which focused on one school at a time, District Review Teams examine the entire district. A representative sample of schools is singled out for special attention, but the information gained is used to draw conclusions about the entire district.

Up to twenty districts undergo a formal review each year. Each review takes 3-5 days, depending on the size of the district.

Purpose of the district review

The purpose of the district review is to provide feedback to the district, Ministry of Education, and the public on the district's efforts to improve student achievement by

- bringing an informed, objective, external perspective to the work of the school district
- reviewing district and school achievement data
- reviewing the district's accountability contract and school plans
- making recommendations to the board and Minister about improving student achievement in the district
- identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

The Ministry of Education's *District Review Guidelines* are available at

✓ www.bced.gov.bc.ca/review/

The District Review Team

The District Review Team is appointed by the Ministry of Education and includes

- a team chair—a superintendent from another district selected by the Ministry
- a parent selected by the Ministry
- Ministry staff person(s) selected by the Ministry
- educators (principals, administrators, and teachers) from other school districts selected by the team chair and the superintendent of the district under review.

District Review Teams vary in size according to the size of the district under review.

Parents interested in serving on a District Review Team can contact BCCPAC for more information, or go to the Ministry's website at

✓ www.bced.gov.bc.ca/review/

Key Areas for Inquiry

To guide the work of District Review Teams, the Ministry has developed a core set of questions, called *Key Areas for Inquiry*, based on research into what makes schools and districts effective.

The *Key Areas for Inquiry* are:

- Goals
- Rationale
- Data
- Strategies
- Structures
- Results
- Communication
- Teamwork—District and School Coherence
- Teamwork—District and Parent Involvement
- Leadership/Teamwork

Information and the Ministry's application form for parents interested in serving on a District Review Team can be found on the Ministry's website at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/review/

The Ministry encourages all schools and districts to use the *Key Areas for Inquiry* as guidelines in formulating school plans and accountability contracts.

The public report

The District Review Team gives its report to the Minister of Education on completion of the review. All reports are made public by the Ministry which does not change them. The reports are posted on the Ministry's website within two weeks of the review, and are often reported in the media.

All District Review reports are published on the Ministry of Education's website at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/

The school district must respond publicly to the recommendations in the report by June 30th of the review year. The recommendations must be reflected and dealt with in the next accountability contract.

DPACs are encouraged to follow up on the recommendations, and may request the school district to explain how the recommendations are being used to improve student achievement in the district.

Schedules of district reviews

The annual schedule of district reviews is set by the Ministry well in advance and posted on the Ministry's website. School districts are informed in September that they will be reviewed during the school year.

Visits by the Deputy Minister of Education are also scheduled in advance and posted on the Ministry's website.

Special Advisors

Under the School Act, the Minister of Education can appoint a special advisor to review a school district's progress on its accountability contract or to assist a board with educational, financial, or community issues in the district. [*School Act, s. 171.1*]

It is not expected that special advisors will be appointed often. In the first year after the School Act was amended to allow for special advisors, only two were appointed in the province.

The special advisor must submit a report on anything resulting from carrying out his or her duties. The report is public, available on the Ministry's website soon after it is completed.

