



***Engaging student, teacher, and community voices in dialogue toward change for our high schools***

**Senior Years Review Project Plan Report**

**2007-2008**

**June, 2008**

**Background:**

The need to rethink the education of adolescent learners is becoming widely articulated in education research. The growing expectation of post-secondary pathways for all students, reported high levels of student disengagement, low levels of the sense of belonging in school and the widening gap between how students learn in school and out of school support a call for change.

Current research and literature indicates that there is considerable disparity between what students believe about learning (purposes, processes, and conditions) and their experiences in high school. Research also suggests that similar disparity exists between educators' views on learning and their experiences teaching in high schools. As a result, national and international initiatives have been initiated which are targeted at high school reform and adolescent learning. These initiatives include:

- Canadian Education Association – CEA
  - *An Agenda for Youth - Getting it Right for Adolescent Learners*
- National High School Alliance – NHSA
  - *Transforming High School for All Youth*
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development – ASCD
  - *High School Reform Proposal*

The Evergreen School Division Senior Years Review Project is a tripartite partnership between Evergreen School Division, Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST), and the Manitoba School Improvement Program (MSIP). This project was initiated in the spring of 2006 and was aimed at conducting action research thorough the engagement of students, teachers, and community in reflective dialogue to inform change in Evergreen School Division High Schools.

## Phase 1 Project Plan Summary (2006-2007)

**Phase 1** of this project included the following actions:

- Division-wide Student Learning Forum (May 2006)
- School-based Student Focus Groups (October 2006)
- School-based Staff Focus Groups (November 2006)
- Community-based Focus Groups (January 2007)
- Site-based Student/Staff/Community Sharing (March 2007)
- Report and recommendations of Advisory Committee (May 2007)

### The Educated Person

The following table summarizes the views of students, staff and parents on the characteristics of an educated person.

<b>Students</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Parents</b>
Caring/ Compassionate	Empathetic	Caring / Empathetic / Tolerant / Compassionate
Worldly / Well-rounded	Worldly / Aware / Informed	Wise
Thoughtful / Understanding	Reflective / Contemplative	
Passionate	Committed / Motivated	Committed / Motivated / Passionate / Determined
Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable / Skilled	Knowledgeable Industrious / Perseverance
Industrious / Persistent	Motivated /	Open-minded / Learner /
Open-minded / Learning	Open-minded / Adaptable	Tolerant / Adaptable
Sharing - Advises	Inquisitive	Inquisitive / Curious
	Innovative	Visionary
	Experienced	Confident

### Information Sharing (Phase 1):

- Manitoba Education Research Network Research Forum - Brandon, MB (November, 2006)
- Manitoba Association of School Trustees Conference - Winnipeg, MB (March, 2007)
- Canadian Education Association National symposium - Montreal, QC (May, 2007)

## Successes and Challenges of School identified by Students, Staff, Parents

The following table summarizes the successes and challenges identified by students, staff parents during the consultation process.

<b>Successes</b> (to be celebrated and built upon)	<b>Challenges</b> (we should pursue 'improvement')
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers who build positive relationships and provide extra help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive Relationships               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do teachers model and teach desired values / characteristics (e.g. of 'Educated Person')?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student choice, variety of strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance of Curriculum               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can curricular content and instructional strategies be deliberately connected to our aims, values, mission, and beliefs?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra-curricular opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can students play a role in assessment?</li> <li>○ How do teachers provide criteria in advance and feedback for learning?</li> <li>○ How do schools / staff use assessment to inform instruction and programming?</li> <li>○ How do students use assessment to inform improvement efforts?</li> <li>○ How can assessment practices be deliberately aligned with our aims, mission, values, and beliefs?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller, more comfortable classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety, flexibility, choice               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can different learning styles be taken into consideration?</li> <li>○ How can students have choices in their learning?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe schools, sense of community – acceptance of new students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher knowledge of subject area               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can we ensure that teachers are teaching within a comfort zone re: content?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polite students who are willing to learn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relative importance of curriculum / Extra-curricular               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do we demonstrate the relative value of programs?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities like this forum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratize Decision-Making               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can students, teachers, and community have authentic input into decision-making? (e.g. student input into staffing)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upgrades to facility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources / Facility / Infrastructure               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What values guide the allocation / sharing of resources?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Phase 1 Results

Phase 1 of the project has been designed to engage staff, student, and parent groups in dialogue about their values and beliefs regarding high school learning in Evergreen School Division. Students, staff, and parents then worked together to identify some recommendations that would begin to make those values and beliefs a reality in our High Schools. The recommendations fall under two main themes: *Relationships* and *Relevance*.

## Theme 1 – Relationships

A main recommendation from this process is to focus on **building positive relationships**, particularly between teachers and students, but also between and among all education partners. Groups of students, parents, and staff also recommended that the school division continue to pursue inclusive learning environments.

Another recommendation related to relationships is to **democratize decision-making** – include student, teacher, and community voice in setting the educational direction of the high schools.

*“Teachers need to be ‘real people’ and not act perfect – teachers need to understand and relate to students.”*

## Theme 2 – Relevance

A major challenge and recommendation identified by the students, staff, and parents is the need for **curriculum relevance**. The groups stressed the need to integrate curricular outcomes across subjects, and connect them with educational aims. In pursuing this recommendation, curriculum must not be seen as an end in itself, but as a means to get at the social, individual, and practical attributes that matter most to the citizens in Evergreen.

The groups also recommended that the division continue a focus on **assessment for learning**. It will remain a challenge for the school division to pursue assessment practices characterized by our educational aims. The groups highlighted the importance of Involving students in assessment, and setting grading criteria in advance. Assessment should be used to inform learning and instruction practices.

*“There’s too much ‘rote’ working through the curriculum, not teaching and learning.”*

## Phase 1 Advisory Committee Recommendations:

1. Continue dialogue at the school level – build themes into school improvement plans.
2. Incorporate relationship development and curriculum/assessment relevance into Professional development plans.
3. Seek continued support from MSIP to work with the schools on school improvement.
4. Highlight findings and share with public.
5. Involve students in leadership activities, e.g. decision making, teacher recruitment.

## Phase 2 Project Plan Summary (2007-2008)

**Phase 2** of this project has involved the implementation of the recommendations of the advisory committee based on the data collected in Phase 1. This included the following actions and strategies as articulated in the Evergreen School Division 2007-2008 Strategic Action Plan:

### ■ Relationship Development

- PD day with Dr. Gordon Neufeld (Relationships Matter) in October, 2007
- Parent Session with Dr. Gordon Neufeld (Hold on to Your Kids) in October, 2007
- School-based Student Success Initiatives (division grants)
- School-based Advisory structures

### ■ Democratize Decision Making

- Student Learning Forum - Fall 2007
- Establish a Division Student Leadership Team
  - Involvement in teacher selection
  - Staff self-assessment instrument
- Student involvement in teacher recruitment and selection
- School based planning involving student voice

### ■ Curriculum/Assessment Relevance

- Professional Learning Community grants
- Division PLC day - Relevance
- New Assessment Policy – Assessment *FOR* Learning
- Portfolio Implementation (K-12)

### ■ Monitoring

- Participation in CEA National Research Project on Adolescent Learning - "What Did You Do in School Today?"

## Phase 2 Information Sharing

- Article in Interlake Spectator (September 2007)
- Article in MASS Fall Journal (Fall 2007)
- Evergreen Annual Community Report (October 2007)
- CEA Fall Workshop – Winnipeg, MB (October 2007)
- Report in Evergreen Exchange Newsletter (December 2007)
- MASS Fall Conference – Brandon, MB (November 2007)
- COSL Conference – Winnipeg, MB (February 2008)
- CEA CEO Forum – Niagara on the Lake, ON (May 2008)
- CSBA Congress Presentation – Regina, SK (July 2008)

## Phase 2 Advisory Committee Recommendations:

- **Aims/Division Foundations** - Enhance clarity of purpose with all stakeholders; provide reference point for 'improvement' to guide critical dialogue about practice
- **Student Voice** - Continue the development of the ESD Student Council - examine ways to further develop student voice at the school and classroom level. Supports required at school level to sustain and implement the initiatives of the ESD Student Council
- **Teacher (staff) Voice** - Build mechanisms to provide staff input and engagement in change process
- **Action Research re: Curriculum Relevance** - Provide teachers with the opportunity to engage in action research to develop and promote curriculum relevance, e.g. Professional Learning Community
- **Relationship Development** - Continue focus on positive relationship development with discussion as to specific strategies / practices that can be implemented to foster positive teacher – student relations
- **CEA Research Projects on “What Did You Do in School Today” and “Knowledge Mobilization in Secondary Education”** - Examine and participate in research in two primary areas – Success Factors for Students and Student Pathways/Trajectories
- **Monitoring and Evaluation** - develop strategies for evaluation and monitoring with a view to determining if the strategies implemented have been successful and have resulted in sustainable changes in practice, e.g. *What Did You Do In School Today?*
- **MSIP**: develop strategy to continue partnership with MSIP in this project

## Phase 3 Project Plan (2008-2009)

**Phase 3** of this project will implement the recommendations of the advisory committee based on the data collected in Phase 1 and 2 of the project. This will include the following strategies as articulated in the Evergreen School Division 2008-2009 Strategic Action Plan:

### ■ Foundation Review

- Revisit division foundations, i.e. mission, vision, values, beliefs with stakeholders

### ■ Relationship Development

- Staff Professional Development and Parent Session with Corwin Kronenberg (Teaching Kids to be Responsible) – September, 2008
- School-based Advisory Systems
- Student Success Initiatives – school-based (division grants)

- **Curriculum/Assessment Relevance**

- Student Success Initiatives – school-based (division grants)
- Professional Learning Communities (division grants)
- Division PLC day - Relevance
- Action Research Project - Curriculum Relevance
- Career and Technology Studies Programming in High Schools
- Interventions for less successful learners

- **Democratize Decision Making (Student and Teacher Voice)**

- Division Student Council
  - further develop student voice at the school and classroom level
  - action research
- Teacher Voice

- **Evaluation and Monitoring**

- CEA National Research Projects on Adolescent Learning - “What Did You Do in School Today?” and “Knowledge Mobilization in Secondary Education”

**Benefits to Other School Divisions:**

The Evergreen School Division/MSIP/MAST partnership has the potential to yield important benefits for other schools and school divisions within and beyond Manitoba. The process followed in Evergreen provides an example of how collaborative dialogue, planning, and action that involves students, educators and community members can inform school improvement efforts. In Evergreen, the strategies for engaging these partners aim at being respectful of each individual’s lived experiences and stories rather than focusing exclusively on externally generated targets or measurements. Further, the collaborative process includes a focus on participants’ core beliefs about the purpose(s) of education and schooling – a focus that is rare among current ‘improvement’ and ‘effectiveness’ approaches in Manitoba schools.

The work in Evergreen will also produce a wealth of data concerning prevailing attitudes and beliefs among students, educators and community members about schooling and the actions that these groups recommend for strengthening our schools. Provincial, National, and International research suggests that the data generated in Evergreen has very broad relevance and may help to inform the actions and pursuits of other jurisdictions, particularly other Manitoba Schools / Divisions. Furthermore, as the work in Evergreen continues, the impact of various strategic actions can be described and shared with other educators and school communities in Manitoba.