School Improvement Initiative

Cree School Board

Office of the Deputy Director General
November, 2011

Continuous School Improvement Initiative
Cree School Board

Prepared for the Pedagogical Management Team
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November, 2011

In the "effective change" process it became important to develop a clear Strategic Direction leading to the future. We learned that the Strategic Direction involved the need to affirm our Mission, to clarify our Vision, Values, Guiding Principles and Goals, which are building blocks required for strategic planning. Once we established a Strategic Direction, the Cree School Board's next step was to develop and shape a long-term Strategic Action Plan. We gathered and drew information from both the organizational improvement planning and the school improvement planning aspects from the work we did on the "effective change "process. These important pieces combined to form and shape the Strategic Action Plan. It was interesting but not surprising that the Strategic Action Plan and the identified major action areas directed us to focus and revolve all our efforts around our students, both youth and adult, with the objective being to improve their educational success. Furthermore, it also identified the need for a higher level of ***capacity building*** *in order to improve school operations, including the operations and functions of the Cree School Board organization.*

Abraham Jolly, Director General
Annual Report 2010 - 2011

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Preface

Schools and school systems all across the world are seeking ways of improving student achievement to respond to the growing public recognition of the importance of education for individual and societal progress and success. The Cree School Board has adopted an exciting approach to supporting school improvement that is research and evidence based. Unlike many jurisdictions around the world that have adopted simplistic practices, the Cree School Board has recognized that sustained improvement depends on schools and Board administration adopting an aligned approach that builds the capacity of teachers, school leaders, district leaders, parents, and community allies. The Cree School Board is putting that approach into practice in schools through the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum Initiative, Success in Sight Initiative, Literacy Initiative, Local School Improvement Plans, and Leadership Coaching . In all strategies, the Cree School Board is closely working with schools to develop common approaches to meaningful change focused on improved school and classroom practices. We recognize that within these broad parameters there can be many different ways to proceed, taking into account the diverse demographics and contexts of our schools. The initial evidence is that these strategies are working. All the indicators of student progress are improving, and there is a renewed sense of energy and optimism in schools about the future. At the same time, we recognize that we are only at the beginning of the road.

This publication illustrates the work being done in the board as well as the significant challenges that must be addressed. We describe in detail the strategies being used by the Board to create enthusiasm, to build teacher skills, to develop strong leadership, to involve the community, and to use data to guide improvement. We show that improvement must always be a collective effort no matter how significant a role some individuals may play. We recognize that the school cannot do it alone although the school must also be committed to the possibility of improvement. We also recognize the importance of tenacity and, as Robert Slavin put it, "the unrelenting pursuit of success for students.

The Pedagogical Management Team
Cree School Board

Introduction

This publication contains information on the strategies to achieve board-wide improvement in student achievement at the Cree School Board. In this introduction, we put the Cree School Board Strategic Action Plan in context. First, we outline the Board's commitment and strategy for raising student achievement. Second, we describe the various projects, from which this case is derived, and highlight the overall findings from this project.

In 2010, the Cree School Board launched a major board wide strategy to achieve substantial improvements in student achievement. The starting point for reform was a comprehensive two year Educational Review (CAFSI Report) commissioned by the Director General and carried out by the independent agencies –Talleyrand Professional Services and Brentwood Consultants in collaboration with two Cree School Board education consultants. A key element of the Cree School Board's strategy for improvement included the contracting of Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)to work in partnership with the Board and schools to support improvement in student achievement.

Nine key principles have underpinned the Board's work:

1. Work with schools to set achievement targets through Local School Improvement Plans.
2. Assemble and support teams at all levels to drive continuous improvement in student achievement.
3. Translate the Quebec Education Program (QEP) into a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC).
4. Build teachers' capacity to support student learning and achievement.
5. Build principals' capacity to lead and manage continuous school improvement.
6. Allocate resources to support target setting and improvement planning for student achievement.
7. Embark on a process of community outreach and engagement to build support for the literacy and numeracy initiative.
8. Demonstrate a commitment to research and evidence-based inquiry and decision making.
9. Establish Professional Learning Communities where educators are committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.

Board Profile

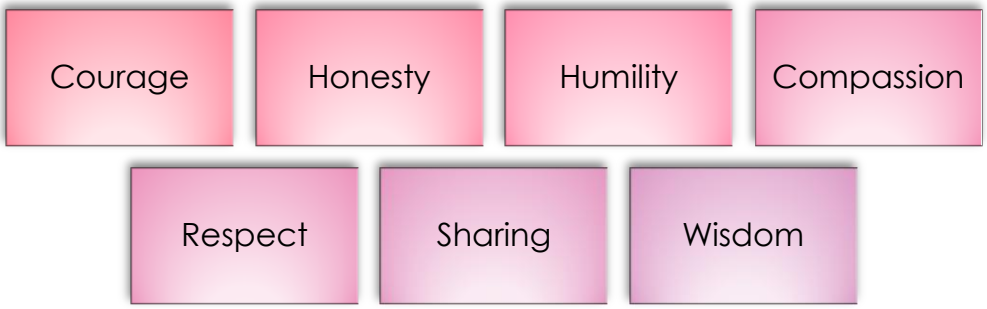
Mission

To provide for life-long learning while instilling the Cree identity in partnership with our communities to allow each student to attain the qualifications and competencies to become a successful contributor to the Cree nation and society at large.

Vision

A well-educated and successful Cree nation through inspired teaching and valued learning.

Values



Demographics

The Cree School Board was established in 1978, under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement with a mandate to provide for the education of Cree youth, grades pre-kindergarten to secondary 5 level, as well as supporting Cree adults in their pursuit of post-secondary education, continuing education and vocational training. The Board has a mission which differs from most other School Boards in one very important aspect. In addition to providing for well-educated Cree youth and adults, it also has a mission to ensure that Cree Youth are proficient in the use of the Quebec Cree dialect, and well-grounded in their Cree culture and history.

The Cree School Board had a total of 3,939 students in the 2010 – 2011 school year. This year (2011 – 2012) there are a total of 4,204 students – a 6.7% increase over last year. Appendix B breaks down school enrollment by community.

Graduation Rate

In June 2010, the graduation rate of the Cree School Board was 1.1%. This rate increased to 7.7% in June 2011.

June 2010 graduation rate: **1.1 %**
June 2011 graduation rate: **7.7%**

Absenteeism

For 2010 – 2011 school year, the average absenteeism was at 22.4% for the Board. A low of 13.6% in August and a high of 32.5% in April. On the average, a student missed a total of 40.9 days over an average of 180 school days.

Transfers

From the start of the 2010 - 2011 school year to the end of June, 242 students transferred. Of these, 60 students transferred out of the CSB.

Departures (Dropouts)

From the start of the 2010 - 2011 school year to the end of June, 228 students quit. Of these, 209 students quit because of low motivation. This represented 5.9% of the average student clientele.

Pass Rate for Selected Compulsory Courses for Graduation

Subject	Sector	Pass Rate
Mathematics, Secondary IV	English	36,5%
	French	66%
Science & Technology, Secondary IV	English	46%
	French	67%
History of Quebec & Canada, Secondary IV	English	58,5%
	French	56,6%
Cree Language, Secondary V	English	58,5%
	French	63,6%
English Language Arts, Secondary V		39,6 %
French Mother Language*, Secondary V		100%
English Second Language, Secondary V		65,7 %
French Second Language, Secondary V		64,7 %

Data from June 2011

*Note that only two students were enrolled in French Mother Language for the 2011 – 2010 school year (one was a non-beneficiary).

Performance on Standardized Tests

The Cree School Board administers the Canadian Achievement Test (CAT-3) each year These tests from the Canadian Test Center were developed after careful consideration of the four major Canadian curricula—those for Western Canada and the Territories, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada. The tests offer assessments in reading, language, writing, spelling and mathematics and allows teachers and schools to determine how their students are performing.

Following is information gathered from the 2009 CAT-3 test for Grade 6 students in the Cree School Board. These results indicate the percentage of students who scored **at or above grade level** on the tests.

Grade 6 English Sector

Reading	Language	Math	Computation & Numerical Estimation
18%	48%	29%	23%

Grade 6 French Sector

Reading	Language	Math	Computation & Numerical Estimation
16%	35%	21%	38%

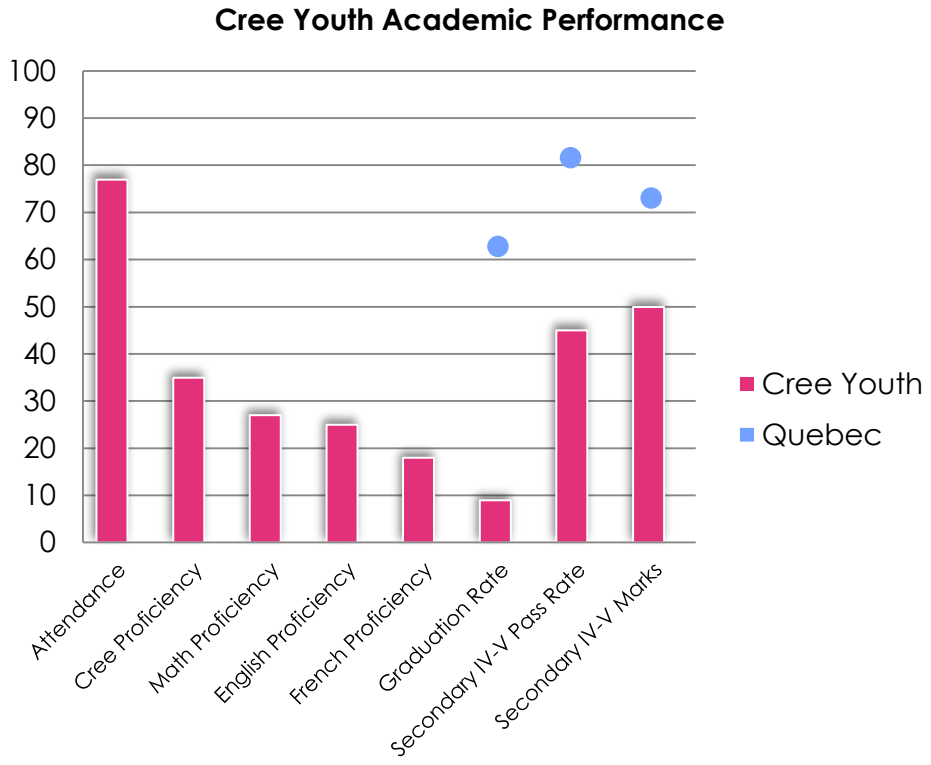
Reversing the results implies that 82% of Grade 6 students are **below** grade level in reading in the English Sector (100 – 18 = 82) and likewise, 84% of students are **below** grade level in reading in the French Sector (100 – 16 = 84).

This report shows only basic overall achievement data for Grade 6 – it is indicative of performance across the Board at all levels.

More detailed CAT-3 test results as well as results for other levels can be obtained at your school by asking the principal for a copy of the Local School Improvement Plan.

CAFSI Report

In pursuing a clear picture of where the Boards' students currently stand, an educational review was conducted in 2007-8, entitled "Communication, Accountability and Follow-up for School Improvement" (CAFSI), co-authored by Talleyrand Professional Services and Brentwood Consultants, with a primary focus on youth education. The results of this study indicate less than desirable performance. The table below depicts this performance, clearly demonstrating current Cree student achievement is far below level.



The authors of the CAFSI Report made 115 recommendations for improvement to the Cree School Board. Of these 115 recommendations, 66 of them relate directly to youth education.

SAP

Board's Approach to Support School Improvement

Strategic Action Plan

Action Areas

Board's Approach to Support School Improvement

Introduction

The Cree School Board's vision reads:

> *A well-educated and successful Cree nation through inspired teaching and valued learning.*

The Deputy Director General emphasizes the importance of articulating a clear, shared vision from which a culture of improvement develops and an infrastructure of support is put in place. This was not always the case, according to the DDG, who said:

> *For far too long our schools have lacked a shared vision. The attitude of many school and Board staff was that we couldn't change the schools we work in. Many of us thought that there were just too many other factors, outside of our control, that would prevent us from changing the culture of our schools. I believe that attitude has changed. We've discovered that we are not victims of our surroundings and we now believe that change is not only possible, it's positively probable if we believe in our own ability to learn how to work so change is achieved.*
>
> Joe MacNeil – Deputy Director General

The vision and focus that has developed revolves around:

- **Literacy** is the priority
- **Graduation** rates that meet or exceed Provincial standard**s**

The CSB's focus on literacy started with the release of the CAFSI "Highlights" report where it was stated:

> *Results on standardized tests in reading, language and math at the grade 6 and 9 levels in English and grade 6 in French show that students do not have the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed to successfully complete school. Over the past 4 years, only 24% of grade 6 students in English and 16% in French showed mastery of reading at their expected level…*
>
> *…You cannot expect students to master a range of subjects whose language of instruction is English or French mother tongue, if the language expectations for these same students are based on second language levels of proficiency.*

In June 2009, the Director General and the Deputy Director General presented a Cree School Board Strategic Action Plan that sets out clearly defined goals in both Literacy and Graduation rates. The Plan identifies 5 strategic areas that must be addressed in order to target these goals: Curriculum, Teaching, Leadership, Student and Family Engagement, Cree in all aspects of school life.

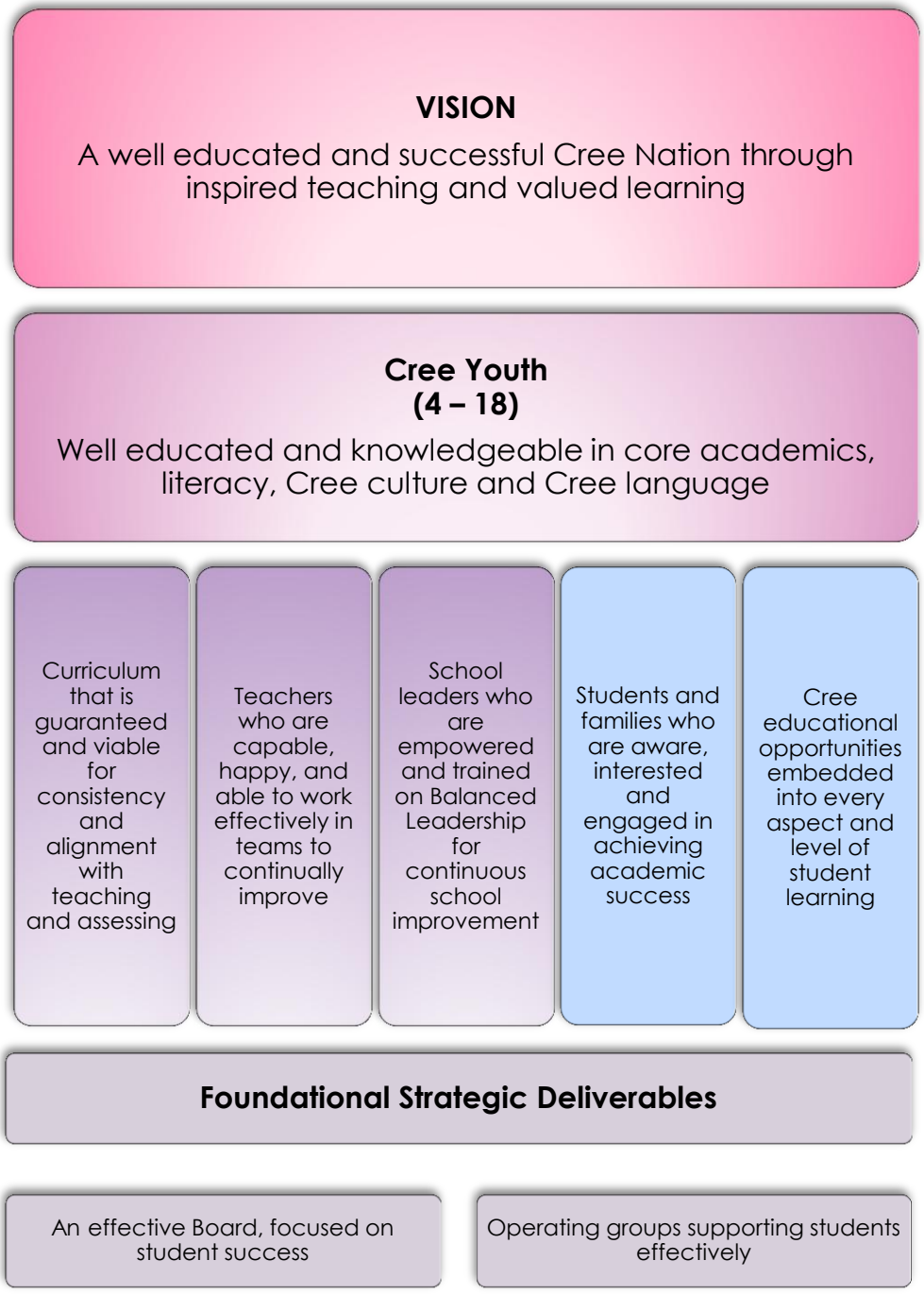
Subsequently in June 2010, the Council of Commissioners adopted their Council Policy Manual which states:

[*The Director General will ensure that:*]

- *There will be annual increase in students graduating from high school*
- *Students are fluent and literate in their mother tongue (Cree, English or French).*
- *Students can read, comprehend, and communicate fluently at grade level or higher in their second language (Cree, English, or French).*

Strategies in Place to Support School Improvement

In June 2010, the Council of Commissioners was presented with a 5-year Strategic Action Plan for the Cree School Board. The Action Plan identifies three strategic action areas (purple) as well as two strategic review and recommendation areas (blue) for the Board to focus on.



Actions Areas

The Pedagogical Management Team has broken down the strategic action areas into more specific action areas which are whose tasks are spread over the 5-year period of the Strategic Action Plan.

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

- Language and Math Curriculum Development
- Didactic Materials
- Common Assessments

High-Performing Teaching Team

- Professional Learning Communities
- Literacy Training
- Teacher Satisfaction
- Substitute Teacher Training Program
- Instructional Framework Standards
- Teach for Eeyou Istchee
- Distance Education and Online Learning

High Performing School Leadership Team

- School Leadership Teams
- Standards for School Leadership
- Principal Professional Learning Communities
- Local School Improvement Plans

Student and Family Engagement

- Student Engagement
- Family Engagement

Cree Education System

- Cree Education System Reform

Effective Board

- Strategic Planning Cycle
- Cree School Board School Success Standards

Operating Groups Supporting Students

- Education Services Restructuring
- Focus on Special Needs
- Data Management and Statistical Analysis

A1

"A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum"

Curriculum that is guaranteed and viable for consistency and alignment with teaching and assessment

Curriculum

The CAFSI Report (June, 2008) set out to determine whether or not "The curriculum being taught fulfills the requirements mandated for each level of instruction and is appropriate for students at that level."

The conclusion by the research team: "what is *actually taught in* classrooms often bears little resemblance to the provincial curriculum because the students do not have the competencies to handle the subject matter." and "Our analysis of the data lead us to conclude that [the mission of the CSB] would be better served by a single curricular model from kindergarten through secondary school."

As a result, the authors proposed the following recommendations:

CURRICULUM	**R26**	THAT the Board draft a framework for the design and implementation of a new curricular model, including a realistic timeline and predetermined indicators of success, and communicate it to stakeholders, including the Ministry.
	R27	THAT the new curricular model provide for the teaching of Cree from kindergarten to secondary V, including the development of a comprehensive curriculum that provides for progressive learning outcomes at each grade, the summation of which meet the expectations of stakeholders for the mastery of speaking, reading and writing Cree.
	R28	THAT the new curricular model provide for the teaching of Cree culture from kindergarten to secondary V, by an appropriate combination of specific courses and cross-curricular learning embedded in other course subjects.
	R29	THAT the new curricular model provide for the teaching of all compulsory and elective subjects at the elementary and secondary levels based on the Basic School Regulation, the QEP and the certification requirements of the Ministry.
	R30	THAT, where appropriate, the curricular offerings envisaged by recommendation 29 include local programs of study, provided they meet ministry standards.

CURRICULUM	**R31**	THAT the new curricular model provide for diversified paths to learning at the secondary level, including vocational education, to be developed with the collaboration of the youth and adult education sectors of the Board.
	R32	THAT, except for the teaching of Cree and Cree culture as a separate subject, the new curricular model provide for English or French as the language of instruction at a given level of instruction, in accordance with the wishes of each community as expressed by a resolution of the general assembly of parents, it being understood that a school may only offer instruction in both languages if numbers so warrant
	R33	THAT the new curricular model provide for progressive implementation beginning at kindergarten and moving forward one year at a time and a transitional regime for students currently enrolled in schools of the Board.

In his now famous 2003 book, What Works in Schools, Robert Marzano synthesized 35 years of research data that identified twelve key factors that have the greatest impact on student achievement.

SCHOOL	1. Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum
	2. Challenging goals and effective feedback
	3. Parent and community involvement
	4. Safe and orderly environment
	5. Collegiality and professionalism
TEACHER	6. Instructional strategies
	7. Classroom management
	8. Classroom curriculum design
STUDENT	9. Home environment
	10. Learned intelligence/Background knowledge
	11. Motivation

See full table in Appendix I

Marzano states, "My basic position is quite simple: Schools can have a tremendous impact on student achievement if they follow the direction provided by the research." Eleven of the factors are organized into three categories: School Level, Teacher Level and Student Level with the twelfth factor being Leadership, about which, Marzano says, "could be considered the single most important aspect of effective school reform…it influences every aspect of the model presented in this book."

Curriculum

The term curriculum can be broadly used to mean a set of courses and content to be taught at various grade levels, or it can be a specific learning program which describes teaching, learning, and assessment in detail. In Quebec, the Ministry of Education provides School Boards with the Quebec Education Program (QEP); this program constitutes the game plan for guiding the educative action directed at our youth. The QEP is a curriculum in very broad terms. It establishes a set of courses to be taught in Quebec schools and it defines competencies to develop, content to learn, and evaluation criteria however, the QEP does this for two-year blocks (cycles) at the elementary and lower secondary levels and for one year blocks at the upper secondary levels.

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC) clearly defines what students need to know, understand and be able to do at the end of a specified block of time and, unlike the QEP, generally the block of time is much shorter than two years, and in fact most GVCs focus on term, weekly or even, in some cases, daily blocks. Marzano rates a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum as the School Level Factor that has the most impact on student achievement. In fact, the research shows that, other than Leadership, a GVC is the number one factor that influences student achievement. A GVC also guarantees equal opportunity for learning for all students and it guarantees that teachers have time teach content and students have time to learn it.

Education Services, under the leadership of the Deputy Director General, has embarked on a long term project to develop and elaborate a GVC, based on the Quebec Education Program, for students in the Cree School Board. This curriculum will not only specify what students need to know, understand and be able to do, it will also provide common assessments, common teaching materials and suggested research-based effective teaching strategies.

Jim Laird - Interim Director of Education Services

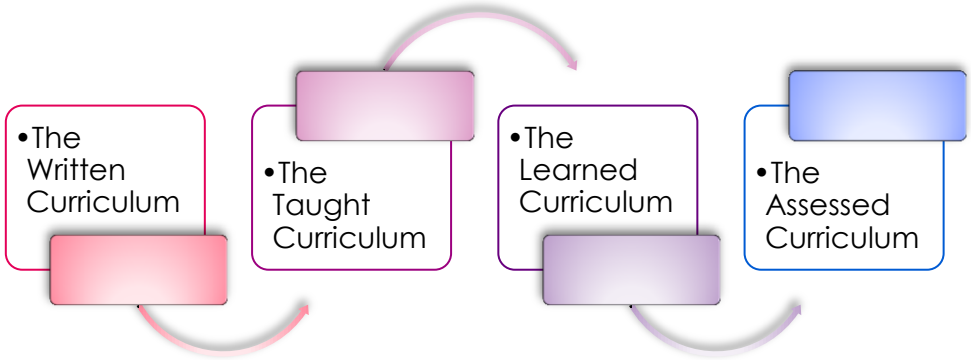
Cree School Board Curriculum Framework

In response to Recommendation 26 (**R26**), the Director General established a Curriculum Committee, in 2008, that consisted of pedagogical managers, administrators, consultants and teachers. In 2009, this committee supported and published a Framework for Curriculum, developed by Joe MacNeil, which was revised the following year with the help of McREL. The *Framework for a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum*, sets out to:

- Provide a set of guiding principles for CSB Guaranteed and Viable curriculum development;
- Identify and organize relevant practices and resources for curriculum improvements;
- Support the development of a CSB Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum.

Purpose of the Cree School Board Curriculum Framework

- To align standards, content, instruction, and assessment. Research has shown that when these are aligned, students' academic achievement increases.



- To promote instructional strategies that have shown documented success at enabling aboriginal students to gain competency with provincially and nationally accepted essential standards of learning.
- To provide consistency and uniformity in content and learning expectations across the jurisdiction of the board in Mathematics and Languages.
- To promote proven Second Language Learner (SLL) instructional strategies aimed at engaging and advancing academic achievement of the Board's students.

Curriculum Initiative Report

Progress Overview

- Three language teams continue to unpack Ministry language program and create aligned curriculum
- One math team has begun to unpack Ministry elementary mathematics program and create aligned curriculum
- Progress is steady, but behind the original timeline
- French team is further behind
- Work session dates for 2011
  - January 20-21: Team work session
  - February 21-24: Team work session
  - March 22-24: Team work session
  - April –off site –small teams working independently
  - May 17-19: Team work session
  - September 7-8: Training session with all K-3 teachers
  - October 25-26: Team work session (math team begins)
  - November 29-30: Team work session

Evidence of Progress

- K-2 term and monthly maps completed – Terms one and two weekly maps completed
- K-2 curriculum introduced to all K-3 teachers in September
- K-2 teachers trained in the use of the Cree School Board GVC in September
- Grades 1, 2 and 3 competed in Cree.
- Completing grades 1, 2, and 3 documents and beginning grades 4, 5, and 6 in English and French.
- Completing grades 4, 5 and 6 in Cree
- Developing monthly maps and framing weekly lesson plans for each of the grades.
- Much time spent providing professional development to build collective capacity to perform the various tasks associated with curriculum work
- Building team capacity so work will be produced more quickly, while maintaining a level of quality
- Developing year-long thematic cultural integration maps in French and English. Materials plan is in progress.
- Developing vocabulary lists for all grade levels
- Translated recommended books for grades 1 and 2

Challenges

- Lack of team members' content knowledge and skills level related to language arts
- Minimal experience of curriculum development within original team.
- Time expended to orient new team members with the documents, expectations, and work done to date.
- Struggle with development process and support – the same people are doing both

Recommendations

- Continue to provide professional development in content knowledge and skills.
- Give consideration to what information will be compulsory for implementation due to the varied instruction in buildings, poor attendance rates among students and teachers, and abundance of substitute teachers.
- Consideration of Cycle Two and Three teachers using the 1,2,& 3 developed curriculum as a way to phase in the information and rigor.

A2

"A high-performing teaching team"

Teachers who are capable, happy, and able to work effectively in teams to continually improve

Teachers and Instruction

The CAFSI Report (June, 2008) set out to determine whether or not teaching in the Cree School Board meets the following criteria: "teaching reflects teacher mastery of subject area and planning of lessons"; "teaching methods and organizational strategies match curricular objectives and needs of students"; and "student work is assessed thoroughly, constructively and consistently".

The conclusion by the research team: "..teaching in classes of CSB varies widely and in many cases is problematic. There are some excellent teachers in CSB schools, teachers that any school would be proud to have on its faculty. On the other extreme are those who should not be teaching. In between are the vast majority, a mixture of teachers with below-average to above-average skills and engagement, achieving some level of success. We have indirect evidence of this from the comments from stakeholders and direct evidence from our observations. As stated earlier, our overall rating of these observations was merely 'adequate,' and this from a sample that probably included fewer weak teachers than would have been found in a representative sample".

They emphasize: "The quality of student learning is directly related to the quality of teaching that students receive. No issue presented in this report deserves more attention than this one."

As a result the authors propose the following recommendations:

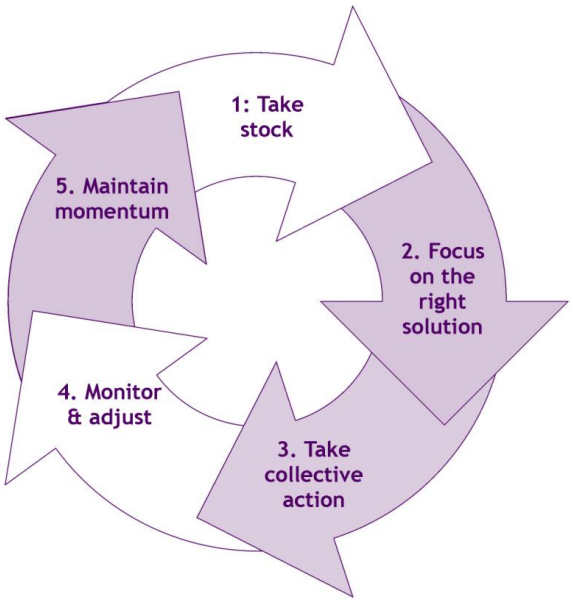
R26	THAT the Board draft a framework for the design and implementation of a new curricular model, including a realistic timeline and predetermined indicators of success, and communicate it to stakeholders, including the Ministry.
R51	THAT, in accordance with Board guidelines on professional improvement, the school administration, in collaboration with school staff, develop and implement a comprehensive professional improvement plan for all school staff in accordance with applicable collective agreements and regulations.

Success in Sight

Success in Sight is a two-year facilitated, comprehensive school improvement process that focuses on practices that increase student achievement. It differs from other approaches to school improvement because it is designed to build on improvement efforts already under way in schools by teaching schools how and when to make changes. It does not require schools to "start over" with a whole new model of schooling, use specific strategies, or focus on a specific subject area or population of students. Instead, it helps schools achieve their improvement goals by building on their strengths, identifying the best ways to make short- and long-term progress, and paring away unnecessary activities. Success in Sight is intended to teach schools how to set priorities in their efforts for school improvement and optimize the resources available in the school and broader school community.

Over a two-year period, school leadership teams are taught how to balance the science of effective schooling with the art of continuous improvement by attending 6 two-day face-to-face professional development sessions with other participating schools and meeting with the two change facilitators assigned to their school during 10 onsite mentoring sessions between the large group sessions.

Success in Sight is the result of years of research by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). It has been presented in the "What Works" books (Marzano 2003; Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock 2001; Marzano, Waters, and McNulty 2005) and pilot tested across grade levels and settings, including low- and high-performing schools and urban and rural schools. Pilot-test data from schools implementing the Success in Sight model, in which McREL staff serve as the change facilitators, show 9 of the 11 low-performing elementary and middle schools making improvements during the first two years—either by making adequate yearly progress after failing to do so or by significantly increasing the percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency.



The five stages of the *Success in Sight* process

Four key elements

The SIS process has four key elements that set it apart from other school improvement processes:

1. It helps identify and start with manageable change efforts. The Cree School Board School Improvement Initiative encompasses many different aspects of education at all levels of the board. If we were to try to address all the changes at once, we would quickly lose focus and become disillusioned by the lack of perceived success. It is important to identify and celebrate successes that are achieved throughout the School Improvement process

2. It builds capacity of all staff members to carry out School Improvement initiatives. Teachers and administration must work together so that this improvement is successful.

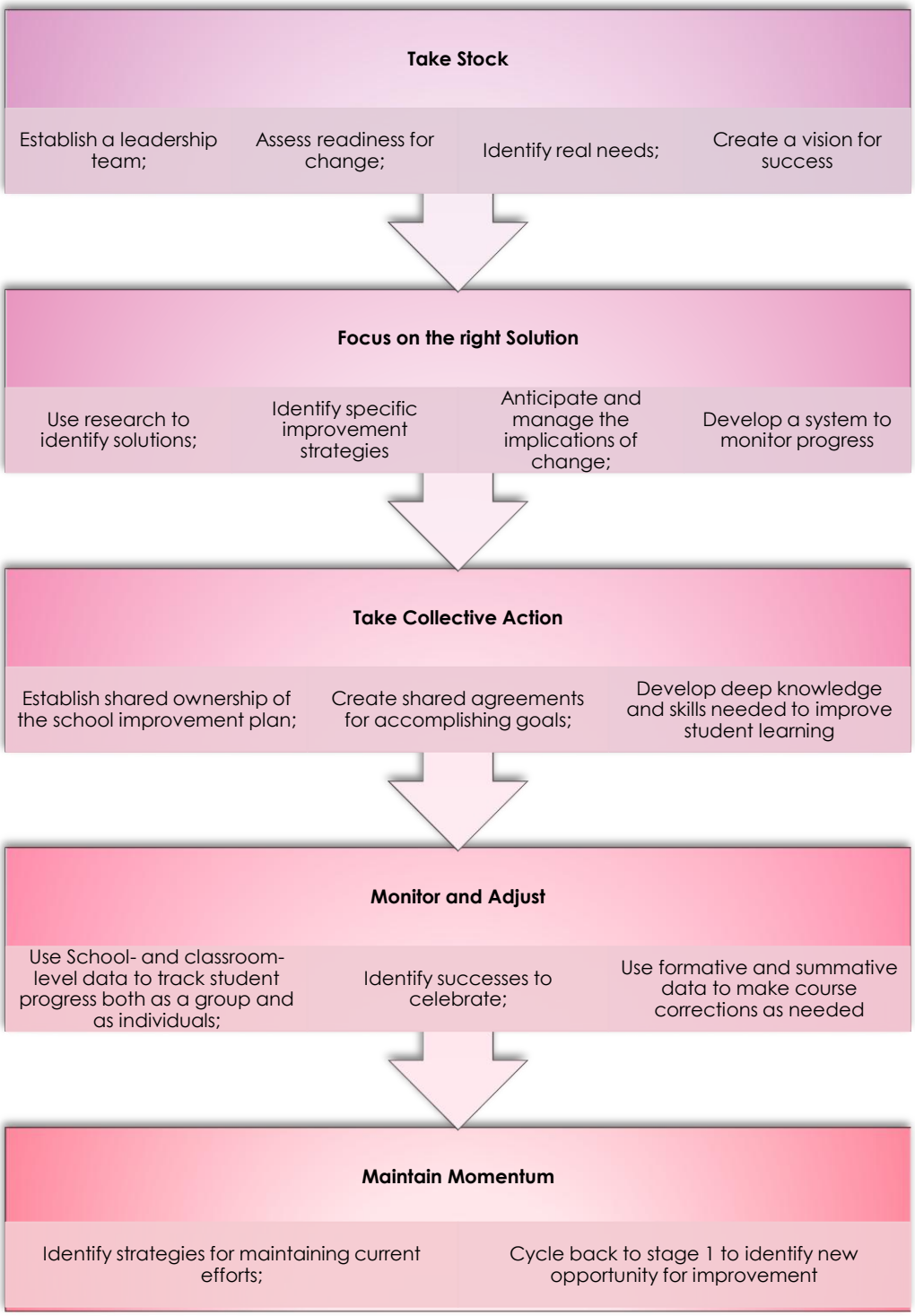
3. It helps create a "can-do" attitude among staff and administration. It builds the belief that change is possible, that students can succeed and that teachers can improve student success. It brings everyone on board so that everyone becomes willing and able to help with school improvement.

4. It remains focused on implementation.

The CSB, through Success in Sight, will provide ongoing guidance, processes, and tools to help schools overcome obstacles that stand in the way of implementing our Regional School Improvement initiative.

Success in Sight takes both a professional learning community and a systems approach by helping to identify the interconnected nature of our school board. Efforts in one part of our board may affect other areas in our board.

A five-step process



Key Outcomes

Just as economists track "leading" and "lagging" indicators of the economy's performance, we think of these outcomes as "leading indicators" of improvement—that is, critical benchmarks that are associated with, and often, precede the "lagging indicators" of increases in student achievement.

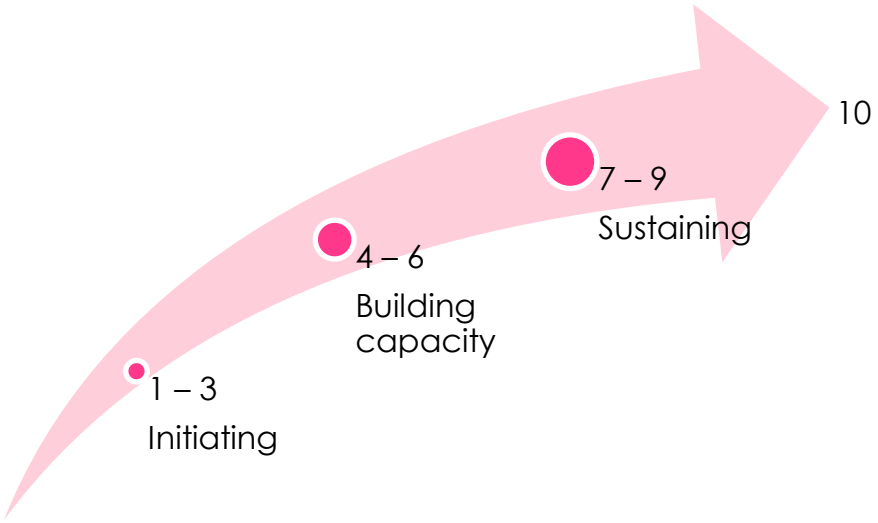
Success in Sight Initiative Report

Progress Overview

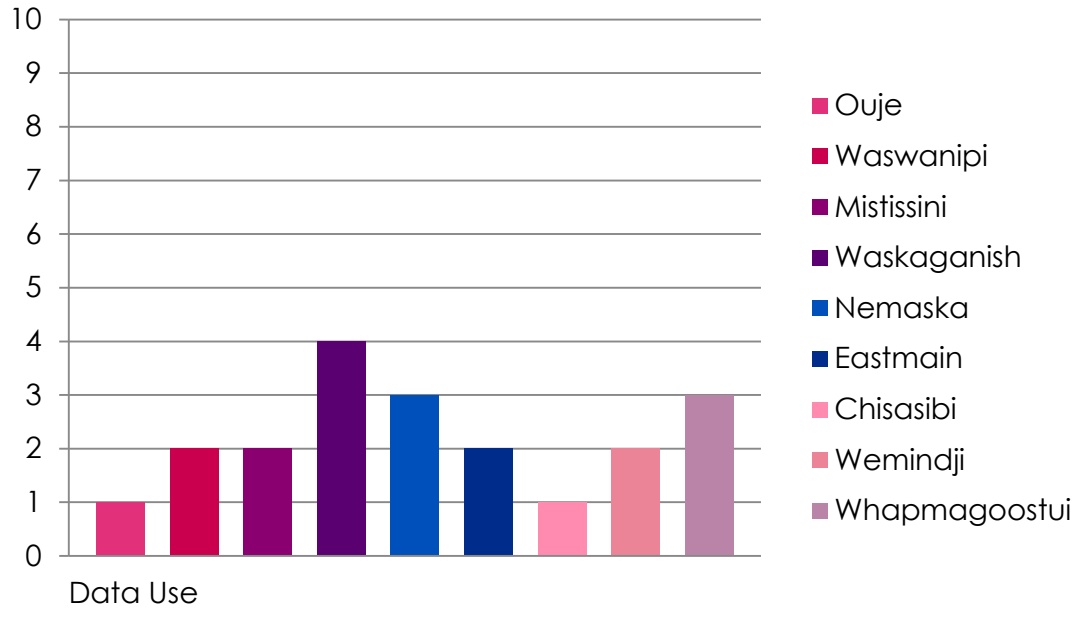
- June, 2010: Initial implementation
- June, 2010 –November, 2011: five 3-day Leadership training sessions
- May, 2010 –November, 2011: 9, 1 ½ to 2 days on-site technical assistance in each school
- Six McREL consultants: 1–2 consultants working with each school, 1 McREL consultant working with Board
- February, 2010 –November, 2011: one 3-day technical assistance sessions with RSIT and/or DDG and/or Management Team; one 2-day assistance session with Pedagogical Management Team
- May, 2010 & Nov, 2011: PD for all CSB principals
- Dec, 2010: 2 presentations 1) Management Council and 2) Commissioners
- Feb, 2010 –April, 2011: technical assistance via distance

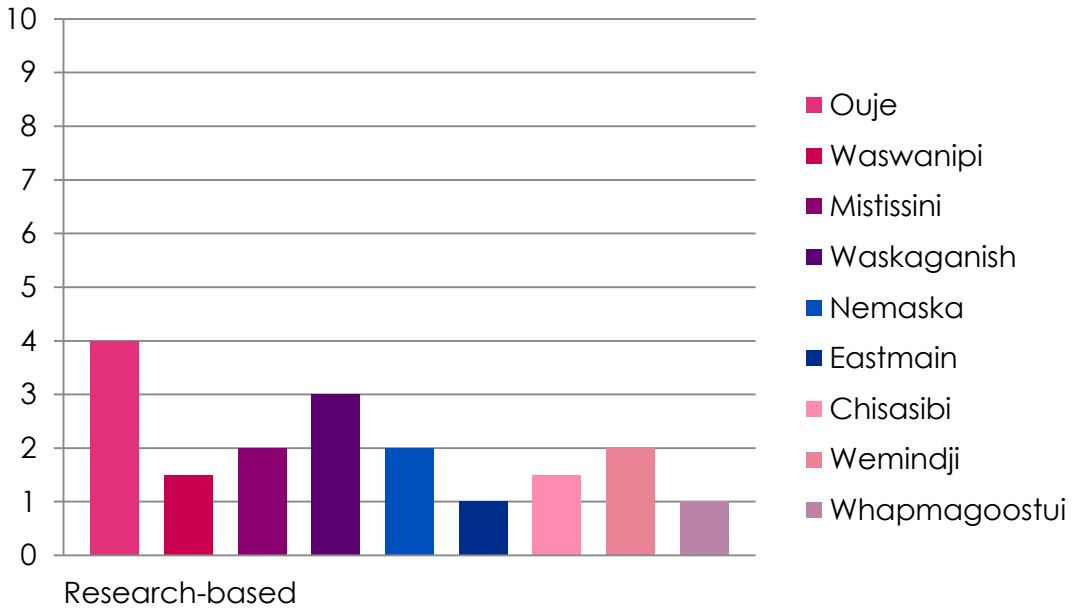
Evidence of Progress

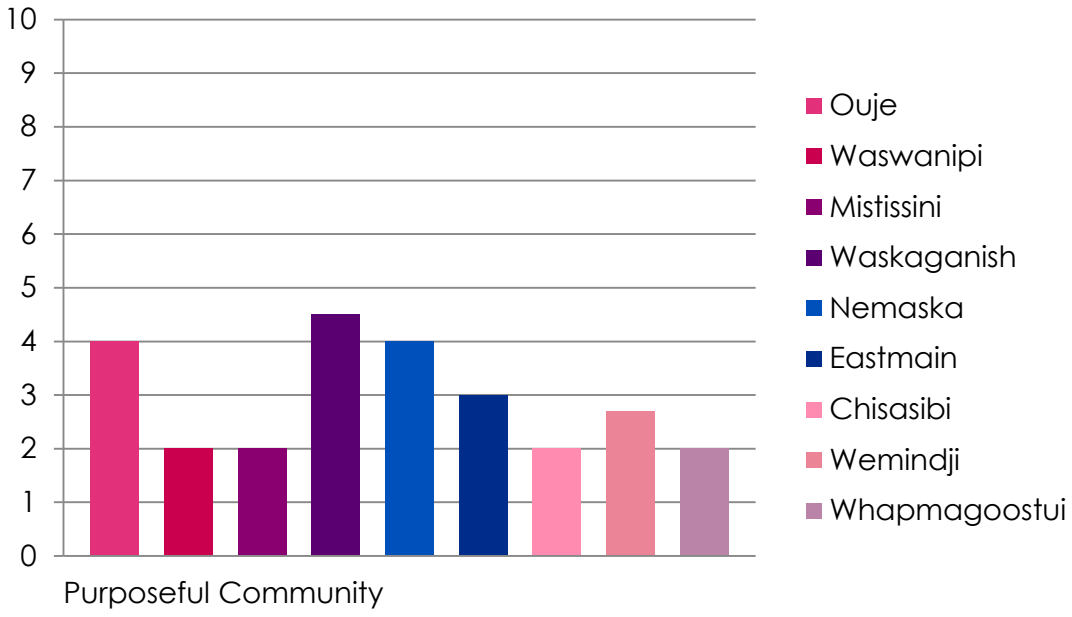
McREL measures progress using a scale from 1 to 10 where I indicates that the initiative is in its beginning stage – at this point there is little or no progress being made – and 10 indicates that the initiative has been fully implemented and is being sustained – that is to say that the initiative has become fully embedded into the culture of the school or Board.



Below are the individual ratings, as determined by McREL, for overall progress toward Continuous Improvement, for each school, The results are based on data collected during the 2011 school year:



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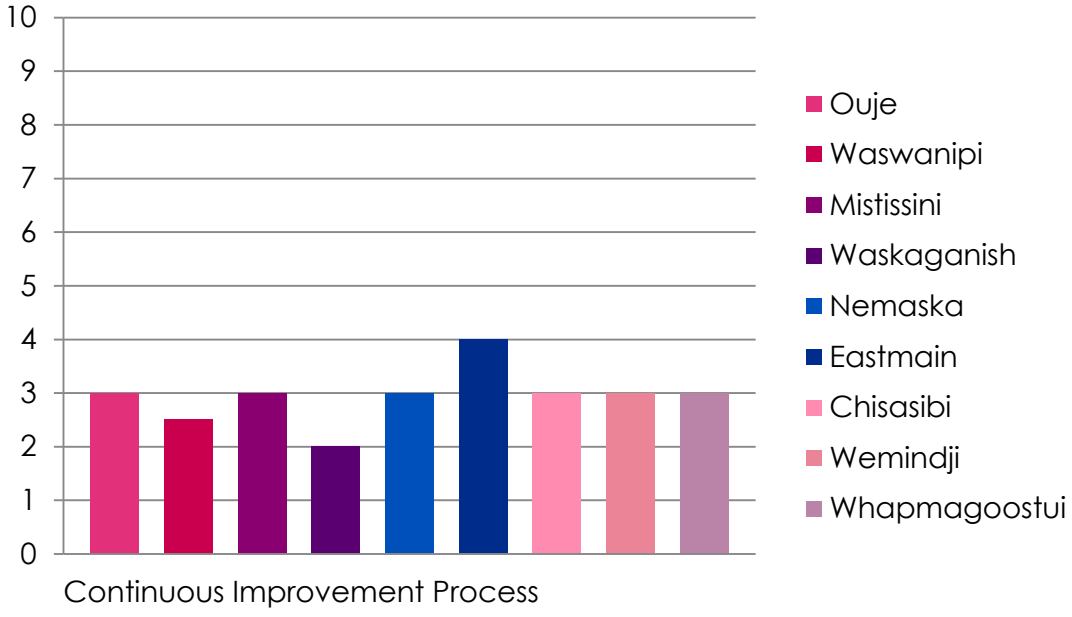
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Continuous Improvement Process

Professional Learning Communities

"To create a professional learning community (PLC), focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results."

Richard DuFour

What is a PLC?

Not content with the status quo, members of a PLC constantly seek better ways to achieve mutual goals and accomplish their fundamental purpose of learning for all.

All teams engage in an ongoing cycle of:

- Gathering evidence of current levels of student learning
- Developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning
- Implementing the strategies and ideas
- Analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not
- Applying the new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

"A Professional Learning Community is educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators."

adapted from Learning by Doing

3 Big ideas of a PLC

Focus on learning

1. The fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure high levels of learning for all students. This focus on learning translates into four critical questions that drive the daily work of the school. In PLCs, educators demonstrate their commitment to helping all students learn by working collaboratively to address the following critical questions:
2. What do we want students to learn? What should each student know and be able to do as a result of each unit, grade level, and/or course?
3. How will we know if they have learned? are we monitoring each student's learning on a timely basis?

4. What will we do if they don't learn? What systematic process is in place to provide additional time and support for students who are experiencing difficulty?
5. What will we do if they already know it?

Build a Collaborative Culture

- No school can help all students achieve at high levels if teachers work in isolation.
- Schools improve when teachers are given the time and support to work together to clarify essential student learning, develop common assessments for learning, analyze evidence of student learning, and use that evidence to learn from one another.

Focus on results

- PLCs measure their effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions.
- All programs, policies, and practices are continually assessed on the basis of their impact on student learning.
- All staff members receive relevant and timely information on their effectiveness in achieving intended results.

After a full year of collaboration with McRel, the Badabin Eeyou School Improvement Team (BESIT) developed the skill of shared leadership. Implementing school-wide fractals to focus on improving math and vocabulary was quite a challenge, but as the year advanced the team developed a synergy and became more confident in coordinating PLCs (Professional Learning Communities). To support Badabin's Local School Improvement Plan (LSIP), teachers formed focus groups to research strategies that would target identified issues; Reading & writing, mathematics, attendance and safe schools.

Joey Charland - School Principal – Whapmagoostui

Professional Learning Communities Report

Progress Overview

The Cree School Board co-sponsored a *Professional Learning Communities At Work Institute* and sent a delegation of more than 100 teachers, consultants and administrators to the event which took place in Ottawa in November 2010.

Instructional Services produced and distributed a "*Cycle-Team Guide: Increasing Student Learning through Collaborative Learning and Sharing*" to all schools. This guide gives teachers clear instructions on the focus of professional learning communities and how this concept should be implemented in the existing school cycle-teams.

In the spring of 2011, the Director of School Operations mandated that all schools schedule a minimum of one-hour per cycle of compulsory time for teachers to partake in professional learning community activities.

In April 2011, the Department of Special Education invited a group of teachers from the Board to participate in a Pyramid Response to Intervention (RTI) Workshop in Vancouver. The Pyramid Response to Intervention strategy revolves around professional learning communities, and how to respond when children don't learn.

Participants learned:

- practical ideas regarding how to identify students needing additional support, determine the appropriate intervention(s) for each child, monitor each student's progress, and revise a student's program as needed.
- how to use flexible time to extend student learning and support students who have already mastered grade-level curriculum.
- to use universal screening tools to identify students for extra help before they fail.
- how to determine when formal special education placement is appropriate.
- explored how the three big ideas of a PLC—focus on learning, build a collaborative culture, and results orientation—make PLC and RTI natural partners.

Most of you have heard of the power of professional learning communities. I cannot stress how important PLCs are to our journey toward school success. Each of us needs to develop expertise in the PLC approach.

PLCs have been proven, over and over again, to not only improve student achievement, but also student behavior, student engagement, parent involvement, teacher satisfaction, and school morale. Keep your eyes focused on the vision of pleasant, successful, orderly schools where students are engaged in learning and where teachers collaborate as experts in school effectiveness. Yes, I know this may not always be the case right now, but do your best to place your energies in what can be instead of what has been. "When you take your eyes off of your goals all you see are obstacles.

Joe MacNeil – Deputy Director General

Literacy Initiative

"If the school does not teach children to read, no one else will. If they do not learn to read, they will not succeed in school."

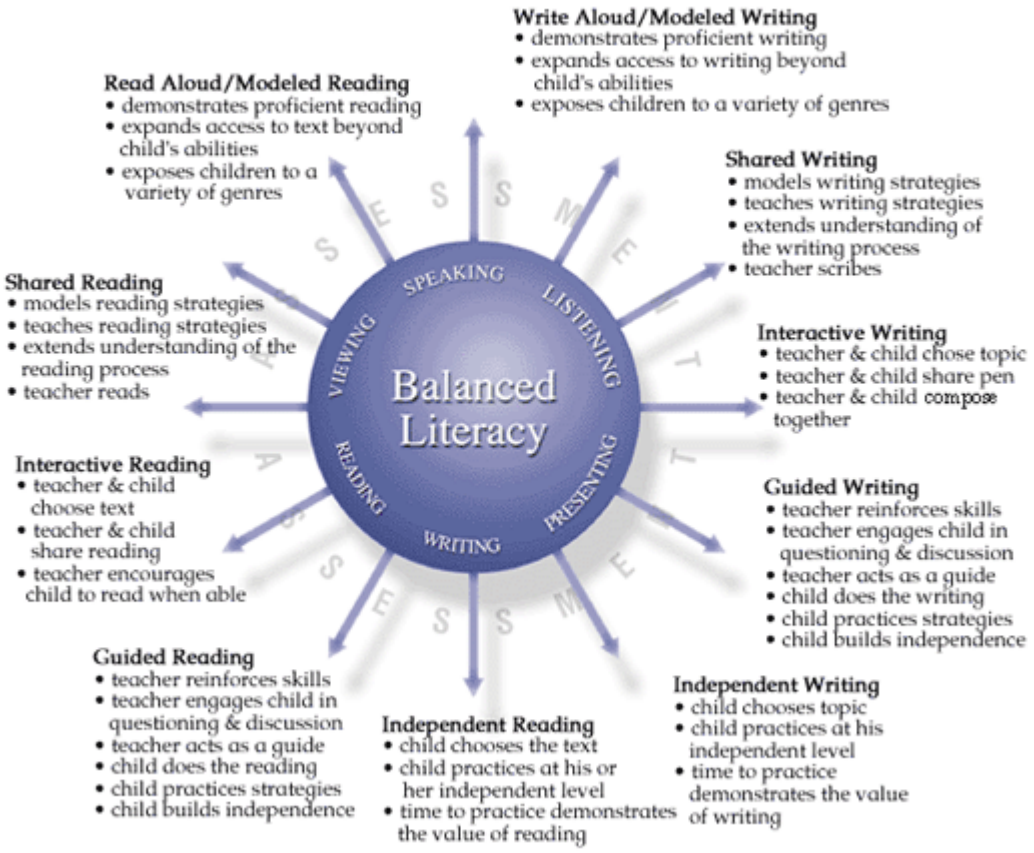
CAFSI p.96

> *Language learning is central to every learning project, for language is a vital aspect of communication and represents a vehicle for learning used in all subjects. Language enables students to organize their thoughts, to express themselves clearly and accurately, and to communicate effectively both orally and in writing in various situations. Since it provides access to knowledge, it is an essential tool for creating, analyzing, exercising critical judgment and describing or expressing ideas, perceptions and feelings. It is through language that we develop our view of the world since words, beyond codes and rules, convey the singular nature of thought*
>
> *Quebec Education Program 2001*

Literacy is the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to communicate with others. It enables individuals and communities to connect. Literacy is an essential to lifelong learning and being present in today's democratic society. It is speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and thinking critically. Literacy text includes books, newspapers, documentaries, posters, brochures, application forms, movies, songs, DVD's, emails, newscasts and the list grows as technology advances.

Balanced Literacy is an integrated, supportive and comprehensive approach to language literacy learning. It is a program that strikes a balance between both whole language and phonics. The strongest elements of each are incorporated into a literacy program that aims to guide students toward proficient and lifelong reading.

What is Balanced Literacy?



Balanced literacy is a framework for reading and writing instruction. It involves teaching by reading to students, having students read independently, and reading with students. This is accomplished with five basic components.

Balanced Literacy Component #1 – The read aloud

In the read aloud strategy the teacher reads out loud to the classroom. This way the teacher can model the correct strategies and behaviors. It's important that teachers read with enthusiasm, rhythm, and the proper intonation. This way students can experience the joys of reading long before they can read on their own.

Balanced Literacy Component #2 – Guided reading

Through guided reading teachers are able to work with students who are on the same level. Students are put into small groups, given their own book, and the teacher works with each student to help develop the skills they need.

Balanced Literacy Component #3 – Shared reading

During shared reading the students and teacher read together. This is an opportunity for students to discover new words and their meanings.

Balanced Literacy Component #4 -Independent reading

During independent reading students are allowed to choose the books they want to read. This is important for many reasons — one being that reading becomes a more enjoyable experience. Also, when students realize teachers value reading time, they begin to realize that reading must be an important skill.

Balanced Literacy Component #5 – Word study

Students work with words through fun and engaging activities. Through word study students learn letters and the sounds they make. They then move on to root words, suffixes and prefixes, and how to derive meaning of words.

Literacy Initiative Report

Progress Overview

The Literacy team hired two expert consultants - French and English - to establish a program for in service training. All nine schools in the Cree Board received extensive training in both second language sectors, two visits for each school, along with resources to support the work. The focus of these workshops was on a balanced second language literacy approach with research supported strategies, interventions and evaluations.

<u>English</u>

Luke Mettaweskum School	October 13, 14 ; February 17, 18
Wabannutao Eeyou School	October 18, 19 ; March 31, April 1
Wiinibekuu School	October 20, 21 ; March 29, 30
Waapihtiiwewan School	November 1, 2 ; April 5, 6
WJ Happyjack Memorial	November 3, 4 ; April 14, 15
Maquatua Eeyou School	November 22, 23; April 11, 12
James Bay Eeyou School	November 29, 30; March 1, 2
Badabin Eeyou School	December 1, 2 ; March 3, 4
Voyageur Memorial School	February 10, 11

March 18: workshop for administrators and a number of teachers in reading assessment and guided reading

French

Luke Mettaweskum School	October 19, 20 ; February 17, 18
Wabannutao Eeyou School	October 13, 14
Wiinibekuu School	November 10, 11 ; March 29, 30
Waapihtiiwewan School	no French
WJ Happyjack Memorial	November 2, 3 ; April 14, 15
Maquatua Eeyou School	no French
James Bay Eeyou School	November 29, 30; March 1, 2
Badabin Eeyou School	no French
Voyageur Memorial School	November 23, 24 ; February 10, 11

Workshops covered Effective Literacy Practices. Part One was given to all schools except for Voyageur Memorial School. A well prepared binder with resources for literacy and teacher resource recommendations was given to all English, French and Cree Sector Elementary teachers and educators. The first part of the workshop focused on four areas, setting the context, the reading process, oral language development, and "read-alouds" with an emphasis placed upon "read-alouds". The Literacy team invited the Cree Sector teachers and the Educators to these workshops as effective practices for literacy are strategies that cross languages and to facilitate a more cohesive team in each school.

> Teachers were generally very receptive. Principals or Vice-principals were present in six of the schools, Wiinibekuu School, Wabannutao Eeyou School, Maquatua Eeyou School, Badabin Eeyou School, Luke Mettaweskum School and Waapihtiiwewan School. In two of the other schools they did come in briefly, WJ Happyjack School and James Bay Eeyou School.
>
> [One teacher commented] that [the training session] was one of the more useful workshops she had been given by the Board. [Others] felt that some of the tools and strategies given in the workshop would add to and bridge some gaps they felt were in the program now in use in their school.
>
> Sherry Weistche – Education Consultant – Instructional Services

The workshops encouraged adequate modeling and guidance to English language learners, crucial to developing confidence and skills in second language as well as gradual release of responsibility to students towards independent learning. A very definite emphasis was placed on the oral language development for our second language learners. There was also a focus on assessments and the critical role they play in determining lesson plans, guidance for specific learning needs and instructional outcomes.

A3

"A high-performing school leadership team"

School leaders who are empowered and trained in Balanced Leadership for continual school improvement

Leadership and Planning

The CAFSI Report (June, 2008) set out to determine whether or not "School leadership provides vision and motivation, encourages high expectations for students and staff through individual and group support," and "The school fosters teaching and learning through operational and strategic planning."

The conclusion by the research team: "We have seen serious deficiencies in the capacity of the administration of most schools to provide the leadership required to manage them effectively. Likewise, we see the current school planning process as badly flawed and in need of a major overhaul. The problems observed reside as much at the board level as they do at the school level. However, the 'bottom line' of our analysis is that the current approach is essentially a paper exercise that is not helpful to schools."

As a result the authors propose the following recommendations:

SCHOOL CULTURE & ORGANIZATION	**R39**	THAT school administrators receive appropriate support to enhance their capacity to improve the culture of their school and enhance the breadth and depth of opportunities to learn through innovative models of school organization, within a framework of school organization approved by the Board.
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP & PLANNING	**R44**	THAT the Board halt the LEPs currently being implemented for 2008-09 and beyond and replace them with a short-term plan for the school's involvement in the implementation of the recommendations of this Review and subsequently by a new local planning process, to be developed in accordance with recommendation 108 (strategic planning) of this report
	R45	THAT the implementation of recommendation 44 be supported by appropriate forms of capacity development in accordance with other recommendations of this report.
ALLOCATION & MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES	**R49**	THAT the supervision of teaching be treated as a priority responsibility of school administrators, to be exercised in accordance with Board guidelines on teacher supervision.

ALLOCATION & MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES	**R51**	THAT, in accordance with Board guidelines on professional improvement, the school administration, in collaboration with school staff, develop and implement a comprehensive professional improvement plan for all school staff in accordance with applicable collective agreements and regulations.

School Leadership Teams

In response to recommendations R39 and R51, the schools, under the supervision of the Director of School Operations, established *School Leadership Teams*.

Role of the School Leadership Team

The focus on school change and improvement over the last few years has greatly increased the leadership tasks required in a school, and has created a need for shared leadership to help schools become more effective in their planning, decision-making, and implementation of their programs.

Functions of a School Leadership Team

- Facilitates the involvement of the school community in the development of the Local School Improvement Plan
- Encourages, supports and creates opportunities for involvement from parents in the community
- Contributes to the design of the Local School Improvement Plan
- Monitors the effectiveness of the Local School Improvement Plan strategies

Duties of the School Leadership Team

Although the School Leadership Team is not directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the school, it is involved in a number of tasks that affect the operation of the school. The School Leadership Team:

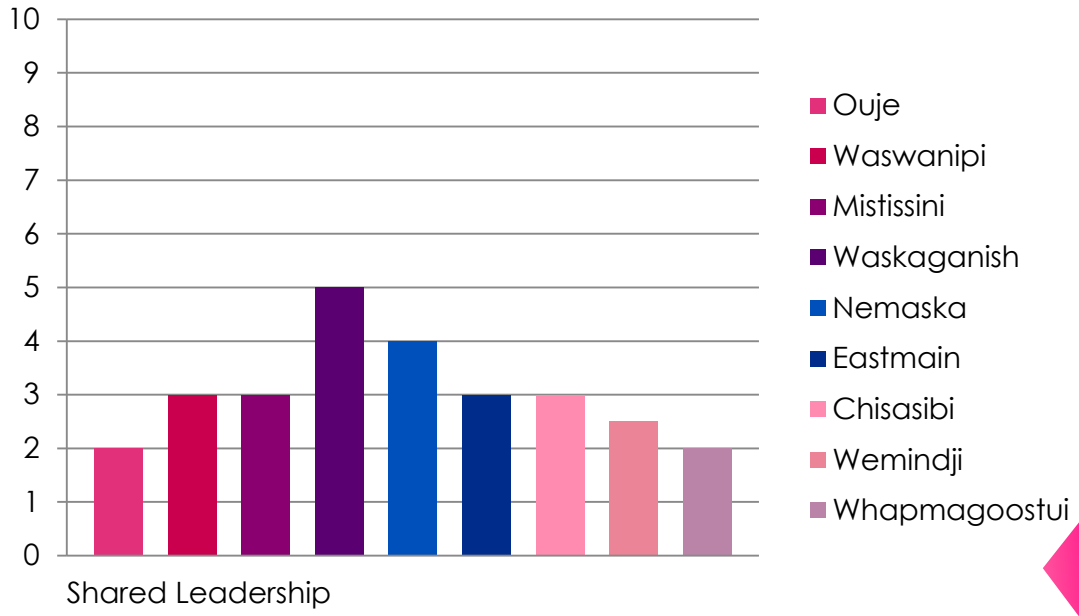
- Facilitates the development of the School Improvement Plan
- Monitors, assesses and amends the School Improvement Plan
- Advances policies and procedures that enhance achievement and meet educational, safety and parent involvement goals
- Facilitates communication within the professional learning community

- Builds the capacity of the school to address parent and staff concerns
- Builds the capacity of the school to improve in the following areas:
  - High Academic Achievement
  - Effective Educators
  - Adequate Resources and Facilities
  - Safe and Orderly Schools
  - World-Class Service
  - Strong Parent and Community Relations

This emphasis on teamwork, shared leadership, and professional development is transforming our school culture, and is changing the way we look at our school, our students, and our responsibilities as educational leaders.

Lisa Shallhorn - School Principal - Nemaska

McREL Analysis of Shared Leadership at the School Level



Local School Improvement Planning

The CAFSI Report (June, 2008) set out to determine whether or not teaching in the Cree School Board meets the following criteria: "the school fosters teaching and learning through operational and strategic planning (Local Education Plan)."

The conclusion by the research team: "…we see the current school planning process as badly flawed and in need of a major overhaul. The problems observed reside as much at the board level as they do at the school level. However, the 'bottom line' of our analysis is that the current approach is essentially a paper exercise that is not helpful to schools."

As a result the authors propose the following recommendations:

R44	THAT the Board halt the LEPs currently being implemented for 2008-09 and beyond and replace them with a short-term plan for the school's involvement in the implementation of the recommendations of this Review and subsequently by a new local planning process, to be developed in accordance with recommendation 108 (strategic planning) of this report
R45	THAT the implementation of recommendation 44 be supported by appropriate forms of capacity development in accordance with other recommendations of this report.

All schools want their students to succeed. But schools can only make a lasting difference when they focus on specific goals and strategies for change. School improvement planning is a process through which schools set goals for improvement and make decisions about how and when these goals will be achieved. The ultimate objective of the process is to improve student achievement levels by enhancing the way curriculum is delivered, by creating a positive environment for learning, and by increasing the degree to which parents are involved in their children's learning at school and in the home.

What is a School Improvement Plan?

A school improvement plan is a road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement, and shows how and when these changes will be made.

School improvement plans are selective: they help principals, teachers, and school leadership teams answer the questions "What will we focus on now?" and "What will we leave until later?" They encourage staff and parents to monitor student achievement levels and other factors, such as the school environment, that are known to influence student success. With up-to-date and reliable information about how well students are performing, schools are better able to respond to the needs of students, teachers, and parents.

A school improvement plan is also a mechanism through which the public can hold schools accountable for student success and through which it can measure improvement. One of the first steps—a crucial one—in developing an improvement plan involves teachers, school leadership teams, parents, and other community members working together to gather and analyze information about the school and its students, so that they can determine what needs to be improved in their school. As the plan is implemented, schools continue to gather this kind of data. By comparing the new data to the initial information on which the plan was based, they—and the public—can measure the success of their improvement strategies.

The Cree School Board Local School Improvement Plans (LSIP)

In February 2011, the Deputy Director General and the Director of School Operations delivered a new planning process to schools. In the new LSIP, schools are required to state their SMART goals for improvements in Reading, Math, Safe Schools and Attendance for the 2011-12 school year. The SMART goals are essentially statements that specify by what percentage achievement scores will increase over the course of one school year. The LSIP will become a public document through which schools will announce their goals to the community and the Board, and become accountable for the results they achieve.

The LSIP requires that schools identify the proven strategies they will use to achieve their SMART goals in each area. The strategies must be "research-backed and proven."

The Cree School Board requires all schools to use the same research-backed, proven strategies to apply to their improvement efforts. Thus, schools receive information from School Operations that identify the strategies and resources schools must use as part of their improvement strategies.

> *The essential truth of school improvement is that; "**There can be no excuses**." I do not expect schools to be accountable for success overnight but I do expect, and the Cree School Board expects, that all schools will show some signs of academic progress by the end of next year. The results might be small, perhaps a 5-10 % increase in competency levels (hopefully more) but the results must be there nonetheless. If you use the LSIP plan, and you work with your staff to learn and apply all that you need to, you will undoubtedly produce promising results.*
>
> *Joe MacNeil - Deputy Director General, February 2011*

Principles and Required Components

1. All schools must develop and implement an annual data-driven Local School Improvement Plan (LSIP) that incorporates researched-backed strategies for improved academic improvement for all students of the Board in all grades and language sectors including those served by Special Education services and those in work-study programs.
2. The purpose of the school improvement plan is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school, so that greater numbers of students achieve proficiency in the core academic subjects of reading and mathematics with the result that increasing numbers of students graduate.
3. Development of the LSIP must be led by the school principal in collaboration with the School Leadership Team, and must include opportunities for input by the school staff and parent representatives.
4. The LSIP must align with and support the attainment of the strategic academic achievement goals of the Cree School Board.
5. The LSIP must contain specific goals and SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) objectives aimed at producing annual increases in reading, mathematics and Cree language achievement scores as well as annual increases in the school's graduation rate, attendance rate, and school safety.
6. Schools must carefully align and commit all available resources to the attainment of the school improvement plan. As a result, human, financial, technological, and other material resources are to be allocated and distributed to reinforce the school's achievement of its targets.

7. The goals and strategies of the LSIP must be supported by a plan for high-quality professional development. All Professional development must be targeted to increasing the capacity of administrators and teacher to attain the goals of the LSIP. All professional learning activities including time and resources must directly align with the articulated goals and purposes and be data-driven and research-based. The LSIP must identify how and when the professional development will be carried out, the sources of funding and all other resources necessary for the professional development activities; example: time, pedagogical days, Board services, external services, etc) (Note: Financial resources includes New Paths for Education funding and, as such, all projects approved for funding in schools must also directly align with professional development to build staff capacity to achieve improvement goals.
8. The LSIP must be grounded by collaboratively developed statements that reflect the shared vision, mission, and core beliefs of the school community.
9. The LSIP must include a school profile that includes information on total numbers of students as a whole, and other disaggregated student clientele data.
10. The LSIP must include a discussion of the school's current norm-referenced and criterion- referenced standardized academic achievement data and the school's student results on Ministry of Education and regional CSB exams.
11. The LSIP must identify the statistical gap between the achievement goals of the CSB and the current achievement scores of the schools. The identified gap must serve as the focus of the improvement plan actions and strategies.
12. The school improvement plan must establish specific, annual, measurable objectives for continuous progress by each group of students enrolled in the school and must include a detailed action plan for each improvement goal.
13. The LSIP must include a detailed monitoring plan that describes how each identified action step will be monitored. The LSIP must clearly specify the staff members who are responsible for the implementation and regular monitoring of the plan strategies and actions.
14. The goals and strategies of the LSIP should Incorporate, as appropriate, activities before school, after school, during the summer, and during the extension of the school year.

Supervision of Instruction

> *Instructional supervision goes far beyond what most teachers think of when they picture a principal observing a teacher for the purpose of writing up an evaluation. Instructional supervision can certainly involve some formal classroom evaluations. More often though, it involves how the principal comes to form opinions on the quality of teaching in the school through his/her daily work as an instructional leader.*
>
> *Joe MacNeil - Deputy Director General*

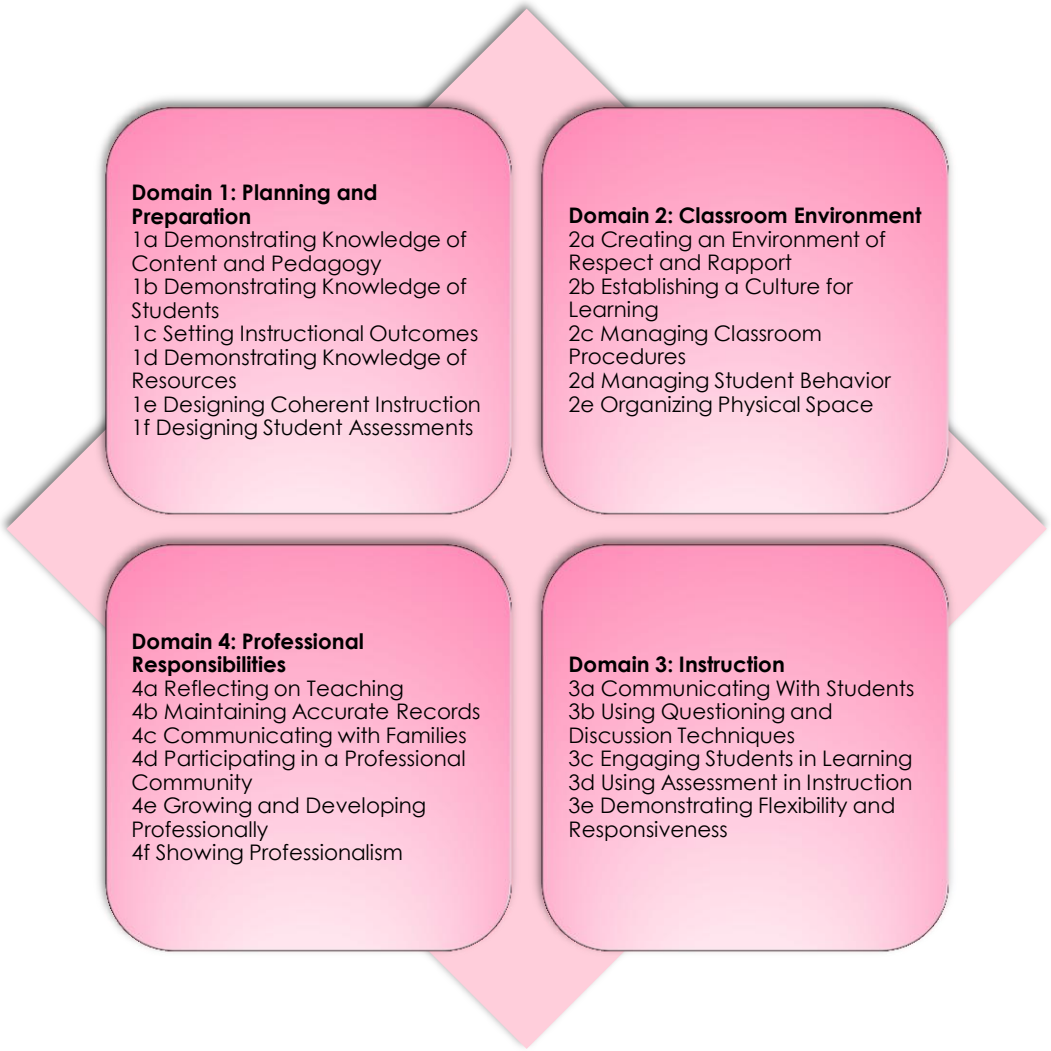
Through the effective supervision of instruction, administrators can reinforce and enhance teaching practices that will contribute to improved student learning. By skillfully analyzing performance and appropriate data, administrators can provide meaningful feedback and direction to teachers that can have a profound effect on the learning that occurs in each classroom. Because student learning is the primary function of the schools, the effective supervision of instruction is one of the most critical functions of the administrator. If Cree School Board schools are to provide equal access to quality educational programs for all students, administrators must hold teachers accountable for providing an appropriate and well-planned program. These programs include a variety of teaching strategies designed to meet the diverse needs of all students in our complex society.

In response to recommendation 49 (**R49**) from the CAFSI Report, the Office of the Supervisor of Schools provided principals with training on the supervision of instruction based on the work of Charlotte Danielson: *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*.

Danielson's Framework for Teaching divides teaching into four domains: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. The Framework may be used for many purposes, but its full value is realized as the foundation for professional conversations among teachers as they seek to enhance their skill in the complex task of teaching. The Framework may be used as the foundation of a school or Board's mentoring, coaching, professional development, and teacher evaluation processes, thus linking all those activities together and helping teachers become more thoughtful practitioners. The Cree School Board is using this Framework for the supervision of instruction.

> [Principals are] expected to spend time working with teachers to deepen their own understanding of being a pedagogical leader.
>
> Kim Quinn - Director of School Operations

The framework:



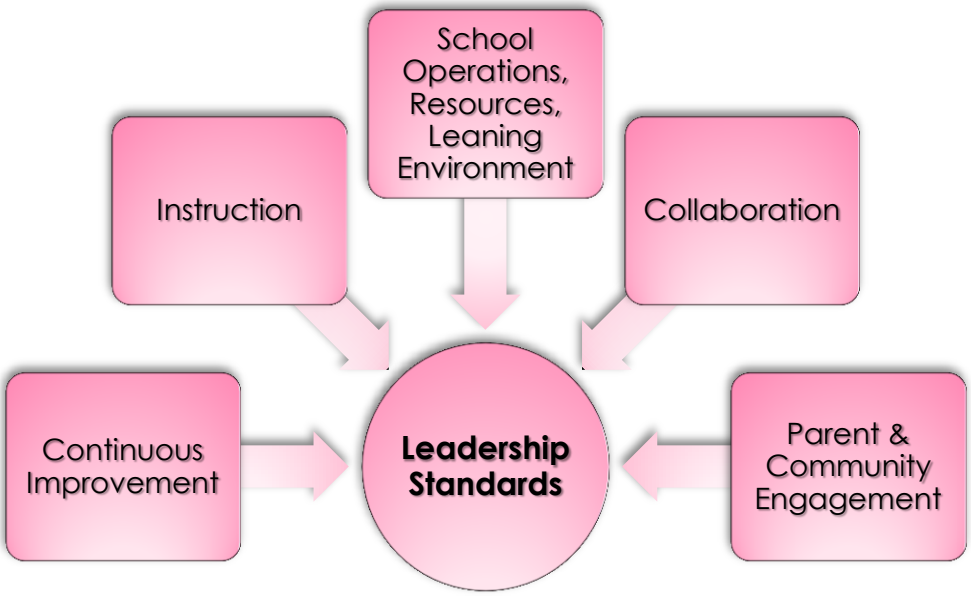
The principal's responsibilities as instructional supervisor cannot be fulfilled simply by formally evaluating teachers. Instead, principals must engage in regular meetings with teachers to discuss the implementation of the curriculum and the students' progress with the content of the curriculum. Instructional supervisors work with teachers to study examples of student work and discuss how that work is aligned to the curriculum standards. As supervisor, the principal also regularly meets with teachers to study the results of class and regional assessments. When school leaders and teachers study assessment results and student work they learn which instructional strategies are working and which need to change to promote higher levels of student success.

All of this work provides teachers and their supervisor with ongoing, job embedded opportunities to learn together and to collaboratively monitor instructional quality and academic performance as the school moves toward attainment of its academic improvement goals. This kind of instructional leadership is founded upon a professional learning community (PLC) approach to pedagogical supervision and bears little resemblance to the kind of teacher evaluation most teachers are concerned about.

> *Through on-going focused instructional supervision and discussions with teachers, principals will gain much more insight into a teacher's effectiveness and competence than they will from annual formal teacher evaluations.*
>
> *Joe MacNeil - Deputy director General*

Leadership Performance Standards

Expectations about the performance of education leaders in the Cree School Board have changed and expanded considerably in the past two to three years, extending far beyond traditional definitions of administrative roles. Responsibilities of education leaders now exceed what individual administrators in schools and school boards can be expected to carry out alone. The Board's requirements to increase student learning necessitate a shift in leadership, from managing orderly environments in which teachers work autonomously in their classrooms to one in which administrators, teachers, and others share leadership roles and responsibilities for student learning. Research and best practice indicate the value of collaborating on shared vision, goals, and work needed to ensure that every student learns at high levels.



Performance expectations and indicators are observable and measurable statements about what leaders do to ensure effective teaching and successful learning by every student.

The Pedagogical Management Team is in the process of developing clear and concise standards in this area. These standards will lead to evaluation criteria for Principals.

Eight Evaluation Criteria for Cree School Board Principals

Creating a Culture	• Influence, establish and sustain a school culture conducive to continuous improvement for students and staff.
Ensuring School Safety	• Lead the development and annual update of a comprehensive safe schools plan that includes prevention, intervention, crisis response and recovery.
Planning with Data	• Lead the development, implementation and evaluation of the data-driven plan for improvement of student achievement.
Aligning Curriculum	• Assist instructional staff in aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment with state and local learning goals.
Improving Instruction	• Monitor, assist and evaluate staff implementation of the school improvement plan, effective instruction and assessment practices.
Managing Resources	• Manage human and fiscal resources to accomplish student achievement goals.
Engaging Communities	• Communicate and partner with school community members to promote student learning.
Closing the Gap	• Demonstrate a commitment to closing the achievement gap.

Board

"Board Operations"

Use of Data

Board Support

Roles, Connections

Effectiveness, Challenges

Use of Data

Understanding and using data about school and student performance are fundamental to improving schools. Without analyzing and discussing data, schools are unlikely to identify and solve problems that need attention, identify appropriate interventions to solve those problems, or know how they are progressing toward achievement of their goals. Data are the fuel of school reform.

…In short, using data separates good schools from mediocre schools. Schools that are increasing student achievement, staff productivity and collegiality, and customer satisfaction use data to inform and guide their decisions and actions. Data use essentially sets a course of action and keeps a staff on that course to school improvement and student success.

J. Killian & G. T. Bellamy

Although the authors of the CAFSI report do not include a "performance theme" that specifically addresses data collection and use in the Cree School Board, they do have this to say:

"…the lack of certain data, notably with respect to student results, constrained our ability to paint a complete picture of student success. We recognized from the outset that we would not be able to evaluate longer-term results due to a lack of longitudinal data. We therefore limited our evaluation of student results to the aspects of student success which the data would support. ***However, collecting these data proved to be extremely problematic.*** *"*

CAFSI, Appendices

Our schools have been collecting data for decades, but it hasn't been until recently that the Cree School Board has discovered the power of data for promoting school improvement. Much of the recent focus on data was triggered by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, legislation in the United States that is intended to increase student achievement across all socioeconomic boundaries and improve results at "low performing" schools.

Recent advances in technology and the increased demand for assessing student learning has led many School Boards to discover that the usefulness of data goes far beyond the NCLB Act. Today, forward-thinking Boards across the country are employing data-driven decision making techniques not only to analyze test scores and student achievement, but also to:

- Narrow achievement gaps between student subgroups
- Improve teacher quality

- Improve curriculum
- Share best practices among schools and districts
- Communicate education issues more effectively with key stakeholders
- Promote parental involvement in the education process
- Increase dialogue within the educational community

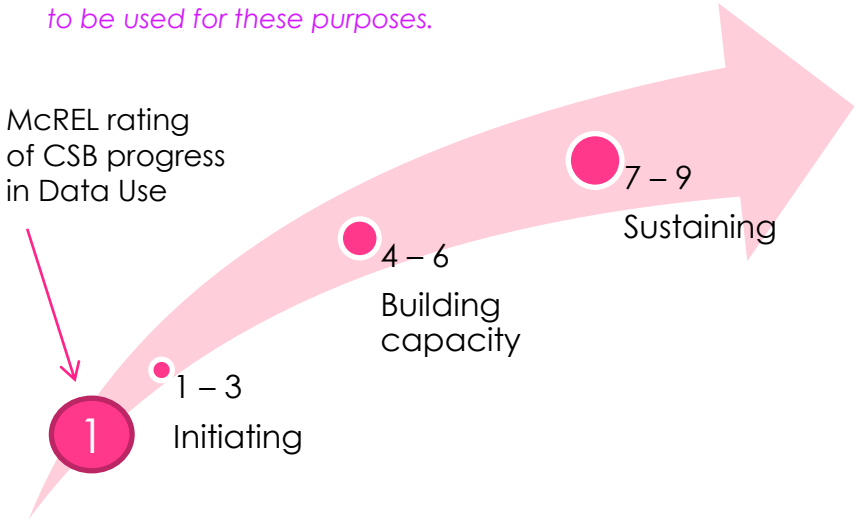
In its most basic form, data-driven decision making is about:

- Collecting appropriate data
- Analyzing that data in a meaningful fashion
- Getting the data into the hands of the people who need it
- Using the data to increase school efficiencies and improve student achievement
- Communicating data-driven decisions to key stakeholders

The Cree School Board is still in its infancy in the area of use of data although the importance of using data has now become ingrained in the decision-making processes of the Board. The challenge now is to provide more accurate data to schools in a more effective and user-friendly fashion. In terms of the five areas that McREL focuses on as indicators of success, "use of data" ranks the lowest with a score of one out of ten.

With this in mind, the Board created a Data Management Department. The Director of School Operations states:

> *With school improvement work focused on data to drive decisions, the intention is for the Coordinator and her team to be able to provide the necessary data and reports to schools, our office, and at the board level to be used for these purposes.*



Accountability is an important component to any organization. Without accountability, goals, targets and performance measurements become mere "pies in the sky" and, rather than pushing us forward, hold us back from any success we might otherwise achieve. From the Council of Commissioners, to the Director General, to school Principals and classroom Teachers, we all must be held accountable--and must hold ourselves accountable--for what we have control over in working towards the collective goal of improving student success rates.

Joe MacNeil - Deputy Director General, March 2010

General Administration

In the 2009 – 2010 school year, the Director General committed to ensuring that all Departments of the Cree School Board be held accountable for developing, implementing and monitoring Departmental Plans.

Building on the foundational strategic plan, organizational plans have been or are being developed by each department on an annual basis. These plans allow each department to align their specific departmental mission, objectives, targets and performance measurements to the overall CSB strategic plan. Key components of the organizational plans include: (1) A current situation analysis, (2) strategic priorities for the year, (3) departmental objectives and targets for the year and (4) an estimated timeline and budget for the year.

One of the main purposes these organizational plans serve is to determine accountability at all levels of the board. Accountability is crucial when evaluating goals, targets, and performance for any given year in any given department. If goals and targets are not being met, it is in the best interest of our students that we determine why they are not being met and how we can best adjust how and what we do in each department in order to accomplish our overarching goal of high levels of achievement for all students.

Finance

Our efforts focused on identifying and developing a financial plan to secure the significant resources required for the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan. We are pleased to have developed and secured Council approval for the "Blueprint for the Funding of the Strategic Action Plan (BFSAP)". This plan has set aside close to $7M for 2011-2012, targeting the special initiatives derived from the Strategic Action Plan.

The funding under the BFSAP will require a significant shift in resources over the coming years as the plan calls for a freezing of all internal funding allocations and a redirection of funds relating to overall escalation of salaries, prices and clientele to targeted areas identified in the Strategic Action Plan.

Matthew Rabbitskin – Director of Finance

Human Resources

The 2010-2011 year has been one of ongoing change and planning for the new strategic direction being set by the Cree School Board. Along with other services and pedagogical management, Human Resources participated in the work of departmental planning so as to align with the strategic direction, all with the intention of improving the services provided to the schools and departments of the Cree School Board…

…We have continued to work to review and revise the current recruitment process for teachers. In the next school year we will recruit a coordinator who will provide support to the school administration in the recruitment of teachers.

Natalie Petawabano – Director of Human Resources

Role of the Deputy Director General

The Deputy Director General's (DDG) role is to articulate clearly the board's vision for improvement and foster collective commitment to that vision, and to provide direction and support for its implementation. In other words, to clarify both the what and the how for the system:

> *"For far too long our schools have lacked a shared vision. The attitude of many school and Board staff was that we couldn't change the schools we work in. Many of us thought that there were just too many other factors, outside of our control, that would prevent us from changing the culture of our schools. I believe that attitude has changed. We've discovered that we are not victims of our surroundings and we now believe that change is not only possible, it's positively probable if we believe in our own ability to learn how to work so change is achieved."*
>
> *Joe MacNeil*
> *Deputy Director General*

The role involves providing both an infrastructure (structure, resources, support) for system improvement and supporting a culture focused on a coherent vision for improvement.

> *"It's been so encouraging to me to hear of the work the leadership teams have been doing, especially because what these teams are saying to us is, "Yes, we can do this! We have control over the future...We have a Vision!" Our curriculum teams and our French, English, and Cree literacy teams are saying the same things. These dedicated and positive teachers, consultants, coordinators and principals are saying that they believe change is possible and they are committed to achieving that visionary change."*
>
> *Joe MacNeil*
> *Deputy Director General*

The work also requires fostering a collective commitment to improvement with student achievement as the focus. This requires a role for the DDG in understanding, and building bridges between, the roles of all involved.

> *"…our Council of Commissioners, our Director General and the whole CSB Senior Management Team have all come to recognize the need for addressing the Board's academic decline through leading-edge, research-based school improvement initiatives. This recognition is not simply a change that our leaders like to talk about. This change is backed by the necessary budgets and the necessary resources and training."*
>
> *Joe MacNeil*
> *Deputy Director General*

The Board's approach to ensure the development of the knowledge and skills required for student achievement includes instructional leadership from the DDG to ensure that the school board has built "the capacity of staff to actually deliver". Instructional leadership begins with the DDG in this Board. Through leading the Pedagogical Management Team, being present in schools and engaged in instructional discussions, a collective system focus on ensuring school improvement is generated.

Role of School Operations and Education Services

School Operations ensures that school administrators have the resources, training and support to develop, implement and monitor the Local School Improvement Plan as well as to manage the school on a day-to-day basis,

Education Services ensures that teachers have the resources, training and support to implement the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. This includes support to special needs students.

Role of the Principal

Principals are leaders who can clearly define and articulate the goals of the Local School Improvement Plan and support improvement and learning in the classroom by: helping to develop a common language around understanding what improvement looks like; promoting cross-curricular approaches to literacy; providing support through direction, resources, and structures; creating a culture of collaboration; encouraging the formation of learning teams; being models for professional development; and advocating that everyone in the board be a learner.

As the instructional and organizational leader of the school, the principal is ultimately responsible for the effective implementation of the school improvement process. However, effective implementation by definition must include the sharing of responsibilities and decision-making with other members of the school team (See *Role of the School Leadership Team*).

Role of the Teacher

Teachers receive specific training in literacy content sessions from expert literacy consultants as well as training on the Cree School Board Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum to ensure that they are building their capacity to deliver quality instruction in the classroom. There has been a considerable amount of Board support in identifying quality instructional practices from the literature and from critical friends and then providing quality professional development focused on instruction through the efforts of the CSB Literacy Team and the GVC team. The role of the teacher in this Board has been expanded so that leadership can occur on many fronts. In fact, the School Leadership Team model puts the teacher in a role central to the work of the Board's improvement efforts. In order to sustain focus on instruction in times of change in student achievement, staff, and leadership, the role of the teacher is seen as one that includes the continuous redefining of one's practice regarding the needs of one's students.

The role of the teacher also includes building leadership capacity, whereby "teachers build a commitment to shared leadership as they discuss, strategize, and develop common understanding about school improvement (see School Leadership Teams) . . . teachers are also encouraged to participate in Professional Learning Communities which focus on student achievement (see Professional Learning Communities).

Connections Between School and School Board

The Cree School Board and the schools within the Board share a unique relationship – they both rely upon the work of the other in order to do their job well. Strong school board and school leadership, governance and teamwork are the foundations for raising the achievement of every child in Eeyou Istchee.

A strong, mutually-supportive relationship between a school board and its schools is an essential ingredient in a well-run and effective school system. This includes the presence of the Cree School Board in the communities – an opportunity for school staff to interact with departmental directors and regional support teams.

The CAFSI Report points out that: "*…the Board must also invest time and energy in developing a collaborative dialogue among all members of the CSB community…The leadership of the CSB is invisible in the communities.* "

The Director General organized a tour of all Cree communities in the 2010 – 2011 school year. In his words:

> We started our Community Tours on February 7, 2011 and completed our last community visit on June 2, 2011. Our theme and purpose in visiting our communities was summed up in three words: ***communicate, consult and connect.*** *In each community* we had the opportunity to visit the Chief and Council and the School Committees together to communicate and have dialogue on the importance of Cree Education and the need for their support. The next day we had the opportunity to present and communicate to the community members the findings of the *CAFSI Report and the "effective* change" process that led to the *CSB Strategic Action Plan 2011-2015. Also within the CSB* Strategic Action Plan was the very important piece, the *School Improvement Plan, which was presented* enthusiastically and effectively by our Deputy Director General. Furthermore, in our presentations the Chairman introduced and touched on the new *Council Policy Manual, based on a Governance Policy Model,* which the Council of Commissioners adopted in September 2010. In the last part of our presentations we allowed much needed discussion, dialogue and direction with our community members on the languages of instruction in our schools and the issues surrounding them.
>
> The most satisfying experience was visiting our schools and connecting with our principals, teachers and most especially our students, Elementary, Secondary and Adult.
>
> Abraham Jolly – Director General

In order to give teachers and school staff a deeper understanding of the School Improvement Process which is currently underway, the Deputy Director General has planned a Pedagogical Management Team tour of all schools to meet with staff. These tours focus on pedagogical matters and allow staff the opportunity to pose questions and give feedback to the team.

> I want to announce that in this second year of school improvement it is my goal as Deputy Director General, to become more personally involved at the school level. Therefore, I, along with the leadership of School Operations and Education Services, intend to visit and meet with teachers in every community this year. Through our interactions with school staff we will be able to share more information on how the Board's strategic plan for school improvement will take shape over the coming years. It's very important that all staff recognize how school goals, team beliefs and values become aligned with those of the Board. We are enthusiastically looking forward to these meetings.
>
> Joe MacNeil – Deputy Director General

As of November 2011, the team has met with school staff in Waswanipi, Ouje-Bougoumou and Nemaska.

Lateral Capacity Building

From the onset of the school improvement process, the Cree School Board was intent on building lateral capacity – at the system, school, and classroom levels.

Strategies used by the school board for lateral capacity building include:

- On-site training and monitoring of School Leadership Teams with the assistance of McREL
- On-site leadership coaching for Principals by John Weideman (ex-Director of Education Services for the Eastern Townships School Board) and Ken Tanahill
- On-site literacy training for teachers with expert literacy coaches, Angela Puma and André Charlebois
- Training on development of Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum based on the Quebec Education Programs given by McREL
- Sponsorship and participation in the *Professional Learning Communities Summit* by Solution Tree.
- Participation of Special needs teachers in the *Pyramid Response to Intervention Workshop* by Solution Tree.
- Reading Assessment Workshop for selected teachers using PM Benchmarks.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Our work is creating energy and enthusiasm for change. Progress is motivating and makes the aches and pains of organizational change easier to bear. More and more people are starting to believe in the power and possibility of school improvement.

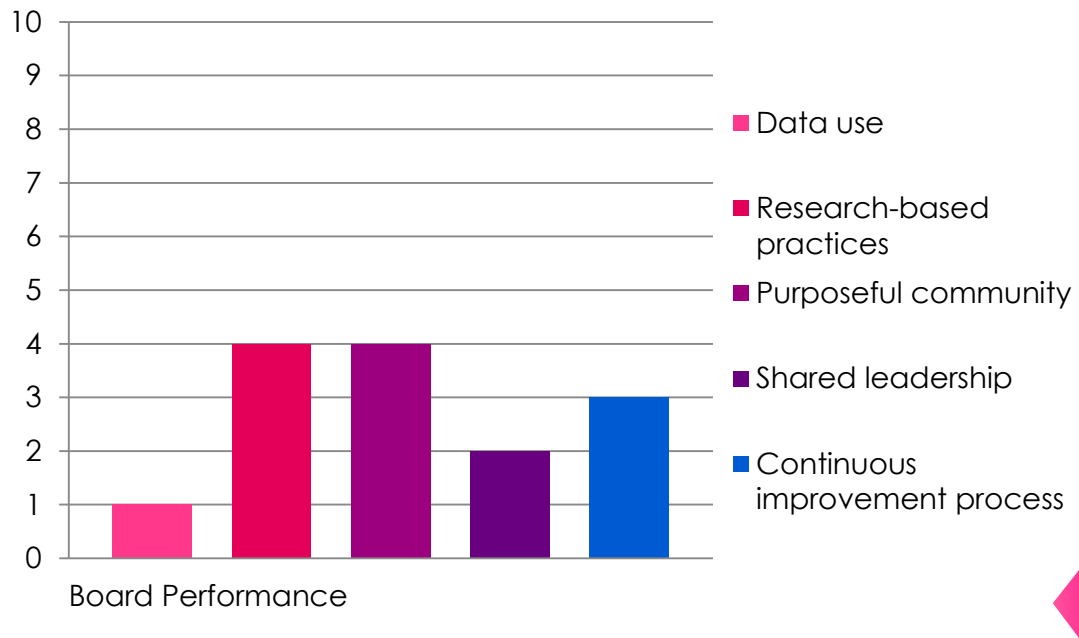
Teachers are starting to see that school improvement efforts bring not only student achievement, but also an improved atmosphere at work. Teachers and regional staff are starting to recognize that they are becoming agents of change. They are becoming leaders and are seeing their influence expand as the evidence of their effectiveness increases.

Joe MacNeil - Deputy Director General

As a result of our investment and engagement in the school improvement work underway, we are all learning to be leaders of effective change.

Kim Quinn - Director of School Operations

McREL Analysis of CSB Improvement Progress



Challenges Encountered

In order to be inclusive in terms of change management and capacity building, the Deputy Director General has indicated that one should help people understand that they are part of the process and help them understand how they fit in. While all schools are involved in the Cree School Board School Improvement Initiative, some schools were initially more enthusiastic than others (e.g., those who had to be "persuaded" of the importance of this initiative).

> *"Keep in mind as you carry out your school improvement teamwork that all change is hard and all change has potential for conflict. People sometimes resist changes that will have an effect on their personal preferred way of doing things; things they feel protective of. Models of change from other organizations teach us that change causes conflict. We can expect to be no different. People will argue, tears will be shed, some staff will withdraw and some valuable employees will even leave. The good thing is; we can learn how to manage our change process."*
>
> *Joe MacNeil - Deputy Director General*

The other challenging factor is time. In order to implement change, one needs time to integrate the information and knowledge being presented.

Attention to building professional capacity is important both for professional learning and student learning.

> Many factors influence student learning, but the research is clear: what teachers know and are able to do is one of the most important of all. Teachers are the ones who work directly with students, who translate and shape curricular goals and theoretical ideas into classroom practice and who shape the environment for learning. Teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions have direct and serious implications for the success of the students they teach. From this standpoint, professional learning represents an enormous investment in the development of educators, directed at ensuring that the teaching and learning in our schools is up to date and effective.

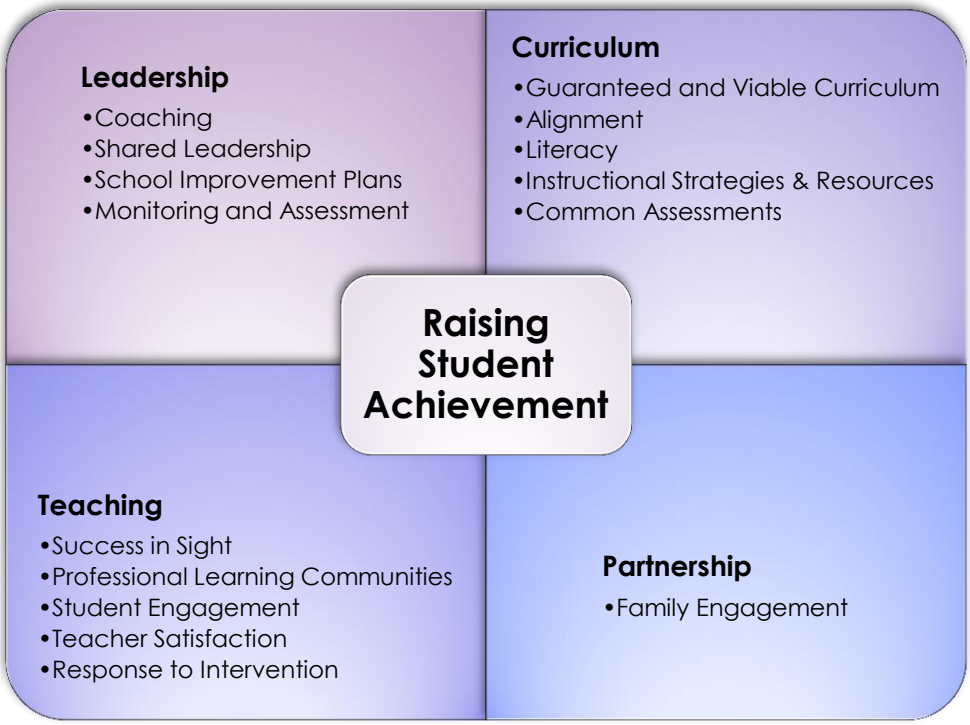
The Cree School Board, through its Strategic Action Plan, is dedicated to building capacity at all levels of the system – teachers, principals, Board leaders – to support improved practices and outcomes. The nature of capacity building has evolved over time as the literacy and numeracy strategy itself has evolved. Consistent with research about effective professional learning, it is evident that a range and blend of approaches are needed, combining external expertise, job-embedded learning in schools and classrooms, individualized supports, and professional learning communities. This takes time.

We are not declaring victory just yet; much more work and much greater accomplishments remain to be achieved. But we should pause and celebrate the news that progress is being made; the tide has turned and we have confirmation that our ultimate success is not in doubt. We have clear proof that with the right assistance Cree students can be successful. We can make change happen and our schools can really make significant gains in a short period of time.

Joe MacNeil, Deputy Director General
Annual Report 2010 - 2011

Appendix

Implementation Wheel



Student Enrollment by School
2011 – 2012
Cree School Board

Pre-School	•719
Elementary	•1,995
Secondary	•1,490
Total	•4,204

Chisasibi

Pre-School	•187
Elementary	•564
Secondary	•425
Total	•1,176

Mistissini

Pre-School	•165
Elementary	•420
Secondary	•236
Total	•821

Waskaganish

Pre-School	•88
Elementary	•257
Secondary	•215
Total	•560

Waswanipi

Pre-School	•71
Elementary	•254
Secondary	•166
Total	•491

Wemindji

Pre-School	•59
Elementary	•169
Secondary	•131
Total	•359

Whapmagoostui

Pre-School	•40
Elementary	•99
Secondary	•109
Total	•248

Eastmain

Pre-School	•48
Elementary	•88
Secondary	•79
Total	•215

Ouje-Bougoumou

Pre-School	•35
Elementary	•69
Secondary	•74
Total	•178

Nemaska

Pre-School	•26
Elementary	•75
Secondary	•55
Total	•156

Appendix C - Eleven Factors Impacting Student Achievement

What Works in Schools Influences on Student Success

Influence		Description
School	Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum	*Ensuring teachers address specific content, in specific courses, at specific grade levels, and that the content can be taught in the time available*
	Challenging Goals and Effective Feedback	*Setting academic goals for individual students and the school, monitoring progress toward those goals, and providing timely feedback on progress*
	Parent and Community Involvement	*Engaging parents in day-to-day activities of the school, decision making and regular communication*
	Safe and Orderly Environment	*Protecting students from physical or psychological harm and maintaining order so learning can take place*
	Collegiality and Professionalism	*Developing teachers' subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and belief in their ability to effect change*
Teacher	Instructional Strategies	*Ensuring teachers' awareness of, and ability to apply, research-based strategies at appropriate time to maximize student learning*
	Classroom Management	*Establishing and enforcing rules and procedures, carrying out disciplinary actions, and maintaining effective teacher-student relationships*
	Classroom Curricular Design	*Effectively sequencing and pacing learning experiences that are under the classroom teacher's control*
Student	Home Environment	*Parents' communication about school, supervision, and expectations, and parenting styles*
	Learned Intelligence and Background Knowledge	*Students' prior learned knowledge of facts, generalizations, and principles about a specific domain*
	Motivation	*Students' efficacy, self-worth, emotions, and deeply seated needs and aspirations*

McREL