

Improving Student Outcomes

a guide for
boards of education

September 2023

BCSTA

British Columbia
School Trustees
Association



Calendars & Conversation Starters

The top priority for boards of education is to improve outcomes for students in their district. Understanding and using data through a governance lens can highlight areas of need and inform decisions. This guide is intended to support boards in this important work.

Boards of education and senior staff routinely discuss the many rich and diverse programs and opportunities that school districts provide to support all students. In addition to discussing and celebrating student learning, programs and opportunities, boards should regularly work with staff to review and reflect upon evidence that guides and informs decision making. The intention of these discussions should be to support, enhance and guide board governance.

Most of the evidence discussed by boards is gathered and presented by staff. In addition to the highly relevant local evidence, there are provincial reports that are routinely

created and shared with districts. The intention of this document is to highlight the provincial reports calendar and provide suggested questions that boards may consider as part of their dialogue with staff when examining these reports.

It is important to note a few key points when considering evidence of any kind. When reports are presented, whether local or provincial, it is always critical to consider your district's unique circumstances. British Columbia is a vast province, and each context is unique. Some districts have close to 80,000 students and other districts have fewer than 500. The consideration of evidence and the processes in place to examine, analyze, present and use it will vary across the province. Every district is unique, and all evidence has its own narrative and purpose.



Guiding Principles for Considering Evidence

1. Consider the intentions. Why are you looking at this evidence and for what purpose? Is it for information or to inform decisions?
2. Be cautious of evidence from a small sample of students and watch participation rates (the percent of students included in the assessment). Both the number of students taking an assessment and the participation rates compared to the entire district are important points to discuss and consider when putting evidence into context.
3. Seek both numerical (quantitative) evidence and observation or interpretation (qualitative) evidence. Try to unearth the stories and meaning behind the evidence.
4. Consider other pieces of evidence or other narratives that may inform the dialogue and learning. No one piece of evidence should stand alone and the triangulation of multiple sources of information is important. Ensure that the evidence is valid and that the evidence illuminates or measures what it intends to.
5. Look for patterns and trends over time rather than relying on a single 'snapshot.'
6. Listen to a range of voices when looking at evidence. This will help boards understand how evidence can be viewed and interpreted from a variety of perspectives.
7. Consider the different ways that evidence can be disaggregated and broken down into smaller groups.
 - Disaggregation can help focus conversations on the areas that require careful attention.
 - Typical groups for disaggregation include children in care, children with diverse abilities and disabilities, Indigenous learners, and gender.
 - Disaggregated evidence can also be combined, and an examination can also be done at the program level (e.g. alternate programs).



These broad principles are intended to inform dialogue and discussion. Each provincial report has its own story and timeline. In addition, all reports from the ministry are designed to support the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning (FESL). The framework is a provincially required process for every district to routinely examine evidence of student success and to create a strategic plan. There is also a requirement to annually report to the ministry with an enhancing student learning report, due by the end of September each school year.

The schedule in this document includes major releases from the Ministry of Education and Child Care. In each case, there is a short description of the report and sample questions that may help boards in discussions with their staff and leadership team. In addition, staff may complete preliminary work to present the evidence from these reports in a manner that more directly supports local context and is more aligned with the board's governance work. The data source may be the ministry reports, but the staff reports may be more tailored to suit specific needs or dialogue.

It is also important to note that some local measures may not align perfectly with ministry reports as there may be slight differences in the ways evidence is presented. When there are discrepancies, these are important points of conversation as there may be local contexts which provide additional clarity, or the methods used to gather and present the evidence may be slightly different.

Most of the broad measures used by the ministry are quite complex and there are different methods used for collection and reporting. As always, conversations between trustees and staff are an important part of the examination of evidence and the ministry is also a resource when there are questions about provincial reports and measures.

To support an understanding of these reports, there is a glossary attached with additional descriptions of each report. Please note that the indicated release dates are estimates and there may be annual timing fluctuations.

Graduation Assessments

Fall

Graduation assessment reports for Grade 10 Literacy, Grade 10 Numeracy and Grade 12 Literacy include data from the previous year as this is when the assessments were written. For example, a November release in 2023 is for assessments in the 2022-2023 school year.

Questions

What is done with the information received from the graduation assessments and how does it inform or guide programming?

What does the report say about the percent of students who are proficient or extending on the literacy assessment compared to the numeracy assessment?
What question comes to mind?

When these assessments are cross referenced to the *How Are We Doing Report*, what questions emerge?

How might the disaggregation of this assessment focus supports where they are most needed?

Completion Rates

November

Completion rates measure how many students are completing school within a certain period of time in their secondary years, normally within 6 years. Completion rates can be confused with graduation rates and it is important to note that these are very different measures. Completion rates are based on a cohort of students entering Grade 8 as opposed to graduation rates which are an individual measure. Completion rates are the measure currently used and are a more inclusive guide to how many students successfully finish school.

Questions

What differences does the report show between the five-year and six-year rates?

What do the longer rates (seven or eight year) reveal about students who don't complete school within six years?

What trends have been noticed over the past three years?

What about the different rates between all learners and students with diverse abilities and Indigenous students?

How might this evidence be used to inform goals and direction of the strategic plan?



Class Size & Composition

In the fall, the ministry collects detailed information on class size and composition. The following resources contain valuable information for boards of education.

Class Organization, 1.10 Headcounts of Students by Category (Special Education/Gifted/ELL)

Special Education Services: Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines, Section E.



How Are We Doing Report?

December

The How Are We Doing report includes several measures used to monitor the outcomes of self-identified Indigenous students.

Questions

How do staff use this report with district teams and other staff who work to support Indigenous students?

What does this report say about the numbers and achievement of students who live on-reserve compared to those who live off-reserve?

What does the report state about the percentage of Indigenous learners in alternate programs?

What differences emerge in the participation rates in the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)?

What does the report show about the trends in the numbers of students who are 'emerging' in the FSA?

What do the graduation assessment breakdowns in this report show about the achievement of Indigenous learners?

How and when is this report shared with local First Nations and what actions emerge from those conversations?

What governance decisions in support of Indigenous learners would be helpful for the board to consider?



A background photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, a young girl with dark skin and braided hair is sitting at a wooden desk, looking towards the left. She is wearing a colorful striped shirt. To her left, the side of a boy's face is visible, smiling. In the background, another student is partially visible, looking down. The setting appears to be a typical classroom with wooden desks and a light-colored wall.

Foundation Skills Assessment

January-February

The FSA measures the reading, writing and numeracy skills of students in Grades 4 and Grade 7.

Questions

How is the FSA created, and how is it used as an assessment tool, including the marking processes, as a form of collaboration?

What is the status of the FSA in the district and what are participation rates?

The FSA is just one mechanism to examine student achievement. In what other ways are learners assessed to determine how they are doing in literacy and numeracy as they proceed through school?

How do report cards provide system-wide evidence of how learners are doing in literacy and numeracy?

What evidence of learning in the K-7 years should the board be using to inform decision-making processes and what role might the FSA play in this decision making?

How do literacy results compare to numeracy results?
What actions need to happen based on the results?



Student Characteristics: EDI & MDI

February-March

The Characteristics of Students Entering School (includes the Early Development Instrument - EDI and Middle Years Instrument - MDI) report, which is not provided annually, includes a sampling that lists a range of vulnerability indicators. As students enter school, it is intended to provide a profile of the well-being of learners.

Questions

What is the EDI and how is it, or similar information, used in the district?

What information is collected about students who enter the system and what early interventions are provided?

How are intellectual development and social and emotional learning balanced with a play-based curriculum in the early years?

What information is gathered about learners three and four years after entering kindergarten when considering what is known about who they are when they enter school?

What other district-level information is gathered about students and their learning as they prepare to enter kindergarten and how is this information used?

Are there regional result variations within the district?

What do the MDI results tell the district?



Student Transitions

June

The Student Transitions Project report tracks the pathways that students who enter grade 8 follow through to public post-secondary institutions, including both those who proceed to post-secondary institutions and those who do not.

Questions

What is a public post-secondary institution for the purposes of this report?

How do secondary schools promote the variety of pathways beyond graduation?

What options do students have for employment and their future if they do not proceed to post-secondary?

What dual-credit opportunities are provided and how are pathways to apprenticeships in the trades supported?

Student Learning Surveys

August

The Student Learning Survey targets students in grades 4, 7, 10 and 12, their parents and all staff. It is a general satisfaction survey about the education experience and is available in a wide range of languages.

Questions

What do these surveys state about students' sense of well-being and belonging?

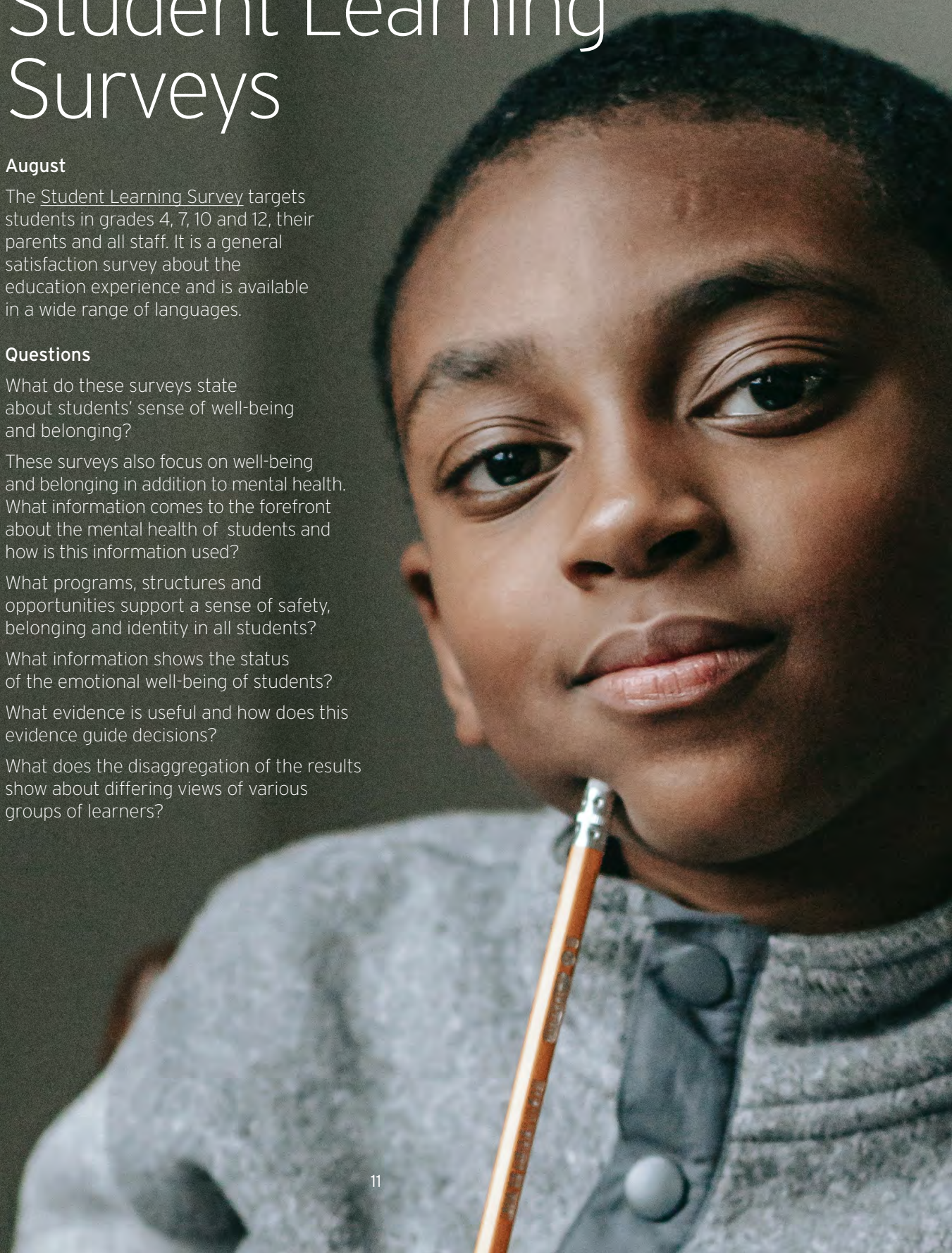
These surveys also focus on well-being and belonging in addition to mental health. What information comes to the forefront about the mental health of students and how is this information used?

What programs, structures and opportunities support a sense of safety, belonging and identity in all students?

What information shows the status of the emotional well-being of students?

What evidence is useful and how does this evidence guide decisions?

What does the disaggregation of the results show about differing views of various groups of learners?



More

Most reports from the Ministry of Education and Child Care can be retrieved from the [Student Success](#) website. This site allows the retrieval of numerous reports in addition to allowing the comparison across districts.

BCSTA Indigenous Education Learning Guide

On pages 10 and 11 of the [Indigenous Learning Guide](#) there is information on data specific to Indigenous students.

Glossary

Aboriginal Students: How are We Doing?

Throughout each school year, the ministry collects student data, some of which is used to monitor outcomes for self-identified Indigenous students in the B.C. public school system. The data are published in the form of the annual *How Are We Doing?* (HAWD) Report.

The report has been published since 1999 and is used by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), First Nations, and boards of education. It includes a provincial summary report, as well as 60 school district reports.

Data elements include the count of students, Foundation Skills Assessment results, graduation assessments and course marks, completion rate, post-secondary transitions and student learning survey results.

As noted in 2021/22 report, "The Tripartite partners have collectively agreed to retain 'Aboriginal' wording for the purposes of this year's 'How Are We Doing?' report. Updating terminology from Aboriginal to Indigenous requires changes to ministry data collection processes that will ensure standardized wording from collection onwards. This work is underway."

Characteristics of Students Entering School

This report lists a number of "vulnerability indicators" including physical, social and emotional as well as language characteristics. The information is based upon the Early Development Instrument which is a questionnaire completed by kindergarten teachers from across B.C. The questionnaire measures five core areas of early child development. These areas are good predictions of adult health, education and social outcomes.

Middle Years Development Instrument

This tool is used to gather data, from the student perspective, on the same themes as the EDI.



Class Size & Composition

In the fall of each year the ministry collects detailed information on class size (how many students in each class and each grade), and class composition (how many children with diverse abilities or exceptional needs) in each class.

Completion Rate

The proportion of students who graduate (with either the B.C. Certificate of Graduation ("Dogwood") or the B.C. Adult Graduation Diploma ("Adult Dogwood")) within a given number of years from the first time they enrol in Grade 8, adjusted for outmigration (the number of students who may leave the district based on previous modelling). There are four completion rate models: the five, six, seven, and eight-year models. Each model represents the potential number of years it may take a student to graduate. The most commonly used is the 6-year model and the reported measure is the six-year completion rate.

Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)

The Foundation Skills Assessment is an annual province-wide assessment of all B.C. students' academic skills in grades 4 and 7, and provides parents, teachers, schools, school districts and the Ministry of Education and Child Care with important information on how well students are progressing in the foundation skills of reading, writing, and numeracy.

Graduation Assessments

Students in the B.C. Graduation Program complete three provincial assessments, Grade 10 Literacy, Grade 10 Numeracy and Grade 12 Literacy. The graduation assessments are an indicator of where individual students might have challenges in literacy and numeracy. They also provide a snapshot of how our education system is meeting the needs of students in these key areas.

Student Learning Survey, Post-Secondary and Career Preparation

Students in grades 4, 7, 10 and 12, their parents and all staff in B.C. public schools are invited to participate in an annual online satisfaction survey about their school experience. School districts may add their own questions. The Student Learning Survey also includes questions on how they are prepared for post-secondary education and jobs of the future. The Post-Secondary and Career Preparation is a separate report provided to school districts. Student and staff surveys are available in English and French. Parent surveys are available in 18 additional languages.

Transition to B.C. Post-Secondary

The Student Transitions Project looks at the pathways for students beyond grade 12. Beginning in Grade 8, it follows the cohort of Grade 8 learners and how they proceed to further education in post-secondary. The report follows both graduates and non-graduates. The information comes from the Student Transitions Project (STP) which is governed by an agreement between government and the four Research Universities (Simon Fraser University, the University of British Columbia, the University of Northern British Columbia and the University of Victoria).



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