

For information on
Trustee Education and
Board Development visit
www.saskschoolboards.ca
bbashutskd@saskschoolboards.ca

Successful Schools: Guidelines for Boards of Education

Module 9

Participate in this seminar to learn more about the research on effective or successful schools. Module 9 workshop and resource materials include these important topics:

- Characteristics of successful schools;
- Examples of schools that have made a difference;
- Setting S.M.A.R.T. goals and monitoring results; and,
- The role of the board of education in ensuring all schools seek continuous improvement.

STEWARDSHIP

RELATIONSHIP

LEADERSHIP

Contents

Introduction	2
Characteristics of Successful Schools.....	4
Schools Make a Difference	4
Attributes of Successful Schools.....	5
The Role of the Community.....	7
Successful Schools and School^{PLUS}.....	9
Achieving Success	12
Analyzing School Board Success	15
What Are Our Goals?	16
Are We Achieving Our Goals?	18
What Data Do We Need?	19
Policy Leadership	23
Describe Results in a Formal Policy	23
Hold School Division Staff Responsible for Producing Results.....	24
Monitor Progress	24
Moving Forward	26
Reflection.....	31
References.....	33
For More Information.....	34

Introduction

A successful school is one in which all students achieve academically and complete Grade 12. All students, no matter what their socioeconomic status, gender, racial/cultural background, are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful in school at the next level next year, and eventually to participate in post-secondary education or enter the workforce.

A successful school prepares students to participate in community life, to work successfully with others and be the parents of tomorrow. Students demonstrate skills and attitudes like cooperation, problem solving and respect for others that are essential for success in all areas of life.

There is a strong emphasis on equity in the successful school. All students, not just an elite few, achieve and all students develop skills to work, live and play with others. This is in contrast to schools of the past where it was assumed that poor students and Aboriginal students would experience limited success and would drop out before Grade 12.

A successful school is a safe school – one that is free of violence, bullying and intimidation. Students feel secure. There is joy and laughter in a successful school, not fear.

Creating successful schools is the responsibility of the board of education.

The Education Act, 1995 says that it is the duty of the board of education to:

- 85 (1) j subject to the regulations, authorize and approve the courses of instruction that constitute the instructional program of each school in the school division.

The Education Act, 1995 also says that every student has the right:

- 142 (1) b to receive instruction appropriate to that person's age and level of educational achievement.

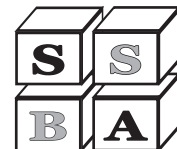
In a Successful School

- All students achieve academically;
- All students master skills needed to successfully work, live and play with others; and,
- All students feel safe and secure.

This handbook is intended to offer school board members information about successful schools. It emphasizes that:

- Schools can and do make a difference in children’s lives;
- Successful schools have specific attributes, for example, they have high expectations for students and provide students with positive reinforcement – recognition for things done well;
- Approaches like School^{PLUS}, which bring school and community together, help to mitigate some of the social and economic factors which influence learning;
- Several different approaches can be taken to achieving school success. Most schools will probably combine aspects from several of these approaches to create their own road to school success;
- Setting goals is the first step in determining success. What do we want our students to know, to be like, to be able to do? The next step is collecting data relating to the goals – data which will tell you if you are moving toward your goals; and,
- Most boards of education govern through policy leadership. In this case, the policy would define success, provide for annual goal-setting and empower staff to collect data relating to the goals.

Building Board Knowledge



1. What is your personal definition of a successful school?

2. Why is it important for the board of education, staff and school community councils to adopt a similar definition of a successful school?

Characteristics of Successful Schools

This section on the characteristics of a successful school covers three topics:

- Schools Make a Difference;
- Attributes of Successful Schools; and,
- The Role of the Community

Schools Make a Difference

Schools can and do make a difference in students' lives. It's well known that students' socioeconomic status and family background influence their educational achievement – but that's not the whole story. A large body of research, dating back to the 1960s, has shown that all children, no matter what their background, can learn and that many of the factors contributing to learning are within the school's control.

For example, the students in two schools with similar socioeconomic conditions can demonstrate significantly different levels of learning. These differences can be attributed to the school. Research indicates that anywhere between 14 percent and 53 percent of differences in achievement are the result of what the school does.⁽¹⁾

Attributes of Successful Schools

Schools can and do make a difference in students' lives. A large body of research shows that successful schools have the following attributes:

1. Professional leadership;
2. Shared vision and goals;
3. A learning environment;
4. Concentration on teaching and learning;
5. High expectations;
6. Positive reinforcement;
7. Monitoring progress;
8. Pupil rights and responsibilities;
9. Purposeful teaching;
10. A learning organization; and,
11. Parent-community-school partnership.

Students' learning is affected by their socioeconomic status and family background as well as by school experiences. School^{PLUS} is a vision which links the community and the school and helps to mitigate some of the social and economic factors which affect learning.

Attributes of Successful Schools

Over the years, dozens of studies have produced descriptions of the attributes of successful schools – schools in which all students achieve academically and master the knowledge, values and skills for success in the community and the workforce. These lists are all quite similar. The list that follows is one of the most recent. It is sufficiently generic to apply to both elementary and secondary schools and it recognizes that student success is not limited to high marks on standardized tests, but rather has a number of dimensions.

Some of the attributes of a successful school in the list below relate to the classroom, some to the school and some to the school division. Several of the attributes of a successful school are influenced by action at all three levels.

1. **Successful schools have effective professional leadership.** The majority of schools perceived as successful have one thing in common – effective leadership. Leadership by the school principal is essential to success. Effective leadership:
 - Is firm and purposeful; and,
 - Provides opportunities for participation by teachers and students.
2. **Shared vision and goals give everyone in the school the same focus.** There is:
 - Unity of purpose;
 - Consistency of practice; and,
 - Collegial and collaborative learning environment.
3. **The school environment promotes learning.** In a successful school there is:
 - An orderly environment;
 - An attractive working environment; and,
 - A caring and respectful environment.
4. **A concentration on teaching and learning promotes student achievement.** A successful school features:
 - Maximization of learning time;
 - An academic emphasis; and,
 - A focus on achievement.

5. **High expectations are important.** Principal and teachers:
 - Communicate expectations;
 - Provide intellectual challenge; and
 - Believe that all students can learn and achieve.

6. **Positive reinforcement tells students what they're doing well.** School staff provide students with:
 - Clear and fair discipline; and,
 - Feedback on progress in learning.

7. **Monitoring progress helps assess whether goals are being met.** Monitoring includes:
 - Monitoring student performance;
 - Evaluating school performance; and,
 - Measuring progress in achieving school goals.

8. **Students know what their rights and responsibilities are.** In a successful school, high student self-esteem comes through opportunities to assume responsibility. Students have:
 - Positions of responsibility; and,
 - Some control over their work.

9. **Purposeful teaching is emphasized.** Classroom teaching features:
 - Efficient organization;
 - Clarity of purpose;
 - Structured lessons; and,
 - Adaptive practice.

10. **The successful school is a learning organization.** Key elements include:
 - School-based staff development;
 - Data-driven, results-based decision-making;
 - Achievement-focused staff development;

- Resource utilization that is focused on goals;
- An emphasis on performance and results; and,
- An expectation that teachers and students will find innovative ways of doing things.

11. **Parent-community-school partnerships link the school and the community.** Partnerships mean:

- Involving parents in meaningful ways;
- Shared decision making;
- Creating links between the school and the community.⁽²⁾

There is a huge body of research on successful schools going back at least 40 years. This handbook provides just a quick overview. Most of this research is quite similar. However, earlier research focused mostly on student learning as measured through standardized achievement tests. More recent research considers a broader range of outcomes including student behaviour, self-esteem and attendance, and student retention rates.

For more information on this topic refer to the bibliography at the end of this handbook under the heading Successful Schools.

The Role of the Community

Schools work best when schools and communities work together.

School/community collaboration increases the potential for all students to achieve success. School and community collaboration can help to mitigate some of the factors over which schools have little control – such as students' socioeconomic status.

For example, hungry students cannot learn. School/community collaboration can address this problem immediately through school breakfast and lunch programs, and in the long-term through food security projects such as community gardens and kitchens.

Students whose home lives are chaotic because of violence, drinking or their families' inability to cope are often too tired or stressed to learn. School/community collaboration can make it easier for families to get the support they need to bring structure and order to their lives.

Prevention/Early Intervention

School/community collaboration can also play an important role in ensuring that all children have the skills and attitudes that contribute to school success. Prevention and early intervention programs such as pre-kindergarten for vulnerable young children have been proven to have both long-term and short-term benefits for children who are at risk of failure in school and in life.

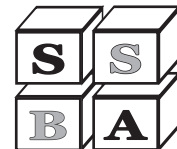
Long-term Benefits:

- Lower rates of juvenile crime;
- Fewer failed grades and school drop-outs;
- Fewer teen pregnancies; and,
- Fewer referrals for intensive needs education.

Short-term Benefits:

- Improved cognitive functioning;
- Increased social skills;
- Increased health; and,
- Higher self-esteem.

Building Board Knowledge



1. Eleven attributes of a successful school are described on the previous pages. Are some of these attributes more important than others?

2. How can we find out where a particular school stands regarding each of the attributes of an effective school?

Successful Schools and School^{PLUS}

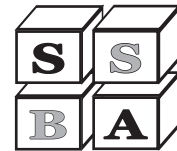
School^{PLUS} is a vision that links the community and the school. School^{PLUS} was recommended by the Task Force on the Role of the School (2001), a Government of Saskatchewan body chaired by Dr. Michael Tymchak. This vision advocates that “schools serve as centres at the community level for the delivery of appropriate social, health, recreation, culture, justice and other services for children and their families”.⁽⁴⁾

School^{PLUS} provides a vehicle to address some of the social and economic factors that affect learning, so the many positive things already occurring in schools will have even greater impact.

A successful school is one where students are safe, achieve academically, complete Grade 12, are prepared for post-secondary education or entry into the workforce, and ready to be productive and participating members of their community.

School divisions and schools have always wanted to be successful by having their students achieve at school and, for the most part, they have been successful. To this end, most Saskatchewan school divisions have participated in organized “School Improvement” or “Effective Schools” initiatives with varying success. School^{PLUS} is closely aligned with these programs and endeavours but transcends them in that it redefines schooling in the Saskatchewan context.

Building Board Knowledge



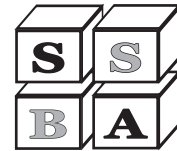
1. *What are the School^{PLUS} priorities your school board has?*

2. *What are the implications of the School^{PLUS} vision for your school board?*

School^{PLUS}:

- Emphasizes learning and success for all students, including the students from difficult socioeconomic and family backgrounds and students with intensive needs;
- Expands responsibility for education and well-being for all children and youth not only in school but also for those who have left school prematurely;
- Promotes partnership with other human service providers to support children and youth with the school becoming a one-stop service centre for children and youth;
- Advocates open, participatory, inclusive and transparent operation with involvement of parents, the learning community and the community at large;
- Suggests that school divisions lead with data and measures student success with emphasis on outcomes for the purpose of improvement of program and practices and policies which will enable it; and
- Promotes communicating results and action plans to the school division participants and to the community.

Building Board Knowledge



1. What policies has your school division developed to better assure the success of schools in your division?

2. What steps has your school board taken to adopt the Effective Practices framework toward School^{PLUS}?

The Ministry of Education has developed an Effective Practices Framework toward successful School^{PLUS} schools. This framework has six dimensions, namely,

1. **Caring and respectful school environment** (climate) – Open, inclusive and culturally affirming.
2. **Responsive curriculum & instruction** – Is flexible and adapts to the needs of the learner.
3. **Assessment for learning** – Provides information and direction for student learning; informs policy and practice; serves as an indicator of public accountability.
4. **Adaptive leadership** – Influence communities to face complex problems and to mobilize them to make changes and successfully adapt to new challenges.
5. **Authentic partnerships** – Among and between educators, parents, students, community and human service providers.
6. **Comprehensive prevention and early intervention** – Community-wide commitment; caring and supportive learning experiences; integrated school-linked services and supports.

The framework provides a process of collaborative planning and monitoring to engage the community in a new way for the benefit of children. The first three dimensions focus on effective learning; the last three focus on supports to learning.

The role of board of education in creating successful schools includes:

- Establish school system goals – ‘What do we want our students to know, to be like, to be able to do?’;
- Define what is a successful school in school division policy;
- Create conditions that best enable schools to be successful;
- Outline expectations of staff;
- Monitoring school success and measuring results;
- Make changes to school programs to better attain the goals as warranted by the data collected; and,
- Inform partners in education, the educational community and the community at large of the results and the action plans stemming from the results.

Achieving Success

Several different approaches can be used to achieve school success. These approaches are summarized in the chart below. ⁽⁵⁾

In reality, these approaches aren't as separate and distinct as the chart suggests. Many schools and school divisions draw from more than one approach when taking action to achieve school success. For example, the goal-focused approach tells us what we want to achieve, while the other approaches describe some of the processes that can be used to achieve these goals.

Goal-focused approach

Focuses on defining desired student outcomes and on results; assumes that a strong emphasis on results will provide a road map to success. Emphasizes change in areas such as:

- Clear definition of desired student outcomes;
- Efficiency and effectiveness in achieving results; and,
- Measurement of student outcomes. ⁽⁶⁾

Human relations approach

Focuses on improving the work satisfaction of teachers; assumes that staff cohesion and morale are the key to school success. Emphasizes change in areas such as:

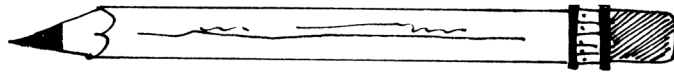
- Respect from relevant adults, such as school and school division administrators, parents, and the community at large;
- Participation in decision-making that enhances teachers' sense of influence and control over their work;
- Frequent and stimulating professional interaction among teachers within the school;
- Processes that offer teachers feedback about their performance and the effects of their performance on student learning;
- Opportunities for teachers to make full use of existing skills and knowledge and to acquire new skills and knowledge;
- Adequate resources to do the job and a pleasant, orderly physical environment; and,
- Congruence between teachers' personal goals and the school's goals. ⁽⁷⁾

Community Involvement Approach

Focuses on improving the school's responsiveness to the external environment (parents, community); assumes that the school will become more successful as connections to parents and community become stronger and as the school responds to input from the community. Emphasizes change in areas such as:

- Strong entrepreneurial leadership;
- Collegiality among teachers and between school staff and community members;
- Capacity for self-evaluation and learning within the school as a whole;
- Strong and deliberate marketing by the school;
- Strong parental involvement in school life;
- Activities and policies that blur the boundaries between school and community; and,
- Support for parents and community members who want to implement change. ⁽⁸⁾

Notes



School systems approach

Focuses on formalizing and structuring the school environment; assumes that success will follow as the school environment becomes more organized and structured. Emphasizes change in areas such as:

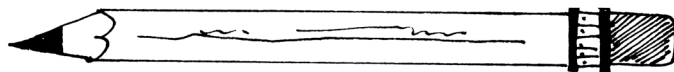
- Explicit written planning documents;
- Clear rules regarding discipline;
- Formalization of jobs and positions within the school;
- Continuity, in leadership and staffing;
- Integrated curricula so there is coordination among the grades;
- Rules, policies and operating procedures; and,
- Adequate resources to get the job done. ⁽⁹⁾

Goodwill approach

Focuses on interpersonal bonds and goodwill among school staff; assumes that if people know each other and recognize each other's sincerity, school success will follow. Emphasizes change in:

- Strengthening interpersonal bonds among school staff; and,
- Building goodwill among staff members and between staff and board of education.

Notes



Analyzing School Board Success

Three topics are addressed in this section:

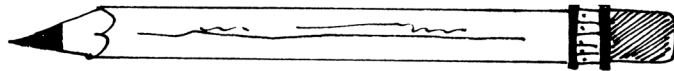
- What Are Our Goals?
- Are We Achieving Our Goals?
- What Data Do We Need?

In the previous section of this handbook, five different approaches to achieving school success were outlined. Often the goal-focused approach is used to define the goals or outcomes the school wants to achieve. Then the strategies described in the other four approaches are used to achieve those results. The remainder of this handbook describes actions that schools and school divisions can take to promote success. The actions outlined draw from all five possible approaches. For example, there is an emphasis on goals (the goal-focused approach) and suggestions that parents and community be involved in setting goals (community involvement approach).

Analyzing School Board Success

Most boards of education govern through policy leadership. They develop policies describing the results they want to achieve, hold school division staff responsible for producing the desired results, and monitor progress to ensure the desired results are being achieved. In this case, the policy would define school success, provide for annual goal-setting and empower staff to collect data relating to the goals.

Notes



What Are Our Goals?

The first step in determining success is setting goals. What do we want our students to know, to be like, to be able to do?

Goals are like the destination at the end of a journey. Although there may be more than one road to the destination, all roads go in the same general direction and all lead to the same place.

People tend to be more motivated when they have a goal to work toward. Clear goals give students, teachers and parents a common purpose and ensure that everyone in a school division is working toward the same ends. Everyone is following similar roads to the same destination.

In a successful school, goals usually relate to:

- Students' mastery of knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- Student behaviour;
- Ensuring that all students experience success and growth;
- Making sure that all students attend regularly;
- Safety in the school; and,
- The student retention rate.

When you are setting goals, keep the following points in mind:

- **Involve stakeholders** – Students, teachers, parents and educational administrators are all stakeholders. Use a process that facilitates input by all these groups. Involvement helps to create a shared vision and to foster commitment to the goals.
- **Set both short-term and long-term goals** – Short-term goals can be achieved in a few weeks or a few months. A series of small successes energizes and encourages people like nothing else. Whenever possible, break long-term goals down into a series of short-term goals so everyone has the satisfaction of succeeding.
- **Set a reasonable number of goals** – When there is a small number of goals, students and teachers can focus their energy and attention. A large number of goals becomes overwhelming and provides as little direction as no goals at all.

- **Provide for both school division and school goals** – The board of education will set goals that apply to the whole school division. By necessity, these goals will be somewhat general, and only a limited number of people can participate in the goal-setting process. Encourage individual schools to set their own goals. School-level goals can be more specific and more people can be involved in setting them.
- **Be sure that your goals are S.M.A.R.T.**

Specific – A specific goal has a much greater chance of being achieved than a general goal. “Students’ reading will improve,” is a general goal. “80% of students will be reading at grade level within two years,” is a specific goal.

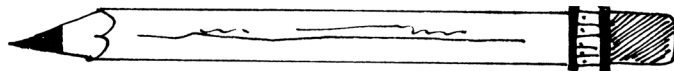
Measurable – A measurable goal includes criteria for measuring progress. “To improve our graduation rate,” is not measurable. “At least 75% of the students who began Grade 10 in 2010-11 will graduate from Grade 12 three years later in 2012-13,” is measurable.

Attainable – A goal of “90% student attendance over a year” may be attainable. A goal of “100% student attendance over a year” is probably not attainable.

Realistic – A goal should be high enough to represent substantial progress, but low enough to be attainable. Baseline data about student achievement collected during the first stage of the strategic planning cycle will help establish realistic goals. For example, if baseline data tells you that 60% of students are reading at grade level, raising that accomplishment to 80% over three years is realistic. Targets of 65% and 100% are probably too low and too high, and thus not realistic.

Timely – A timeframe for achieving the goal should be established. Do you want to achieve a particular goal in three days, three weeks, three months or three years? A strategic plan can include both short-term and long-term goals.

Notes



Are We Achieving Our Goals?

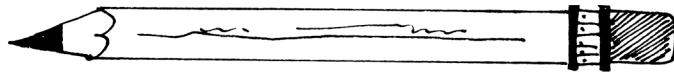
Data helps you determine whether you are achieving goals. “Data are to goals what signposts are to travelers.”⁽¹⁰⁾ Data tell you whether you are on the road to achieving the goals you set for yourself – whether you are any closer to reaching your destination.

Data Give Comprehensive Objective Evidence

Data are important because data move you away from first-person experience toward the comprehensive and the objective.

For example, your child or grandchild’s description of a day at school tells you something about one child’s experiences in one classroom on one day. It doesn’t tell you anything about the experiences of other children in the same classroom or other classrooms. You would need to collect data from most children in all classrooms in order to generalize about the school as a whole. Similarly, when you walk through the hallways of a school, you get certain impressions regarding the orderliness, cleanliness and attractiveness of the school, but that is just one snapshot in time. You would need to collect data in several different locations, at several times during the day, over a few weeks, in order to accurately determine whether the school is orderly and clean.

Notes



What Data Do We Need?

Data Tied to Goals – The data that you collect should be directly tied to your goals. For example, if one of your goals is to increase the frequency of cooperative play on the playground, you would collect data on the frequency and type of such play. If one of your goals is to improve Grade 10 students’ ability to organize an essay in a logical manner, you would examine students’ written essays with a particular emphasis on their organization.

Group Data Are Important – You are collecting data in order to examine the success of whole schools or whole programs, not to evaluate the progress of individual students. Thus, the focus should be on group data – data which reflects the performance of all students in a school or all students in a program, not on data relating to individual students.

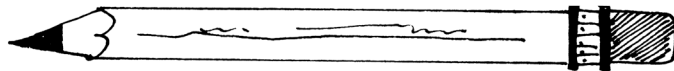
Consider Trends Over Time – When looking at data, consider trends over time. Is change evident over a three or four year time span? Generally, it is unrealistic to expect dramatic change from one year to the next. Incremental change is more likely.

The first year you collect data will be a baseline year. Future years’ performance can be compared against the baseline year to identify trends over time.

Most schools will set goals in the areas listed below and so the data that are collected should relate specifically to those areas:

- Achievement by all students;
- Student retention; and,
- School safety.

Notes



Student Achievement

Standardized Tests – Measuring changes in student achievement does not necessarily mean using standardized tests. Standardized tests measure a very narrow range of knowledge and skills. Moreover, since they are usually multiple-choice they do not measure a student’s ability to actually perform a task. For example, multiple-choice tests can measure a student’s ability to critique an essay written by someone else, but not a student’s ability to research, write and edit an original essay. Standardized tests can provide valuable information about a narrow range of skills, but they should never be the only data collection instrument used.

Benchmarking – The benchmarking process is an alternate approach. Benchmarking relies on teachers’ expertise and can be used for diagnostic as well as evaluative purposes. Benchmarking typically involves:

- **Collect samples of students’ work** – For example, collect samples of Grade 4 students’ descriptive paragraphs all written on the same topic.
- **Identify exemplars which illustrate student work at various achievement levels** – Sort the writing samples into five or six achievement levels.
- **Develop written rubrics which describe the characteristics of student work at various levels** – A rubric might state that a descriptive paragraph at the fifth level of achievement “has an organizational framework that is clear and appropriate for the topic.” Another rubric might state that a descriptive paragraph at the first level of achievement “has no organizational structure – consists of disorganized thoughts”.
- **Train teacher-scorers so they mark students’ work consistently using the exemplars and rubrics** – During training, the rubrics are introduced and the exemplars are read together, so teacher-scorers can see where the exemplars fall on the rubric. The teachers practice scoring on training pieces. They compare the training pieces to the rubrics and the exemplars and do not compare one student’s work to another’s. The focus during training is on consistency, so that teachers’ scoring is consistent with the rubrics and exemplars every time, and consistent with each other’s scoring every time.
- **Score students’ work** – Teacher-scorers work in pairs. Thus, two people score each paper. When there is a difference between two scorers’ marks for a paper, the head scorer helps them negotiate the score. The head scorer also reviews a sample of the scored papers to make sure all scored papers are consistent with the rubrics and exemplars.

- **Report the results** – The first year this process is used it provides baseline data against which future years' performance can be compared. Students' work is usually returned to their teachers. Displaying a student's work next to rubrics and exemplars helps teachers, students and parents identify an individual student's strengths and areas for improvement.

The benchmarking process is used by Saskatchewan's Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP) and the National School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP). Some school divisions in Saskatchewan also use the process, usually in math or language arts.

Student Retention

The student retention rate is the proportion of students who stay in school. It is the opposite of the dropout rate. The student retention rate is of concern to elementary schools as well as high schools, since some students drop out of school, or attend very infrequently as early as Grade 4 or 5.

School Safety

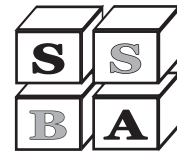
When collecting data about school safety, two types of information are important: information about the number and type of violent incidents, and information about the number and type of positive, kind interactions between people at school.

Information About Violent Incidents – The first step in collecting data about violence is defining violence. Violence is a continuum that includes such things as vandalism, verbal slurs and threats, as well as physical acts of violence and assault with a weapon. Violence includes bullying, sexual and racial harassment, intimidation, all of which may be psychological rather than physical acts. ⁽¹¹⁾

When schools start collecting data about violence, it is not unusual to notice an increase the first few months or even the first year. This does not reflect an actual increase, but rather students' and teachers' greater willingness to acknowledge what is actually happening at school.

Information About Positive Behaviours – All too often people focus on the negative, but you usually have greater success by emphasizing and rewarding the positive. It's important to collect data about positive behaviour as well as about incidents of violence. Positive behaviour includes students resolving conflicts through discussion and compromise, incidents of spontaneous cooperation and sharing, and incidents of kindness or generosity to others.

Building Board Knowledge



1. *When did your school board last set goals relating to students' mastery of knowledge?*

2. *Which schools in your division set school-level goals?*

3. *If you have school division or school-level goals, what have you done to make students, parents, teachers and other members of the community aware?*

Policy Leadership

How do you collect the data you need to measure school success and to find out whether goals are being met? Collecting data doesn't mean that you go from school to school – notebook in hand. Rather, it means that you work with school division and school staff to identify the data that are needed – data to determine the extent to which goals are being met. Then you implement a policy that empowers staff to collect these data.

A board of education's job is to govern those aspects of the education system that, under legislation or through practice, fall under its jurisdiction. Most boards of education do this through policy leadership. They develop policies describing the results they want to achieve, hold school division staff responsible for producing the desired results, and monitor progress to ensure the desired results are being achieved.

Policy leadership has three components:

- Describe Results in a Formal Policy;
- Hold School Division Staff Responsible for Producing Results; and,
- Monitor Progress. ⁽¹²⁾

Describe Results in a Formal Policy

A policy which empowers school staff to collect data relating to school success would begin by defining school success.

It would make provision for regular (annual) goal-setting by stakeholders. It's not a good idea to write specific goals into the policy. These will likely change from year to year. As one goal is accomplished, another one will take its place.

The policy would enable students, teachers, and school administration to collect data relating to the goals set each year. Some data collection activities will stay the same from year to year. For example, once baseline data has been collected about students' writing, the same assessment exercise would be repeated every year in the same grade for comparison purposes. Other data collection activities may change from year to year as goals change.

The policy would be developed in consultation with those affected by it – students, parents, teachers and school division administrative staff.

Hold School Division Staff Responsible for Producing Results

Once the policy has been developed, school division staff are responsible for collecting the data required by the board of education. Policy leadership means that school division staff have considerable independence in deciding upon the methods and approaches they will use to achieve the desired results. For example, the board might specify that it needs information about the writing ability of Grade 6 and Grade 10 students and that the data should be collected through a benchmarking process. The implementation of this data collection process would be up to the director of education, principals and teachers.

When they have the necessary data, schools might take different approaches to achieving success. One school might emphasize community involvement and build stronger links between school, parents and community. Another school might emphasize school systems and develop written policies and operating procedures.

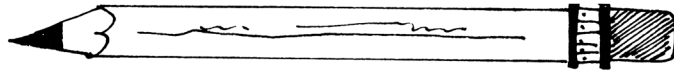
The policy leadership approach is the opposite of hands-on management, in which the board of education makes many decisions about the day-to-day operation of the school division and individual schools.

Monitor Progress

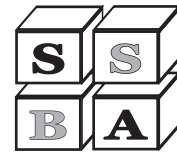
The board needs to check regularly to ensure that staff are undertaking the activities specified in the policy. For example, board members would:

- Be involved in the annual goal-setting activity;
- Have information about the data being collected; and,
- Use a checklist to ensure they receive specific data at scheduled times.

Notes



Building Board Knowledge



1. *What role do boards of education have in ensuring that schools are successful?*

2. *Do you have a school board policy defining school success?*

3. *If you were developing a policy that defines school success, what stakeholders would you involve?*

4. *What stakeholders would you involve when setting annual goals and identifying the data that needs to be collected to assess whether goals are being achieved?*

5. *Your school division has 10 schools. In nine of them the students are achieving well, there are few behaviour problems and few drop-outs. In school #10 there are many behaviour problems and a lot of vandalism. The student dropout rate seems high. Parents talk very negatively about the school. All of your schools are in rural communities with similar socioeconomic status, so that isn't likely to be a factor. How do you find out what's wrong? How do you fix it? Whose job is it to bring this school up to standard?*

Moving Forward

What can schools and school divisions do to move along the path to success? Often the answer is to focus on the attributes of successful schools that appear on pages 4, 5 and 6 of this handbook. Schools can start their journey to success by using the approaches described on pages 10 and 11 to strengthen these attributes of success. Consider the following case studies. One case is real and one is hypothetical.

Case Study #1 – A Real-Life Case Study

The Burke School is located in the Melfort School Division. The board of education requires that each school in the division conduct a review every four years. The Burke School did its first review in 1993. Steps in the review were:

- A review committee was established comprised of the school principal, two teachers and the school secretary. The director of education was an ex officio member of the committee.
- The review committee established five questions that guided the review:
 1. What issues do we wish to address and what questions do we wish to ask?
 2. What information will we need to get intelligent answers to the questions?
 3. What sources will we tap to gather the information?
 4. What methods will we use to gather the information?
 5. What methods will we use to organize and analyze the data.
- A consultant from the University of Regina provided advice on the data collection methods to be used. She emphasized the importance of “conversation” in unveiling important issues between and among individuals and groups.
- The review committee developed a response guide to structure the conversations which were to take place at public meetings.
- It was decided to hold three separate rounds of public meetings. Each round would involve an opportunity for a stakeholder group (first the students, then the community, then the staff) to provide comments regarding what the school was presently doing which met the needs of students, and what the school could do differently to better meet the needs of students. Each round was to include a general meeting to provide an opportunity for the public to see the comments that were gathered and to provide additional comments.
- In Round One, teachers talked to their students about school, the things they do at school, would like to do at school, and the kind of school they would like to attend. Students also talked about these issues in mixed-grade groups, wrote about their ideas, and drew pictures showing their ideas.

Teachers gathered students’ ideas and compiled them into the following categories:

Case Study #1 – A Real-Life Case Study (Continued)

All these categories, except “teacher morale,” and “teachers’ job satisfaction” were believed to fall within the scope of the Burke School review. The remaining categories then were used as the framework for the response guide used in Round Two and Round Three.

- The ideas gathered from students and the way they were categorized were presented at a general public meeting. Additional ideas and feedback were gathered from those attending the meeting.
- The community was canvassed in Round Two. Response packages were sent to all families in the community and to the previous year’s Grade Six students. The response packages used the same categories as in Round One. An additional category for “other” ideas was included. A further addition split each category into two subsections. The first subsection sought ideas about how the school was presently meeting the needs of the children. The second subsection sought ideas about how the school could better meet the needs of the children.

Once again, the information collected was collated and presented at a general meeting where further ideas and feedback were collected.

- Round Three involved the school staff. All staff members were canvassed with a response package similar to that used in Round Two. The responses were collected, collated, and presented at another general meeting.
- The review committee members analyzed the data collected. They looked for statements for which there was consensus, for underlying themes, and for questions that arose from the data. They also considered recommendations arising from the data and suggested conclusions drawn from information collected during the review.
- The result was 20 consensus statements and accompanying recommendations. For example:

Consensus Statement 13: Parent and adult volunteer programs are supported.

Recommendation 15: That the volunteer programs continue at the school and that additional ways be found to utilize volunteers and expand these programs.

- All of the data collected was summarized according to three big themes:

Theme 1: Changes to the physical structure of the facilities, the school, and the school playground are necessary.

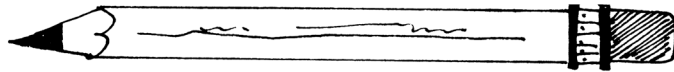
Theme 2: There is a need for consistent application of rules, discipline, and procedures at the school.

Theme 3: Much of what is presently being done at Burke School is viewed positively. ⁽¹⁴⁾

This real-life case study illustrates several points:

- The board of education established a policy stating that each school must conduct a review every four years. However, it didn't specify the method to be used for the review, nor did it actually conduct the review. Each school had the freedom to decide on the methodology of the review and to actually conduct the review;
- An outside expert provided advice early in the process;
- Stakeholders (students, community and school staff) had opportunity to give input; and,
- Sharing information and building consensus were strong themes throughout the review. As soon as one round of consultations was done, the information was compiled, provided to the public and additional commentary was invited.

Notes



Case Study #2 – A Hypothetical Case Study

The board of education of Sunny Valley School Division developed a successful schools policy. They defined a successful school as one in which:

- all students achieve academically
- all students master skills needed to successfully work, play and live with others
- all students feel safe and secure.

Their policy provided for an annual goal-setting activity and empowered staff to collect data relating to the goals. The first goal-setting session occurred in May, so that school staff could plan for the year ahead. Students, teachers, parents, educational administrators and representatives of community organizations participated in setting the goals.

One of the goals they set was that 80 percent of Grade 7 students would achieve at level 3 or higher on a five-point measure of writing. Writing was further broken down into "overall writing", "mechanics" (spelling, grammar and punctuation), "content and organization" and "style".

After the goal-setting activity, the board passed a motion empowering the director of education to implement a benchmarking process to collect data about Grade 7 students' writing ability.

Because excellent writing is a priority for the whole school division, it became a focus for professional development. Teachers in every school got together in teams to explore methods of teaching writing. There was a lot of emphasis on the writing process: making outlines, writing, self-editing, peer and/or teacher editing, feedback, rewriting.

However, teachers and school administrators recognized that to enhance the potential for success they could go a step beyond improving the way writing is taught. They could also focus on some of the attributes of a successful school. Each school set its own priorities in this regard. Most of the planning for change took place during staff meetings so all teachers were involved.

School A decided to concentrate on maximizing teaching and learning time.

- The principal agreed that P. A. announcements would be limited to the first five minutes in the morning and the last 10 minutes at the end of the day in order to maximize learning time
- Teachers observed in each other's classrooms to find out how much time is being spent on instruction and how much on housekeeping tasks like handing out papers, and taking attendance. Then teachers met to discuss ways to organize their classrooms in order to maximize learning time.

School B decided to focus on positive reinforcement.

- The whole school implemented a "Catch You Doing Something Good" program. Teachers and students alike tried to catch each other doing good things and recorded the good things on a big hallway chart.
- Teachers observed in each other's classrooms to count the number of times teachers praised students or acknowledged good work, good behaviour, in comparison to the number of reprimands or criticisms.
- At a staff meeting teachers talked about ways to give highly specific positive feedback. For example, "It was very kind of you to loan your crayons to Susan," gives the student specific information about desired behaviours. "You were a good girl today" does not. "The sentences in this paragraph are arranged in a logical order" gives specific positive feedback. "This is well written" does not.

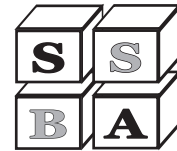
The board of education praised and supported these school-level efforts. They recognized that by focusing on the attributes of a successful school, achievement in all areas is likely to be enhanced and the quality of school life improved.

The hypothetical case study above illustrates several points:

- Each school chose its own path to a common goal;
- Stakeholders were involved in setting goals. This helps to promote shared vision and goals and to increase unity of purpose;
- School staff members worked in teams to identify school priorities and to explore practical ways the priorities can be achieved. Again this relates to shared vision and goals. It promotes unity of purpose, consistency of practice, and collegiality and collaboration;
- Improved writing was a division-wide goal. Inservices addressed specific methods for teaching writing. This contributed to purposeful teaching;
- There was school-based staff development which helps to build a learning organization; and,
- The board and school staff recognized the importance of focusing on the attributes of successful schools as well as on subject-specific teaching.

Building Board Knowledge

1. In your school division, what is the first step toward more successful schools?



Reflection

Three key ideas from this module are:

-
-
-

My questions:

-
-
-

	Ideas I want to learn more about:	Ideas for my board to consider:
To be an effective trustee:		
To be an effective board:		

My Personal Plan of Action

In order to strengthen the governance of our board of education, I make a commitment to:

State the Area You Want to Improve	I Commit Myself to the Following	When Will I Do This?	How Will I Know I Have Been Successful

References

1. Barker, K., Wendel, T., & Richmond, M. (1999). *Linking the Literature: School Effectiveness and Virtual Schools*. Vancouver, BC: FuturEd. (<http://www.futured.com/pdf/Virtual.pdf>)
2. Stoll, L., & Fink, D. (1996). *Changing our Schools*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press. Cited in Barker, K., Wendel, T., & Richmond, M. (1999). *Linking the Literature: School Effectiveness and Virtual Schools*. Vancouver, BC: FuturEd. (<http://www.futured.com/pdf/Virtual.pdf>)
3. Saskatchewan Education. (January, 1998). *On Course: Quick Reference Fact Sheet: Saskatchewan Education's Prekindergarten Program*. Regina, SK: Author.
4. Government of Saskatchewan. (2002). *Securing Saskatchewan's Future. Ensuring the Wellbeing and Educational Success of Saskatchewan's Children and Youth: Provincial Response – Role of the School Task Force Final Report*. Regina, SK: Author, p. 1.
5. Barker et al, 1999.
6. Barker et al, 1999.
7. Louis, K. S. & Smith, B. A. (1990). *Teachers' Work: Current Issues and Prospects for Reform*. In P. Reyes (ed.), *Productivity and Performance in Educational Organizations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, cited in Barker, K., Wendel, T., & Richmond, M. (1999). *Linking the Literature: School Effectiveness and Virtual Schools*. Vancouver, BC: FuturEd. (<http://www.futured.com/pdf/Virtual.pdf>)
8. Barker et al, 1999.
9. Barker et al, 1999.
10. Schmoker, M. (1996). *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, p. 30.
11. Thompson, L. (1994). *One Incident is Too Many: Policy Guidelines for Safe Schools*. Research Report #94-05. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/school_improvement/94-05.htm)
12. This model of policy leadership is based on the work of Dr. John Carver. See bibliography for references to Dr. Carver's work. The Carver model has been adapted for use in Saskatchewan in: McDonough, K. (2002). *A Pathway to Effective Board Policy Development*. Research Centre Report #02-09. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/governance/02-09.htm>)
13. Putz, B. (1994). *Making Connections ...the Burke School Review*. Research Centre Report #94-01. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/school_improvement/94-01.htm)

For More Information

Establishing Benchmarks and Standards

Thompson, L. (1999). *Using Standards and Assessments to Support Student Learning*. Research Centre Report #99-011. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association.

Includes a summary of how to use the benchmark and standard-setting process.

Most of the learning assessments published by Saskatchewan's Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP) and the National School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) include descriptions of how benchmarks and standards were used in each specific assessment. Most of the provincial learning assessments are online at <http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/k/pecs/ae/plap.html>. Most of the national learning assessments are online at <http://www.cmec.ca/saip/>. Check these websites for the most recent learning assessments.

Goal Setting and Data Collection

Schmoker, M. (1996). *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Policy Leadership

The model of policy leadership described in this handbook is based on the work of Dr. John Carver. For more information refer to:

Carver, J. Policy Governance in a Nutshell. (<http://www.carvergovernance.com/model.htm>)

Carver, J. (1997). *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations*. 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Carver, J. (1997). *Reinventing Your Board: A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Policy Governance*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Carver, J. (1993). *John Carver on Board Governance*. (Videotape). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Carver, J. (1997). *Empowering Boards for Leadership*. (Audiotape). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

McDonough, K. (2002). *A Pathway to Effective Board Policy Development*. Research Centre Report #02-09. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/governance/02-09.htm>)

Offers a practical framework that will help Saskatchewan boards of education adopt a policy leadership approach. This framework is based on the work of Dr. John Carver. Includes a section which encourages boards of education to codify their policies into 12 subject areas.

Thompson, L. (1999). *Policy Leadership*. Research Centre Report #99-09. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/governance/99-09.htm>)

Describes policy leadership by boards of education and outlines the process of developing, implementing and monitoring policies.

Prevention/Early Intervention

Saskatchewan Education. (1997). *Better Beginnings, Better Futures: Best Practices Policy and Guidelines for Prekindergarten in Saskatchewan Community Schools*. Regina, SK: Author.

Provides a framework for implementation of prekindergarten programs in Saskatchewan's community schools.

Safe Schools

Bidwell, N. M. (1997). *The Nature and Prevalence of Bullying in Elementary Schools*. Research Report #97-06. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/school_improvement/97-06.htm)

Reports on the incidence of bullying in Western Canadian schools and offers suggestions to prevent bullying.

Braun, B. (2001). *Responding to Student Violence and Problem Behaviour: Engaging the Community*. Research Report #01-04. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/school_improvement/01-04.htm)

Describes several intervention measures that schools can implement to encourage positive behaviour and to reduce violence.

Pendharkar, M. *A School-Based Conflict Management Program*. Research Centre Report #95-02. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/school_improvement/95-02.htm)

Describes how a school-based conflict management program can be implemented and outlines the benefits of such a program.

Tamaki, S. (1994). *Adolescent Anger Control*. Research Report #94-06. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/students/94-06.htm>)

Describes an anger management program that was implemented in one Saskatchewan school and identifies challenges in implementing such a program.

Thompson, L. (1994). *One Incident is Too Many: Policy Guidelines for Safe Schools*. Research Report #94-05. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/school_improvement/94-05.htm)

Describes some of the causes of school violence and outlines the measures that are often taken to combat violence. Includes guidelines to assist boards of education in developing and implementing safe schools policies.

Thompson, L. (1992). *Racial Incidents, Policy Development Guidelines*. Research Report #92-05. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Boards Association. (http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/research/education_equity/92-05.htm)

Describes how boards of education can implement policy to reduce racial incidents and to handle them when they do occur.

School^{PLUS}

The Government of Saskatchewan. (2002). *Securing Saskatchewan's Future. Ensuring the Wellbeing and Educational Success of Saskatchewan's Children and Youth: Provincial Response – Role of the School Task Force*. Regina, SK: Author.

The Government of Saskatchewan's overall response to the final report of the Role of the School Task Force.

Tymchak, M. (2001). *Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School: School^{PLUS} – A Vision for Children and Youth: Toward a New School, Community and Human Service Partnership in Saskatchewan*. Final Report to the Minister of Education. Regina, SK: University of Regina, Faculty of Education, Saskatchewan Instructional Development Research Unit. (<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/K/pecs/pp/docs/RoleofSchools.pdf>)

This final report on the Role of the Schools Task Force puts forward a vision for School^{PLUS} and advocates making the school the hub for delivery of developmental and educational services to young people and their families.

Successful Schools

Association of Effective Schools, Inc. (1996). *Correlates of Effective Schools*.
(<http://www.mes.org/correlates.html>)

A short, simply written piece describing seven attributes of successful schools.

Barker, K., Wendel, T., & Richmond, M. (1999) *Linking the Literature: School Effectiveness and Virtual Schools*. Vancouver, BC: FutureEd.
(<http://www.futured.com/pdf/Virtual.pdf>).

The first half of this long scholarly document is a literature review which discusses the research relating to the attributes of successful schools. It also includes information about models which can be used to promote school success.

Human Resources Development Canada. (1996). *How Schools Succeed: The National Report of the Exemplary Schools Project*. Bulletin, 2(1), Winter 1995-96. (http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/sp-ps/arb-dgra/publications/bulletin/vol2n1/v2n1a9_e.shtml)

Descriptions of several Canadian schools that are considered to be models of success.

Lezotte, L. (1991). *Correlates of Effective Schools: The First and Second Generation*. Okemos, MI: Effective Schools Products Ltd.
(<http://www.effectiveschools.com/Correlates.pdf>)

A short piece describing the difference between the first generation of effective schools research which focused on basic outcomes such as student achievement and the second generation which focuses on more complex and sophisticated outcomes.

Rutter, M., Maughan, B., Mortimore, P., Oustan, J., & Smith, A. (1979). *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

This book was one of the first to recognize that schools do make a difference. Prior to its publication, educators often assumed that achievement is determined solely by socioeconomic factors.