



The NWT School Improvement and Reporting Directive and Framework

*Our Vision: Northern people leading
fulfilled lives and contributing to a strong
and prosperous society*

Minister's Message



Although there are many great things happening in our Northwest Territories' (NWT) schools we are always striving to be better. To ensure the NWT education system continues to improve the learning outcomes for all students, I have instituted this Directive to ensure we have a continual and relevant planning process, evidence-based and student-focussed, that will ensure our work is contributing to a better result.

The Ministerial School Improvement and Reporting Directive and Framework provides direction to support schools in this ongoing endeavour. It outlines a collaborative planning model with a strong focus on learning and ensuring quality teaching continues to occur in every classroom in the NWT.

The directive and framework is building on current school success initiatives and is expected to generate ideas leading to more effective practice. It acknowledges the challenges faced by educators and relies on the leadership and professional competence they bring to the classroom. It also recognizes the pivotal role of parents and communities in improving learning outcomes.

The School Improvement and Reporting Directive and Framework is designed to be used in ways which best meet the needs of schools and communities in identifying their planning priorities. As always our work is underpinned by the needs of our students in order to make them successful, contributing members of our Northern society.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a vertical line, representing the signature of Honourable Jackson Lafferty.

Honourable Jackson Lafferty
Minister
Education, Culture and Employment

1. Ministerial Directive on School Improvement and Reporting

Culture, heritage and language underpin everything people do. These foundations for all learning are developed in the home and the community. It is in this context that our schools work with communities to build on young children's strengths and experiences – helping them gain the knowledge and skills they will need as adults.

Approach to Educating Children and Youth

NWT schools support and value students for their own unique attributes, aptitudes and abilities in helping them develop academic skills and knowledge. The overarching philosophy of culture-based and inclusive education serves to ensure that Northern languages and cultures play an important role in the education of all students, and that those students are served and assessed as individuals.

Learning outcomes are not solely the responsibility of the government, education authorities, and schools; they are also the responsibility of the family, the leaders, and the community as a whole. It is crucial that the education system build strong links with parents, families, community members, volunteers, non-government organizations, community health and social services, and most importantly the students themselves.

Approach to Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting

NWT schools use curricular outcomes to assess and evaluate individual student progress, in relation to their particular needs and abilities, using appropriate classroom assessment tools. This information is used to inform teachers, students and parents of the student's progress. Education authorities and schools also report on school progress to community members based on an annual planning and reporting cycle.

Periodic external assessments are used to evaluate what teachers already know about their students and to provide additional information about the learning outcomes in relation to the needs of students. External assessments are also used in conjunction with other outcomes and environmental information to help assess the quality and equity of the education system.

Commitment to Improved and Equitable Educational Outcomes

NWT schools are committed to improved and equitable educational outcomes for all Northern people. Improving the outcomes for all students and eliminating the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are critical to achieving our vision of *'Northern people leading fulfilled lives and contributing to a strong and prosperous society.'*

School Planning and Reporting

NWT education authorities and schools work with their partners in education to plan and ensure ongoing improvement of the learning process and the well being of our students.

The NWT *Education Act* provides for the development and evaluation of school plans appropriate for the North and the community in which the school operates. Education bodies are required to:

- hold a public meeting annually to consult with parents, community elders and other members of the community regarding the goals and plans for the school program for the next school year;
- monitor, evaluate and direct the delivery of school programs to assure the highest possible education standards in the schools; and
- evaluate school program plans and provide direction with respect to those plans.

At the direction of the education authority and Superintendent, the Principal collaborates with school staff to undertake:

- school planning processes that include the development of a school plan, operational planning and classroom planning;
- ongoing consultation and liaison with students, parents and other community members
- school self-assessment that results in studying and analyzing learning outcome standards and the effectiveness of school processes in maximizing learning outcomes; and
- completing and publishing an annual report and plan that describes educational outcomes and actions to improve school performance.

The School Planning and Reporting Directive reflects current best practices followed by Northern educators. The approach to education and practices described in this directive are to be followed by all NWT schools within the broader context of Department and education authority governance, planning, and reporting. It is to be administered in conjunction with the Language and Culture Based Education Directive; Inclusive Schooling Directive; Programming for Success Guide; Directive on Student Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting; and other relevant Department and education authority directives.

2. NWT School Improvement and Reporting Framework

The purpose of the School Improvement and Reporting Framework is to support the *School Improvement and Reporting Directive* by describing the conceptual model that underpins the directive and to offer guidance about how it can be implemented.

Focus on Student Success

The activities around a successful educational planning framework are built on the values of the community. Only in this way, can we use information to lead a process of ongoing school improvement that meets the needs of the individual student, parents and community.

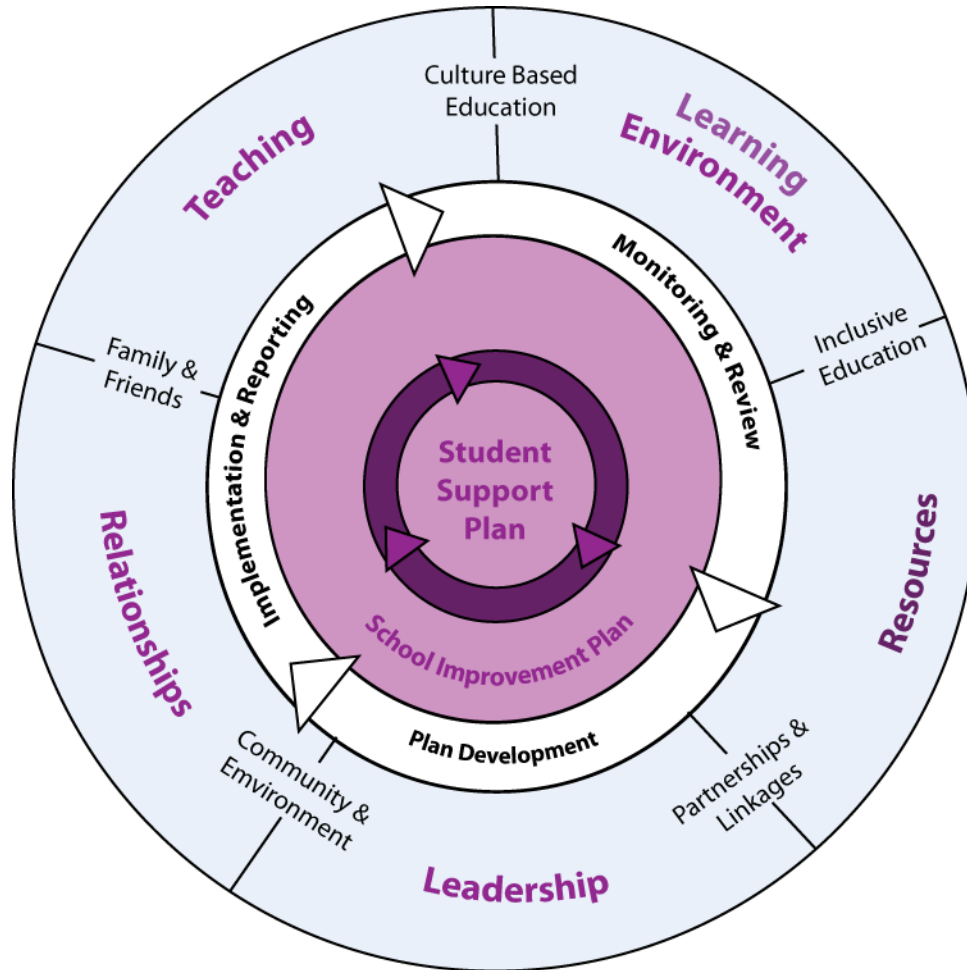
It is within this Northern context that the document lays out a framework for ongoing improvement, including a number of actions that will help to meet the educational and developmental needs of students in the Northwest Territories.

Data on learning outcomes emerge from many sources including learning and evaluation assessments done by teachers and systemic testing. Social-skills learning and outcomes related to developing appropriate behaviour and understanding and internalizing shared core values are also to be assessed and evaluated.

For teacher evaluations to be used with confidence it is important that they are referenced to NWT curricula and are consistent, both within and between schools. In the NWT this includes the functional grade level assessment (FGL), student support programs (SSP's), and Alberta Achievement Tests (AAT). FGL and AAT data can also be used to guide classroom programming for student needs, and, along with other information, to gain an overview of school performance.

Governments, education bodies, communities, parents and students all share a responsibility to provide the means, context, and support for schools to maximize student learning and success.

School Improvement and Reporting Framework



The Student Support Plan - Programming for Student Success

The Northwest Territories education system is committed to the philosophy and practice of inclusiveness that welcomes all students into school and provides them with learning opportunities, appropriate to their diverse strengths and needs, in classrooms with their peers. Students in NWT schools are to follow regular, modified or individual education programs depending on their strength and needs. Even though a student may be following a regular program the student may be on a support plan if the student is having difficulties or requires enrichment.

It is understood that for some students with Individual Education Plans (IEP), mapping their performance and progress in the same ways as for other students may not be meaningful. It is important nevertheless that the performance and progress of all students be monitored, recorded and reported.

An IEP should be based on the long-term life goals identified. It should describe what the student knows and is able to do, what and how the student should learn next, and what the student will do to demonstrate learning. The IEP should be sufficiently challenging to maximize life long goals and be consistent with acknowledged best practices. It must be signed by parents/guardians, the student (if applicable), the administrator or principal, the program support teacher, and the classroom teacher.

School Improvement Cycle

The school improvement cycle can be broken down into three components. Schools:

- assess data and other evidence related to learning outcomes, school operations, and community life;
- plan to improve the standards of student achievement; and
- act to implement planned strategies.

Because the school improvement cycle is an ongoing process, the three components should be seen as dynamic and interactive. While assessment leads logically to planning, and planning logically leads to implementation, ongoing self-assessment recognizes that the act of implementation may cause planning decisions to be modified and may re-focus self assessment questions.

To foster an effective school improvement cycle, schools need to answer the following questions:

- What are our students achieving, both academically and non-academically?
- Are these outcomes effective in our context?
- What areas should be the focus for improvement?
- What will we do to improve in these focus areas?
- What will we do to know if the learning outcomes have been effective?

School Self-assessment

Self-assessment is fundamental to establishing an effective school improvement cycle. Schools should reflect on, and evaluate, their performance in order to plan for and enact improvement. Schools need to undertake self-assessment that results in measureable and informative data that shows how students are achieving learning outcomes

Schools assess using a systematic, ongoing and comprehensive process that focuses on student well being and learning growth. This involves gathering and analyzing data

and other evidence and making informed judgements about how effective learning outcomes are. The process will also provide information on the status of school processes and operations.

School Planning

Schools plan by making evidence-driven decisions about the actions required to maximize learning outcomes. Schools should consider:

- What could be done to address the identified need?
- What does education research tell us about effective ways of addressing the identified need?
- Which strategies can be realistically implemented in our school context?
- What could be done to involve the community and ensure school programs reflect local culture?

School planning responds to student and community needs, addresses policy requirements, accommodates departmental directives, and engages all school staff. The divisional/district education authority works with the school principal to develop the **School Plan** in consultation with the community. The Plan is a public document that provides a direction-setting, strategic overview for the school and typically spans a number of years. As the Plan can span a number of years, it is important that the plan be easily understood by any new incoming administration and school staff.

School Plans should be succinct, but must include clear objectives, priorities, measureable improvement objectives, major strategies (particularly whole-school strategies), reference to systemic policies and directions, evaluation measures and a timeframe, including a provision for annual review.

Measureable improvement objectives need to be anchored to a realistic baseline and standard that gives some sense of what should be achievable if a concerted improvement strategy is employed for long enough. Staff should understand what is trying to be achieved and what their role is in achieving the objectives. There are a number of ways to establish measureable objectives. Schools should select only those methods that are relevant, applicable and useful.

In addition, School Plans may include beliefs and values, non-priority areas to be sustained, and resource allocation. Schools are expected to implement their School Plan in ways that best suit the school's context. Schools typically do this by developing, for example, learning area, staff, and project plans. Such plans are internal to the school and detail how the School Plan will be implemented in that school year.

Classroom planning is the responsibility of teachers and should be aligned to school planning.

Action/implementation

Schools act by implementing their plan. They are accountable for ensuring that plans are implemented and then evaluated for their effectiveness in terms of learning outcomes. It is not sufficient for schools to report that a planned strategy was implemented. A process of reflection, review and evaluation is expected so that schools can judge the effectiveness of implementation strategies.

It is recognized that some strategies may take longer to show measureable improved learning outcomes than the typical school planning cycle. In such cases, the strategy should continue to be monitored for its effect on learning outcomes. To do this, schools may need to develop specific milestones that would provide interim evidence that the strategy is on course and should be continued.

School Operations

School operations are those processes and procedures that enable learning outcomes to improve. There are five areas of focus for effective school operations:

- teaching;
- learning environment;
- leadership;
- resources; and
- relationships.

Schools are expected to monitor and record the effectiveness of these areas in relation to learning outcomes. High quality **teaching** is a pre-requisite for improving learning outcomes. It is therefore the responsibility of schools, with system support, to develop teachers with a purposeful pedagogy that challenges and supports students, and connects to their experience, stage of development, and background.

A **learning environment** that is safe, caring, inclusive, and culturally appropriate is also a pre-requisite for improving the standards of learning outcomes. It is the school's responsibility, with community and system support, to establish a learning environment where students feel safe, student behaviour is well managed, support programs promote student wellbeing and reflect the values of the community, and where attendance, retention, and engagement are priorities. Attendance and behaviour data will be important indicators of the health of the learning environment.

School **leadership** is an important enabler of improved learning outcomes. Leaders who focus on teacher pedagogy and practice are likely to have the greatest impact on learning outcomes. By encouraging expert teachers to operate collaboratively and share their skills and understanding, good school leaders nurture, develop and expand quality teaching in the school.

Strategic deployment of school **resources** is another important enabler of improved learning outcomes. This will be measured by the extent to which resources are targeted to maximise learning outcomes through school improvement planning. It is expected that school resources are managed in accordance with legislation and policy.

Building strong internal and external **relationships** is another enabler of improved learning outcomes. In addition to positive relationships with the community, effective internal relationships between staff members, as well as between staff and students, are important in supporting improved learning outcomes, because they facilitate aligning school goals with the capacity to enact whole-school approaches and consistent practice. In order to develop and improve strong internal and external relationships, partners should be consulted and given opportunities to provide input and receive feedback.

Our schools operate within a context of regional and local governance. They are an essential part of the community in which they are located. Because schools provide a crucial service to that community, it is essential for them to build a strong relationship within their community that is capable of responding to local needs and shaping a sense of pride in the school. Community relationships are not limited to parents. Aboriginal and local governments, businesses, libraries, early childhood centres, other educational institutions such as Aurora College, and government and non-government agencies are all important partners for schools.

School Reporting

The annual **School Report** provides the community with information about school performance. It gives parents and other members of the community a clear sense of how students in the school are progressing and what is being done to maximize learning outcomes. It is recognized that the School Report may also be a vehicle for promoting the school. This will influence the design and presentation of the report, but should not subvert the primary purpose of reporting on school programs and outcomes.

The School Report should be succinct and written with a clear sense of communicating with the local community. It must include contextualised information about school priorities and programs, student enrolments, outcomes, trends and progress on identified priorities, the school budget, and highlights of the school year. Data must be presented in a manner that is fair and ensures that individual student and teacher information remains confidential.

The School Report is published and distributed in a form best suited to the parents and the local community. It is also recognized that parents will judge the quality of education through a range of interactions with the school. These include both formal and informal communications, and activities such as parent nights, assemblies, and school involvement in community events and activities.

Of the various interactions between parents and teachers, an important element of accountability is the way that information about the progress of their children is communicated. This includes student reports and the promptness with which poor performance, or poor behaviour, is communicated and addressed.

School Review

Superintendents of Education are responsible for reviewing schools. Superintendents are expected to develop a close professional relationship with their schools through a range of interactions. The most formal of these are principals' performance reviews and the conduct of an annual school review.

Annual Review

The Annual Review is one part of a collaborative suite of activities around quality assurance for schools. The other elements are: the school's self assessment; school planning; the annual School Report; human resource management; and meeting legislative and policy compliance requirements, including audits.

The Annual Review should focus on standards of learning outcomes - academic and non-academic. The Review will require schools to present the analysis and evaluations of learning outcomes to their Superintendent of Education.

As part of the self-assessment process, each school will evaluate whether their current plan and strategies are positively affecting academic and non-academic performance sufficiently, given their particular context. The fundamental question for an Annual Review is, "are the results being achieved by the students in the school acceptable or not?".

There are two possible outcomes of an Annual Review:

- The Principal and the Superintendent of Education are satisfied that the curricular learning outcomes for all students are within, or above, the range of reasonable expectation, given the context of the school and any applicable Departmental direction. In such instances, they will schedule the timing of their next Review.
- The Principal and the Superintendent of Education have concerns about the learning outcomes, given the school context and any applicable Departmental direction. In such instances, the Principal and the Superintendent will undertake further review and analysis to establish whether that concern is justified and what changes to current strategies and/or additional support and intervention are required.

The key accountability questions for the *Annual Review* are:

- Are the learning outcomes communicated to the students, staff, and community?
- Does the school have adequate data on learning outcomes?
- Has the data been analyzed and recorded appropriately?
- Are school evaluations about the learning outcomes reasonable and verifiable?
- Are the NWT approved curricula being used as the standards for student performance and for evaluating learning outcomes?
- Are Department and education authority policies and directives being followed?

The Superintendent of Education will use a range of other professional interactions to work with schools to answer the following accountability questions:

- Are planned strategies appropriate for the identified need?
- Does the School Plan have an evaluation component that will allow the school to evaluate the strategies' effectiveness?
- Does the school have in place reporting processes, including a School Report that effectively communicates school accountability?
- Is the school improvement cycle embedded in school practice?

Acknowledgement:

Some of the material in the policy and accompanying framework has been adapted from other Department publications and the School Improvement and Accountability Framework, Department of Education and Training, Government of Western Australia.