

Value Added School Review Field Guide

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Value Added School Review Field Guide

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This document is intended primarily for:
System and School Administrators
Education Stakeholders
Alberta Education Executive Team and Managers
Teachers
Parents
Community Members

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Introduction

The **Value-Added School Review (VSR)** is an analytical model designed to assist schools in identifying and addressing opportunities for school improvement. The model works best when it is focused purposefully on students and the student learning outcomes as defined in the *Guide to Education*¹. It complements the processes described in Alberta Education's *Toolkit for Supporting Continuous Improvement in Schools* developed by Zone 1 Field Services, notably the Collaborative School Improvement Review (CSIR) process. While the CSIR process is most appropriately engaged to assist schools and school authorities in addressing performance challenges, the VSR process is designed to be used in any circumstances and shows promise as a tool to assist high-performing schools determine the sources of their success.

The key distinguishing characteristic of the VSR model is the use of external reviewers to examine a school's performance data as captured primarily in Accountability Pillar results reports.

The purpose of this Field Guide is to provide school and authority² administrators with a description of the model and an introduction to implementing it. In considering which approach to use in carrying out a school review, school and authority leaders may choose to incorporate elements of both models to shape an effective review process, since the Field Services' Toolkit offers a range of tools to assist with organizing and presenting school performance data.

Model Overview³

The **Value-Added School Review (VSR) model** consists of a set of investigative processes and analytical tools that are used by informed observers to enhance a school's self-assessment and continuous improvement capacity. The model includes both an internal and an external review team to allow internal perspectives and expertise to be supplemented with observations and feedback from external sources. The aim is to identify or enhance both Accountability Pillar and school-specific measures related to student outcomes. Its success depends on the collaboration of school and authority administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and parents with a review team led by one or more knowledgeable individuals who are not actively involved in the day-to-day operation of the school.

While school authority improvement is addressed in three-year education plans, which play a significant role in supporting improved school quality and ensuring alignment with Alberta Education goals, the VSR model allows for continuous improvement efforts to be targeted directly at individual schools. The model is based on three underlying principles: (1) that all

¹ Defined under Ministerial Order 004/98 and published in the *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12*, page 2.

² In this context the word "authority" is used inclusively throughout this document to refer to all public and separate school districts and divisions, charter schools and private schools accredited under Section 28 of the School Act.

³ The authors of this Field Guide note some similarities between the VSR model and the approach to school review developed by University of Lethbridge researchers and a school district in southern Alberta, as reported in Adams, P. and Townsend, D. (2006) "School System Evaluation: A Generative Approach", *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, Vol. 10, No. 6. 8 pages [<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~iejll>] The major difference between the two approaches lies in the VSR's primary focus on the school rather than the jurisdiction. It should also be noted that the development of the VSR model began in 2001, predating the publication of the Adams and Townsend paper by five years.

improvement in student outcomes occurs at the school level, (2) that schools are best placed to determine the needs of their own students and to identify appropriate programs and strategies to address these needs, and (3) that external review⁴ can provide the stimulus for tackling improvements that might not otherwise be addressed. The validity of these principles is clearly supported in the results of testing the model in the five CBE pilot schools.

The VSR model is intended to assist school administrators and staff to understand key aspects of their school that will impact both planning processes and the day-to-day operation of the school. It is designed to be as flexible as possible so that administrators may shape the review process in a way that targets the needs of the school. As a result, school principals and other key staff play a vital role in determining how the model is used in their school and what specific direction is given to the members of the study team throughout the review process.

Expected Outcomes and Benefits of VSR

The primary outcome of using the VSR process is the development of evidence-based findings and recommendations for change to school policies, procedures and programs that support student learning outcomes. The key difference between the VSR process and other analytical methods designed to inform school improvement is the VSR's purposeful focus on student outcomes. Another defining characteristic of the VSR model is the emphasis on examining a comprehensive array of data obtained, if possible, from multiple time periods.

The particular power of the model, as it has been developed so far, is the role played by external observers. The relative objectivity of people bringing an outside perspective to the review enables them to make observations that may not be visible to those within the school. It can also provide a more robust basis for implementing change than may be possible using an internal review alone. Recommendations made by a thoughtfully chosen group of external reviewers may be seen by school staff, students and parents to be more objective than those developed internally.

Schools and authorities using the VSR process can expect to confirm and/or enhance their processes for understanding the factors that contribute to improved student learning and growth. Over time, the most significant benefit of the VSR may be its ability to inform and support the development of more comprehensive and clearly focused school plans. These can be used actively by school administrators and staff to reflect on and shape school-level outcomes, not simply to meet the formal requirements of central office planning and reporting.

An additional and previously unforeseen benefit to this model is the information that it presents for a new and incoming principal who is entering a school that has completed such a study. The study document and the process undertaken to develop it, assists to focus a school staff upon relevant issues and strategic exercises for planning. An incoming principal, who is presented with this school study document, now has a wealth of information available to them on their new placement and on the school-community that they may not otherwise have access to.

⁴ See Michael Fullan's book *The Moral Imperative of School*, pages 72 and 73 for a discussion of the value of constructive disagreement and external perspective for school improvement.

This scenario was presented to the writers of this *Field Guide* by a new principal, who greatly appreciated the information and overall findings, better positioning them to transition to a new school and the challenges that come from staff movement.

How VSR Works

The VSR model consists of several key components:

- Internal review team
- External review team
- School profile
- Central research question
- Focus group discussions/interviews and/or surveys
- Report
- Action plan and follow-up

A VSR can be initiated either by a school or by its governing authority. Once a decision has been reached to undertake a VSR process (typically a result of a decision made in consultation with or under the direction of the authority central office), the **internal and external review teams** are put together under the general direction of a **project leader**. This person is someone from outside the school who is responsible for managing the overall VSR process. He or she must have previous experience with the model and should have sufficient knowledge of the Alberta education system to gain the ready confidence of teachers, students and parents during the review process.

Depending on the wishes of the school or authority, more than one person may be designated as project leader. The co-leaders are then jointly responsible for ensuring that the VSR process is completed effectively. For practical reasons, one of these individuals will likely take a primary role in managing the process details, including drafting the key analytical and reporting documents.

The project leader initiates discussion with the school leadership team (the principal and other key staff) about potential members for both review teams. The size of these teams can vary according to the wishes of the school and the overall focus of the review. The only constraint is the need to ensure that they can operate effectively. Membership should consist of individuals who can bring to the review process a range of expertise and understanding of matters significantly related to the central research question the school seeks to answer. Team members should also be able to provide guidance and perspective to the VSR process in the context of the vision, mission, values and goals of both the school and the authority. Most of the external team members should be drawn, where possible, from within the wider community served by the school. Final membership in the team is determined collaboratively by the school leadership team and the project leader.

The project leader is also responsible for ensuring that initial analysis of school-level data is carried out and summarized in a **school profile**. In preparing this profile, the project leader gathers relevant information about the school from a variety of sources. He or she may be assisted in this task by school and/or authority staff. First, all documents and data sets that are core to the school are collected. These should include the school's vision, mission, and values

statements; three-year education plan/annual development plan; multi-year Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) or diploma examination results; Accountability Pillar results (for the school, the authority and the province), classroom-level assessments, including grade level of achievement reports. In addition to school data, community demographic data is also important and should be considered an integral part of the school profile. For example, population changes, household income and parents' highest level of education are all external factors that can have a significant effect on school performance and student outcomes.

As much multi-year data as possible should be used in developing the profile so that trends over time can be seen clearly and provide a more complete understanding of the context within which the review is taking place. School-level planning and reporting documents should be reviewed in the context of the authority's most recent Three-Year Education Plan and Annual Education Results Report (AERR), since it is important to ensure alignment between a school's plans and results and those of the authority.

Using data from these sources, the school profile is written by the project leader, with appropriate input from school staff. It can usefully be augmented with data about the surrounding community/communities using Statistics Canada census data and any other available demographic or economic information about the city or municipality in which the school is located. Depending upon the context of the school, additional information related to attendance, discipline and other relevant factors could also be used. The overall data analysis provides an opportunity for an in-depth examination of factors within and outside the school that may affect student outcomes. Selected examples of data relevant for the development of a school profile are provided in *Appendix 2*.

The school profile is **reviewed by** members of both the **internal and external review teams** and the observations and reflections from both are captured in a written summary that captures both similarities and differences in perspective and insight. This summary can be used in at least two important ways: (1) to refine the questions to be asked in focus groups or interviews and (2) to generate recommendations for inclusion in the final report.

In consultation with teachers and perhaps other members of the school community, the school leadership team develops a **central research question** related to the school. This question should have strategic significance for the school, providing the possibility of gaining significant insight into improving school planning and programs through the VSR process. This ensures that the process and tools used during the review result in the generation of relevant information that the school may not have been able to collect without the VSR. This "customization" feature enables the VSR model to be adapted to any school configuration or circumstance.

Once the school profile has been developed, the VSR process moves into the collection of information from **focus group discussions** that are conducted at each school with students, teachers, support staff and parents, which then assists in providing additional insight into the school and community as witnessed by those who experience it on a daily basis from a variety of contexts. Focus group questions are prepared with the help of each school principal so that the discussions can address matters that are of particular significance to the school. The development of the questions is assisted through the analysis provided in the school profile.

A sample set of focus group questions is provided in *Appendix 3* of this Guide to illustrate one approach to prompting discussion. In practice, the conversations that arise from the initial prompt questions may lead to spontaneous evolution of the discussion and take it into topic areas that were not anticipated. This evolution should be allowed to occur, as it may provide deeper insight into issues and solutions than might have been obtained if the facilitator had forced participants to adhere to a “script”. Each focus group may provide insight that is different from other focus groups, allowing a better understanding of the school environment.

A summary of the conversations is prepared by the external team and provided back to the school. This is a critical part of the process, as it demonstrates respect for the time and energy that participants gave to the discussions, and it offers valuable insight that can be used by participants (particularly school staff) to inform school improvement. The pilot project provided clear evidence that the **process** of engaging members of a school community in effective conversation about their school can have significant value without regard to any potential improvements that might be identified as a result of the discussions. This value may appear immediately in greater collegiality within the staff and a heightened sense of *esprit de corps* among both staff and students. Logically, with improvements in the performance of individual schools there also will be improvement for the authority as a whole. It is expected that the model will also prove to be valid for single-school authorities⁵ such as charter and private schools.

In addition to focus group discussions, at least two additional techniques may be used as part of the VSR process. The first is individual interviews. In some instances, a single person with a particularly unusual or unique perspective may be interviewed. This person will typically view the school from a point of view that is not shared in any significant way with other members of the school community, making it ineffective to include him or her in a focus group. One example might be the school resource officer in a junior or senior high school. Other examples include social workers, community health personnel and other non-teaching professionals working with students.

The second technique is data collection through surveys. This could take the form of mining existing survey data or the creation of ad hoc surveys, developed from the findings of the analysis contained in the school profile. Examples of surveys that might be considered include high school exit surveys and student engagement surveys. The decision to use an ad hoc survey rests entirely with the school and authority.

At the end of the review process, a **final report** is prepared, using the school profile as its foundation. This contains a summary of key findings from the data analysis, key messages heard from the focus groups and recommendations arising from a consideration of the findings and key messages. It is then the responsibility of the school to develop an **action plan** to implement changes aimed at improving student outcomes as a result of the review.

⁵ Throughout this Guide, the term “authority” is used to refer to any school authority as defined by Alberta Education. While the word “jurisdiction” is more widely recognized, the term “authority” is more inclusive as it includes all public, separate, francophone, charter, private and federal (band) schools.

Time Considerations

From project initiation to the completion of the final report, the VSR process can be expected to take between two and four months. This assumes that the work is carried out entirely by individuals who are committed to full-time employment in other capacities. Within this time-frame there may be periods when there is no activity, since the on-site work related particularly to focus groups and interviews needs to be scheduled at a time that is convenient for the school.

Part of the initial planning for the VSR should include the development of a timeline that identifies target dates for the completion of key steps in the process. The project leader should play a key role in negotiating these dates with the school leadership team and should also be given support to maintain process discipline throughout the review.

Several factors may be considered in developing a timeline. These include obvious examples such as holidays, exam schedules and semester changes. Others include coordinating the initial communication with or final reporting to staff around planned professional development events.

Experience from previous school reviews suggests that a review will take a minimum of three months from the point where the team leader is identified. This consists of 6 weeks for pulling together data for the school profile, communicating with teachers, establishing the internal and external review teams, reviewing the school profile with each team and conducting focus groups or interviews in the school. An additional 6 weeks is needed to prepare the final report, incorporating all the information generated by the school profile review and the focus groups and interviews. This does depend upon the timeline developed by the school and school authority, coupled with the level of priority assigned to it.

Alternative Approach

As an alternative to using the complete process as outlined above, a school or authority may choose to focus only on the development of the **school profile** portion of the model as a way to save time. While this option does not generate the benefits of obtaining insight from talking to a comprehensive sample of school staff, students and parents, it can provide significant intelligence about the successes and challenges in a school through a structured examination of a wide range of data.

In this scenario, the **internal and external review teams** are still formed, a **central research question** is developed and the **final report** remains the end product of the work. The primary time saving is in the commitment required to develop, deliver and analyze the results of the focus group component of the full model.

Implementing VSR

As noted above, the VSR model has the potential to address several key questions that a school or authority considers important. These questions are asked by the school leadership team, which is the primary “client” for the answers. The following set of questions provides the basis for beginning the review conversations related to a school.

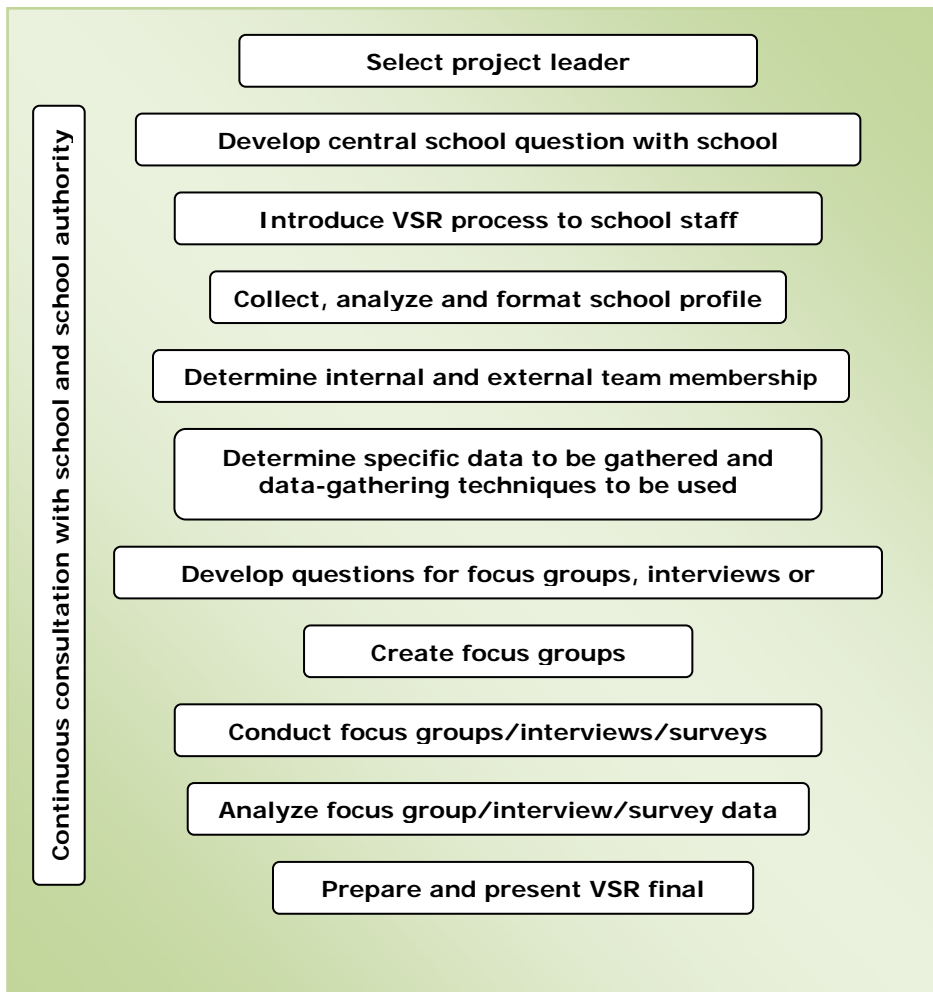
1. What are the school’s greatest strengths related to student outcomes?
2. What are the school’s greatest challenges related to student outcomes?

3. Do school plans and policies adequately support the strengths and include strategies to address the challenges?
4. Are the data driven approaches to decision-making used by the school valid and reliable, and does the information/data point to any unidentified challenges?
5. How do school-level performance measures align with authority performance measures, as defined in plans and reports mandated by the board of trustees?

Three additional questions may be asked of itself by the school authority leadership team to determine the value of using this improvement model at other schools in the authority:

1. How can the Value-Added School Review model be used for school improvement within the policies and philosophy of the school authority?
2. What are the key benefits of the review model?
3. Are there any disadvantages to participating in a school review process?

Once a decision is made to conduct a VSR process within a school, the following specific steps are followed. Each step is described more fully in the following pages. As well, additional details about the key elements of the model are provided in Appendix 1.



Some of the early steps may be carried out in a different sequence, but the complete process will include all of them. It is possible that one or more of these steps may be carried out more than once, depending on factors that appear uniquely in the course of the review. For example, the central research question may be changed or a new one developed as a result of data analysis carried out during the preparation of the school profile or feedback obtained from initial focus group discussions.

1. Selecting the project leader

The first step in the VSR process is the selection of a person from outside the school to work with school and authority administrators to define the scope and timing of the review. A key prerequisite for selection of this individual is previous experience with the VSR model. The project leader should be an experienced facilitator with a strong research background, sound knowledge of the education context in Alberta and superior communication skills (both written and oral).

The project leader provides overall direction to the VSR process and is responsible for ensuring that all key processes are managed effectively. These include (1) meeting with the school principal and other members of the school leadership team at the start of the review, (2) assisting in the development of the central research question, (3) gathering key data and

preparing the school profile, (4) leading the internal and external review teams through a structured consideration of the profile, (5) setting up focus groups and interviews, (6) preparing the final report and (7) presenting the findings to the school.

2. Developing the central research question

At the outset of the VSR process, the central school question is probably the one that most immediately springs to the minds of the school principal and other key staff (such as assistant principals, curriculum leaders, department heads or counselors). It may turn out later in the review not to be the most important question the school needs to answer, but its purpose is to provide initial direction to the VSR and to support both data analysis and the development of focus group or survey questions. The central question should be determined through collaboration by the project team leader and school administrators. It should be broad enough in scope that it avoids creating “tunnel vision” that may adversely affect the analysis of the wide range of information that will be gathered in the preparation of the school profile and during the focus group, interview or survey phases of the review. Those managing the VSR process should be willing to modify or replace this question in the face of evidence gathered during the review.

3. Introducing VSR process to school staff

School staff needs to be clear about the intent of the review process, what it will look like at the school, who will be involved in it and what the possible outcomes will be for the students and the school itself. Staff also need to be clear that review team members want to know what staff have experienced, what their perceptions are, what they feel works well, what the challenges are and where the opportunities for improvement are as they see them.

It is recommended that the school principal invite the project leader to talk to staff early in the process to explain the VSR model and to give them an opportunity to ask questions. Throughout the process, it is important for staff to feel as comfortable as possible that the VSR is a formative process, intended to support them as they work with students, rather than evaluate their performance in the classroom.

4. Collecting, analyzing and formatting school profile information

The creation of the school profile can result in the development of a significant planning tool that will help to confirm or dispel perceptions related to the school. Using time-series data where possible, the profile should provide a comprehensive description of the school’s Accountability Pillar results, looking at more than just student achievement, as well as demographic trends visible within the school and in the wider community in which its students live. At its centre, the profile contains information related to student academic, behavioural and affective outcomes, as well as standard performance measures that schools and authorities are required to report to parents and the public under provincial regulations and policies. The profile is used initially to allow internal and external review team members to undertake analysis and discussion of the data. It is also used to shape focus group, interview or survey questions for use in the second phase of the VSR process.

It should be noted that the school profile may identify important data that should be included, but is found to not be currently available. This is a significant element of the review process and gaps in the data provide valuable direction for future data collection and analysis. The

presence of gaps in useful data should be highlighted so that a plan for filling them can be included in the school's regular planning and reporting documents.

5. Determining internal and external review team membership

The school leadership team, the project leader and authority administrators collaborate in assembling two review teams. The internal review team may consist of school staff members, administrators from other schools in the jurisdiction, and central office administrators. The external team may consist of business and professional people, elected officials from the local municipality, community leaders, members from the local police service, educators from other schools or school authorities, staff from social or health agencies working with young people, clergy, aboriginal elders, or academic researchers. Specific individuals are selected on the basis of their understanding of the school and community as well as their perceived ability to interpret the school profile data and provide informed comment.

Each team will be asked to commit a block of time to meet as a group to review the school profile. While the specific amount of time may vary according to the needs of the process being used in a particular school, it is expected that one half day or evening meeting together should provide sufficient time for reviewing the profile. For each team, the project leader will provide an orientation to the school profile, with an emphasis on helping review team members to understand the various data sets presented in it. This orientation may be done at the same time for both teams in the interests of process efficiency. However, each group's discussion of the data must be carried out separately so that the internal and external perspectives are not compromised. The team leader is a key participant during the deliberations of the review teams and needs to be available to answer questions, particularly those related to data interpretation.

A small number of members from both teams (at least one member from each team) should be available to participate in all aspects of the review process, particularly the focus group/interview process. This may require them to commit up to three days for in-school components of the review. They may also be asked to assist the project leader in preparing the school profile and reviewing drafts of the final report before it is completed. It is recognized that team members may not be able to commit to all days and attendance at select focus groups may also provide the context that they require to add value to the overall process.

6. Determining data to be gathered and data-gathering techniques to be used

The decision about what specific information to collect and analyze will depend on a number of factors:

- 1) The school's central question(s)
- 2) The initial findings arising from the development of the school profile
- 3) The degree of robustness of quantitative data
- 4) The time available to conduct the review

The use of focus groups and interviews requires the development of effective and appropriate questions and the participation of an effective facilitator; however they permit meaningful face-to-face discussions to take place. Surveys require the development of effective

questions, determination of delivery methods and the analysis of data either through internal district personnel and methods, or an outside contractor (including commercial online services).

7. Developing questions for focus groups, interviews or surveys

Developed in consultation with the school principal and with the central school question as the driving force, focus group or interview questions are used as a template only and may vary from focus group to focus group, by age of the participants and their area of professional and personal involvement in the school-community.

If surveys are to be used, the survey questions need to be developed taking into account the time and cost of administration (phone vs. online vs. mail-out) and analysis. Factors to consider include the availability of good quality data from existing surveys, advantages and disadvantages of including open-ended questions, and alignment with the central research question.

8. Creating focus groups and obtaining permission for student participants

The project leader and the school leadership team collaboratively determine the number, composition, time and duration of focus group sessions. Invitations need to be issued and confirmations returned. Student participants require written parental permission if any of the people running the focus groups come from outside the school authority. Even if all team members are drawn from within the authority, the involvement of students in focus groups or surveys should be communicated to their parents.

9. Conducting focus groups/interviews

Focus groups should be organized to include only members of the same peer or interest group. This will require support staff to participate in different groups than teachers. It also strongly suggests that students in different grades be kept with their grade-level peers. The presence of school administrators as participants or observers in the focus groups may impact the degree of comfort that other participants experience and this needs to be taken into consideration.

Focus groups should be constituted ideally with between 8 and 12 participants. In order to obtain a group of this size, it is typically necessary to issue invitations to double that number. In the case of both student and parent groups, it may be necessary to issue three to five times the number of invitations to obtain the desired number of actual participants. Even when confirmed invitations have been received, it is quite likely that some confirmed participants who are not regularly engaged in the school community will not attend.

The discussions should take place in a quiet and comfortable location within the school. Participants should be arranged in a circle, preferably without tables, to maximize the possibility of open and collegial conversation. Sessions should last no longer than two hours, although it is recommended that one-hour discussions may be more productive. It is possible to obtain valuable results from sessions that fit within lunch breaks of less than 60 minutes.

For the purposes of capturing the conversation, a member of the review team may be delegated to take notes or the services of a dedicated note-taker may be used. It is suggested

that a member of the school's administrative support staff be considered for this task. If audio recording is desired, this must be specified in permission letters for students as well as in the invitations to staff and parent participants.

Where interviews are being conducted, these may be done at any time convenient for the review team as well as the subjects to be interviewed. For practical reasons, it is likely that these will be scheduled during the onsite visit to take advantage of team members' availability.

10. Analyzing focus group or survey data

A decision about the analytical process for focus group, interview and survey data needs to be made early in the process. As this will be one of the most time-consuming parts of the VSR, the people who will carry out this analysis will need to be given adequate time to summarize and present their findings. Analysts used for this part of the process should have previous experience in working with qualitative data. Review team members need to be prepared to read the analysis carefully, so they gain a comprehensive understanding of the findings and can highlight the most significant of them for inclusion in the final report.

11. Preparing and presenting VSR final report

A final report is prepared by the project leader, using all of the information collected during the VSR. This report is intended primarily for the use of the school itself. All participants in the VSR process – staff, students and parents – should be given an opportunity to see the report or attend a presentation of the results. It is expected that a copy will also be provided to key central office staff and an executive summary may be presented to trustees at the superintendent's discretion.

The report will contain any elements of the school profile that address the answers to the central school question(s) in a clear and cohesive manner. Where findings from the qualitative components of the review confirm or validate findings from earlier data analysis, these linkages should be highlighted to present the most robust and comprehensive set of answers possible to the questions posed during the review.

A series of recommendations for school improvement, focusing on student outcomes, is an integral part of this report. These recommendations can be expected to emerge from several sources: (1) analysis of school profile data, (2) focus group conversations and interviews, and (3) reflections by review team members and the school leadership team on the combined findings from all sources (school data analysis, focus groups, interviews, or surveys).

Additional Considerations

Throughout the VSR process, **continuous consultation with key participants in the school and the authority central office is important.** The school principal, other school and authority administrators and school staff need to remain engaged in ongoing, open communication while the review model is under way. The VSR model depends for its success on high levels of trust between the participants and members of the review teams, and effective collaboration between the team members and all stakeholders, with school and authority personnel playing a critical

role. These are the people who will be responsible for acting on most of the recommendations that are generated by the review.

This continued consultation with key personnel will also allow for the development of an appropriate exit strategy for the review team and the completion of the process. The questions that need to be addressed by the project leader in consultation with the school leadership team are:

- How will the completed report be presented to school staff, students and parents?
- What is the timeframe for this?
- Who will present it?
- How will the information be used to improve student outcomes?

Conclusion

One of the main strengths of this model is its flexibility. It allows a school to explore in-depth answers to a school-specific question using extensive data, conversations within the school and connections with the wider community. The ability to tailor the model to each school is critical in providing a tool that allows information to be collected in a manner that may not otherwise be available.

The VSR model can assist in the development of shared expertise within a school authority by identifying and promoting effective practices within its own schools and by articulating a more comprehensive understanding of challenges as well as strategies to address them. This process has the potential to generate significant improvements in the short and long-term planning that is an integral component of education, both for a school and for an authority.

The reflective and formative value of this model depends on several factors that influence the level of success of the VSR process:

- Willingness of school leaders to take risks and allow others to offer insight in the analysis of a comprehensive collection of information related to programming, policies, procedures, personnel, communication and student outcomes
- High levels of trust between all participants and their willingness to be open
 - Willingness of school staff to ‘buy-in’ and see the value in the process and outcome
- Team leader’s expertise
- Level of expertise in the internal and external review teams
- Relevance of the central research question that shapes the review at the school
- Quality of relationships between the school, authority and community
- Support for innovation and improvement in the school and its governing authority

School staff are strongly encouraged to engage in their own review of the data, regardless of their formal involvement on the internal review team. This will increase the probability that the review will result in action and that students will benefit from the process.

As the study process develops at a school, it may become evident that the **process** itself (examining the school data, conducting individual discussions and the focus groups or surveys), is an important outcome of the VSR. The opportunity to communicate and discuss specific school-related questions with stakeholder groups, generated through data analysis, is a powerful opportunity that is not routinely available and the shared learning and understanding of all participants can be a positive and powerful catalyst for continuous improvement.

Appendix 1 - Additional Process Considerations

A. School Profile Data

All data about a school or the community it serves is potentially relevant and should be considered for inclusion in the school profile. However, certain information should be regarded as core data. These will appear in every school profile and are marked as “core” in the list below.

As data is collected for the profile, additional data sources may come to light that could also be relevant. Some data may only be gathered or augmented through discussions with school administrators. This is valuable information that assists in providing context related to aspects of the school that are not amenable to quantitative analysis. For example, it may be insight into the culture of the school that is not measured through assessments or surveys.

All of the data listed below is information that is currently available to the schools and authority in different formats. However, having all of the relevant data provided in one document is useful for school and authority staff as they reflect on school programming, student opportunities and outcomes, and the overall school planning process. The school profile assists in confirming or dispelling perceptions related to the school and provides additional background information about the strengths, challenges and opportunities facing each school.

The information collected for the School Profile created in this Value-Added School Review model is all deemed to be valuable. The value of each data set will vary according to the school and to the question or issue being examined, since a multitude of factors interact dynamically and in complex ways in each school.

The data collected for the school profile includes the following:

Core data:

1. The school’s vision, mission and values statements
2. Current school three-year education/development/improvement plan
3. Authority three-year education plan
4. Authority annual education results report
5. School-specific goals, indicators, measures, targets and results from its three-year plan
6. Number of staff by type (e.g. certificated, teacher assistants, administrative, custodial)
7. Multi-year student registration/enrolment history
8. Number of coded students by type
9. Student achievement on standardized provincial assessments (PAT or diploma exams) charted over a five-year period (with PAT results based on cohort numbers), compared with authority and provincial averages
10. Other Accountability Pillar results for the school, compared with authority and provincial averages
11. Community Profile (local neighborhoods or municipality)

Optional data:

12. Classroom student assessment data and student grade level of achievement

13. Student attendance/absence data
14. Student discipline statistics (e.g. suspensions/expulsions, administrative interventions)
15. School handbooks and newsletters
16. Administrative communication handbooks
17. Community Crime Statistics
18. Any other information the school leadership team feels relevant or other information that is available to the school and authority

Examples and explanations of many of these data sources are presented in *Appendix 2*.

B. External Review Team

A central component of this model is the use of a review team consisting of members drawn from outside both the school and the authority. The external team members for the school may include, but are not restricted to:

- School or central office administrators from another Alberta school authority
- Alberta Education Field Services liaison managers
- Alberta Education curriculum and/or assessment specialists
- University or College professors/instructors
- Community/Business leaders
- Members of service organizations such as the Lions Club or Rotary International.
- Town/municipality officials
- Members of local police forces or RCMP detachments, particularly those working as school resource officers
- Members of self-regulating professions such as doctors, dentists, lawyers or accountants
- Members of the clergy from local churches
- Aboriginal elders
- Community health professionals working with at-risk children or young adults

Specific individuals are selected on the basis of their understanding of the school and community and/or their perceived ability to interpret the school profile data. Potential team members are identified collaboratively by the project leader, the school leadership team and school authority central office staff, with final selection ideally resulting in a team that contains a mix of both expertise and perspective.

The main task required of external team members is to participate in a focused consideration of the school profile. One or two substantial blocks of time are identified for the team to meet. It is recommended that an evening session followed by a full day for discussion is considered as a standard approach. The evening session involves a presentation by the project leader and school leadership team to assist both internal and external reviewers in understanding the data presented in the profile. Once that orientation to the profile is completed, the reviewers then meet the following day to discuss what they have observed in the profile, bringing to the discussion their different experiences, perceptions, assumptions and values. If the internal and external review teams are able to meet at the same time (in separate break-out rooms), they can be brought together at the end of the day to present key findings to each other and engage in conversation about their points of similarity and difference. These conversations are captured by a recorder and summarized in writing by the project leader for use in preparing the final report.

To the extent that they are willing and available, a small number of external team members may also participate in the focus group/interview component of the VSR. In this capacity, they are asked to follow process directions provided by the project leader to ensure that appropriate focus group methodology is used for the gathering of qualitative information.

The number of participants can vary according to the context of the school. The size of the review teams might usefully range from seven to fourteen individuals, although there is no reason to establish a clearly defined upper limit. Numbers can be expected to limit themselves because of the practical challenges of finding suitable candidates for membership, taking into account both availability and capacity to contribute effectively.

Note that a principal or other administrator from a school within the authority may be included so that he or she can learn about the VSR process in order to use it in his or her own school. This individual could be placed on either the internal or external review team depending on the wishes of the school leadership team.

It may be possible to engage specific external team members in different phases of the process. This could reduce the amount of time required for different phases of the VSR, which may better allow for external members to participate. However, regardless of their involvement earlier in the process, all external team members should have the opportunity to provide input into the overall observations contained in the final report.

C. Internal Review Team

Another central component of this model is the use of an internal review team consisting of members drawn from the school and authority. This could include the following:

- School administrators
- Department heads/curriculum leaders
- Guidance counselors
- Authority central office staff
- Parent representatives – perhaps the chair or other officer from the school council
- Classroom teachers from other schools in the same authority
- Retired principals or teachers who have professional experience within the authority

The role of this team is the same as the role played by the external review team. After an orientation to the school profile, the members of this team also review the data and make observations and recommendations based on their perceptions.

The results of their discussions are captured in the same way as those from the external review team. The project leader then summarizes the feedback from both teams, highlighting points of similarity and difference between the two teams.

D. On-Site Visits

Where the full VSR model is being used, the on-site visits are a critical part of the process. However, this part of the process needs to be organized so that disruption to the daily routines of the school is minimized. Up to three days may be needed for focus groups, interviews or surveying within the school. The amount of time will generally depend on the size of the school,

with larger schools requiring more time. As noted previously, the on-site component is preceded by initial planning meetings involving the external team lead, the school leadership team, and central office personnel. It is strongly recommended that the project leader and the school principal brief school staff at least once prior to the start of the on-site component of the review to provide them with an orientation to the VSR process. This allows staff to ask questions about the process, to generate interest in the review and to develop the level of trust that will be needed to ensure a good quality outcome.

E. Focus Groups

The project leader, assisted by members of the internal and/or external team, meets with the following focus group participants as determined in consultation with school administration:

- Teachers: during lunch or immediately after student dismissal
- Students: during the day (possibly by separate grades)
- Support and other personnel (teacher assistants, office staff, custodians, lunch-room/playground supervisors, bus drivers)
- Parents: subject to availability – during the school day, after school or during the evening. The School Council may be asked to provide parent input, in which case it may be possible to conduct discussion over supper, prior to a regularly scheduled meeting.
- School Administrators: during the school day

Established focus group processes should be used:

- Groups of 8-12 in number
- Homogeneous groups (i.e. different groups for students in different grade levels, teachers, support staff, parents)
- Sessions scheduled at a range of times to accommodate the schedules of different participants
- Sessions of 90 minutes duration or less (effective feedback can be obtained during the normal lunch recess in most schools)
- Discussions recorded by a neutral note-taker or audio-tape

It is recommended that schools go to some effort to ensure a cross-section of personality types within focus groups, particularly the student groups, so that the feedback comes from a wide range of individuals with different personalities and points of view. As many individual or personality groups need to be represented to provide the richest possible set of perspectives of the school environment and culture.

Comprehensive notes should be taken of the conversations within each focus group. Care should be taken to avoid identifying individual people when the notes are summarized. A neutral note-taker is recommended so that review team members participating in the focus groups can concentrate on listening and supporting effective conversation, rather than having to perform dual roles, with the risk that neither one is done well. It is recommended that schools provide the personnel necessary to perform this task.

It has been observed and noted that the presence of a school administrator in a focus group, as a participant, group reviewer or facilitator, may “temper” the discussion and this should be taken into consideration.

Audio recording should be strongly considered as an option for capturing focus group conversations. However, if this technique is going to be used, parents need to be informed of this when they are asked to give permission for their children to participate in the student focus groups. Similarly, all adult participants need to be informed that audio recording will be used. In all cases, care must be taken to reassure all participants that their individual responses will be held in strict confidence.

F. Survey Creation

Opinion and satisfaction surveying are a regular part of the information gathering process for the Alberta K-12 system. As part of the VSR process, it is possible that much of the data routinely collected for results reporting will be used to inform the review. If additional information is desired using survey methods, there is a wealth of information available on how to design, administer and analyze surveys⁶. While surveys do not necessarily offer the same flexibility that a focus group may provide, they have the potential to obtain information from a larger and more varied number of respondents than focus groups.

Several matters need to be considered in deciding whether to use surveys as part of the VSR process, including the following:

- The value of the data that might be gathered using a new custom-designed survey instrument (or adapting an existing one) compared with the value of information that can be gathered from existing sources, augmented by focus groups and/or interviews
- Whether to use internal staff to construct and administer survey, and analyze the results, or to use an outside contractor. In considering this, schools and authorities may consider the use of a web-based service that allows the school or authority to develop, distribute and analyze a survey for a nominal fee, depending upon the distribution size. One well-known tool is SurveyMonkey™, which offers the possibility of developing and administering up to 100 surveys at no cost.
- The time necessary to construct, distribute and analyze survey data
- The intended number and age of the target respondent groups i.e. students, parents, staff, community stakeholders, etc.
- Whether to include open or closed-ended questions
- Several examples of surveys that are grade specific for school culture and climate may be found in *The Heart of the Matter: Character and Citizenship Education in Alberta Schools*⁷

⁶ See http://education.gov.ab.ca/educationsystem/Satisfaction/SatisfactionSurveyGuide_2005.pdf for a practical guide to surveys.

⁷ See <http://education.alberta.ca/media/616280/heartmatter.pdf> for surveys that may be used as templates.

G. Information Analysis and Reporting

All significant data presented in the school profile, obtained from school records, gathered through focus groups, collected from individual interviews with key personnel or obtained from surveys need to be included in a final report. Analysis can proceed separately on specific components of the data, since the model allows administrators to respond to findings generated at each phase of the collection process rather than waiting for the formal report following completion of the review. The analysis of data is best supported by establishing and maintaining open and well-defined lines of communication between the review team and school and authority administrators. The preparation of the final report is the responsibility of the school review team lead, with input from the external team members and school administration.

As this review model is comprehensive, a great deal of information will be gathered that has both a direct and an indirect relationship to the central research question developed for the study. The use of a combination of data-gathering techniques (the school profile, focus groups, interviews, or surveys) provides a holistic approach to the school review that encourages reflection on school policies and practices.

Analysis of the data gathered for this model can enhance school planning by compiling all significant information into one document. This method offers schools a significant opportunity to gain deep understanding of their strengths and challenges. In addition, any gaps in school data collection may be identified and measures put into place to fill them.

Appendix 2 - School Profile Data Information Examples

1. Student registration history

Obtained from district or school database, this data set provides an understanding of the possible challenges for staffing and other resource allocation related to changes in student numbers over time.

High Crest Elementary School⁸

Student Enrolment (September 2006)

Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
62	50	69	72	76	71	83

Total Students – 483

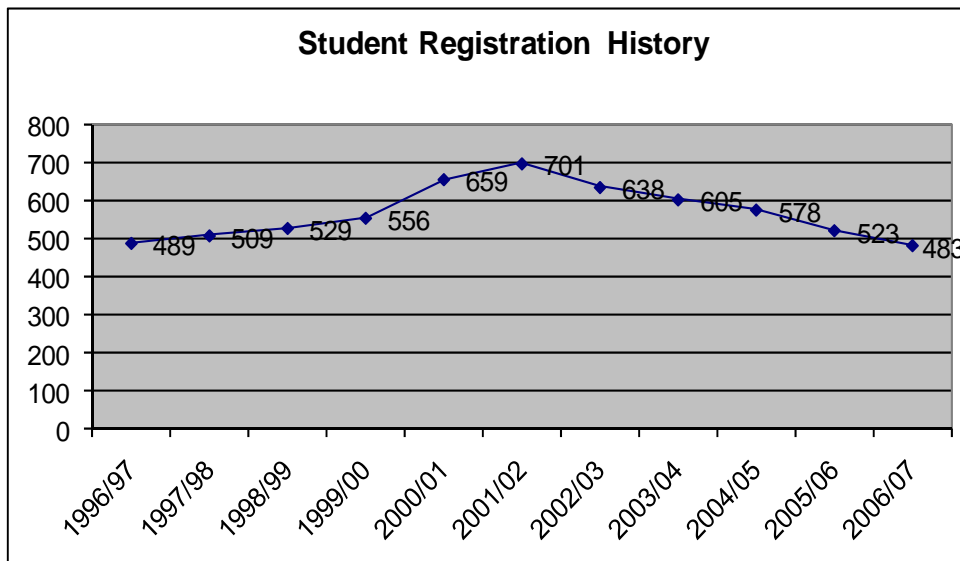
Total FTE – 452 (ECS students equate to an FTE of 0.5 due to their total class time)

Student Enrolment (September 2005)

Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
68	58	67	80	83	78	89

Total Students – 523 students

Total FTE – 495 (ECS students equate to an FTE of 0.5 due to their total class time)



⁸ Hill Crest Elementary is a fictitious school with data chosen for illustrative purposes only.

2. Coded students

These are taken from the September 30 student count generated by each school in the authority. The percentages are compared against the district numbers.

Used in conjunction to the authority average, this allows the school to further develop an understanding of the possible pressures on specific programs and allows the authority to examine the programs available at a school.

High Crest Elementary School

Coded Student Classification	High Crest School Student Population %	Authority Student Population %
ESL	8%	7.35%
Aboriginal	2%	3.62%
Mild/Moderate	8%	10.25%
Severe	8%	3.4%
ECS – Code 10	0 students	14 students
ECS – Code 30	7.94% (5 students)	65 students
ECS – Code 47	0 students	33 students

Code 10 – ECS developmentally immature

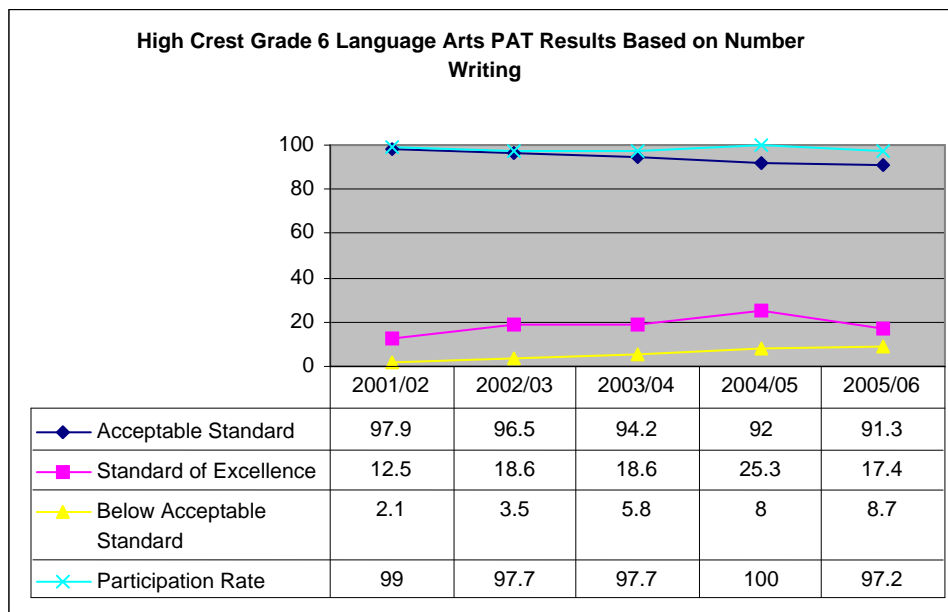
Code 30 - ECS mildly or moderately disabled child

Code 47 - ECS severe delay involving language

3. PAT or diploma results charted over a five year period

These are available from the data released to individual schools and authorities by Alberta Education.

The results for the school may be graphed against the results for the authority or province; however, authority results are more relevant to schools. This is one more opportunity to place information that is already available in other sources into one document.



4. PAT comparison results based upon number enrolled, total test

This comparison to the provincial results over several years is available through the results released to each school and the authority.

Charted in this format, the PAT data allow the school to understand any percentage increase or decrease against the provincial norm to better determine overall relationships to the provincial increases or decreases as related to potential changes in the perceived level of difficulty associated with the changing versions of PATs each year.

High Crest Elementary School PAT student achievement results compare as follows to provincial results:

	High Crest Results Comparison of 04/05 to 03/04	Provincial Results Comparison of 04/05 to 03/04	High Crest Results Comparison of 05/06 to 04/05	Provincial Results Comparison of 05/06 to 04/05
Grade 3				
Language Arts				
Acceptable Standard	+1.7%	+0.5%	-7.9%	-0.9%
Standard of Excellence	+10.8%	+1.1%	-5.2%	-2.1%
Below Acceptable Standard	+1.8%	+0.7%	-5.2%	-1.1%
Math				
Acceptable Standard	-2.8%	-1.4%	-5.8%	+1.4%
Standard of Excellence	-7.3%	-1.0%	-1.6%	+1.1%
Below Acceptable Standard	-1.6%	-0.4%	-5.5%	+1.6%
Grade 6				
Language Arts				
Acceptable Standard	even	-1.8%	-3.3%	+1.7%
Standard of Excellence	+7.1%	even	-8.4%	+0.4%
Below Acceptable Standard	-2.3%	-0.8%	-0.5%	+1.5%
Math				
Acceptable Standard	-1.2%	-0.2%	-10.0%	-3.1%
Standard of Excellence	+1.5%	-2.9%	-15.3%	-2.7%
Below Acceptable Standard	-3.5%	even	-7.2%	-2.7%
Science				
Acceptable Standard	-2.3%	-0.5%	-9.8%	-1.4%
Standard of Excellence	-3.0%	-0.1%	-8.6%	+2.2%
Below Acceptable Standard	-3.4%	even	-8.4%	-1.2%
Social Studies				
Acceptable Standard	+2.3%	-0.2%	-7.9%	-0.4%
Standard of Excellence	+10.5%	+1.6%	-7.9%	+1.4%
Below Acceptable Standard	even	+0.8%	-7.9%	-0.4%

5. Classroom student assessment data and grade level of achievement

These resources will assist in the overall interpretation of PAT and diploma exam results. Classroom data related to student behaviour and achievement, combined with other school-level data (such as the Accountability Pillar results), allow for a clearer understanding of the overall outcomes for students in the school as a whole.

An understanding of the distribution of the grade level of achievement for the students in combination with other factors featured in a school profile will assist in a better understanding of resource allocation and improved definition of school planning priorities.

6. School Education/Development Plan data

This data allows a school to see increases or decreases in specific measures that they report in their education plan. While these data may already be reported by the school, this format allows for a clearer understanding of strengths, challenges and opportunities that a school might have in relation to all the other data contained in the school profile.

School Performance Measures

	2007 (Current)	2008 Target	2009 Target
Service contributions	50% - achieved	60%	70%
Community project student participation	80% - achieved	85%	90%
Decreased bullying reports	70% - achieved	75%	80%
Misconduct referrals	10% - achieved	8%	6%
Referrals to Peace Heroes	80% - not achieved	85%	90%
Pride in Peace Heroes	80% - achieved	85%	90%
Nomination of Peace Heroes	15% - achieved	20%	25%

7. Accountability Pillar Results Data

Released to each school and authority by Alberta Education, these data provide the school and authority with results from measures that will assist in identifying areas of strength and opportunity in both the school and the authority. The number of respondents to surveys needs to be considered in determining how valid the results may be, particular for measures derived from satisfaction surveys.

8. Community Profile

An examination of Statistics Canada and municipality census or economic data for the community in which most of the students live allows school and authority staff to understand factors beyond the school that might provide insight into successes or challenges within the school. In particular, demographic and economic trend analysis can assist with school planning.

An understanding of the dynamics of a community derived from looking at population trends, parent education and household income levels, home ownership ratios, mobility, age, numbers of children at home and cultural diversity can significantly assist a school in understanding the community within which it operates. This means that the school is better placed to identify and offer programs and supports for its students that align with community needs and desires.

Statistics Canada (<http://www.statcan.ca/>) information is available for the 2001 census in a multitude of measures and full release of 2006 census information occurred at the end of 2008. Many communities use civic census data to indicate specific information about neighborhoods within the community that has useful information that is relevant to a school profile. A few examples of the data that is available through an internet search are as follows:

Total Population 2002 - 2006					
2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	% Change 2002-2006
Source: Civic Census 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006					

Population Mobility, 2001		
Total Population Aged 1 and Over	Persons who Moved, 2000-2001	
	Number	Percent
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada		

Age Distribution, 2006
Source: Civic Census 2006

Number of Children at Home by Age, 2001
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada

Median Household Income, 1995 and 2000		
1995	2000	% change
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada		

Population Aged 20 and Over Not Registered as a Student by Highest Level of Schooling, 2001			
Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada			

9. Community Crime Statistics

Crime statistics may be available for the communities in which a school's students live, offering insight into community factors that may influence student behaviours. The deeper understanding offered by this information can lead to more effective policies for dealing with challenges that arise within the school. The availability of crime statistics varies considerably from community to community and from one police service to another. The larger urban areas generally provide an in-depth compilation of the types of offences and the age of the offender. For Edmonton and Calgary, these statistics are broken down further into neighborhoods. Data for smaller municipalities are not likely to be presented at the same level of detail. Schools and authorities

in these locations may be able to obtain crime data from their local R.C.M.P. detachment or police service if they are not published on the police website.

The example below is from a small urban area.

ACTUAL NUMBER OCCURRENCES REPORTED August 2 - 8, 2007	
- CALL TYPE	Week Total
Total Calls for Service	761
Robbery	3
Assaults	12
Break and Enter	16
Theft	52
Mischief	42
Fraud	9
Motor Vehicle Collisions	30
Domestics	17
Theft of Auto	9
Sudden deaths	2

School Resource or Liaison Police Officers may be an excellent source of community information that will supplement statistical data and information from school administrators, counselors and other staff.

10. C.D. Howe School Rankings

If an elementary school is interested in understanding their performance compared with other schools in Alberta, it may wish to include in its school profile the evaluation of itself published in September 2007 by the C.D. Howe Institute. This evaluation controls for a range of socio-economic factors using the following community demographic data for the census dissemination areas served by the school:

- the percentage of lone parents;
- the percentage of persons living in detached dwellings;
- the percentage of persons who had immigrated to Canada in the past five years;
- the percentage of persons who speak an official language as their mother tongue;
- the percentage of persons who speak an official language at home;
- the percentage of persons who are Aboriginal;

- the unemployment rate of adults with children;
- the unemployment rate of all adults;
- the percentage of those over 20 years of age without a high-school diploma;
- the percentage of those over 20 years of age who have some university education;
- the percentage of those over 20 years of age with a university degree;
- the percentage of persons who moved in the most recent calendar year;
- the percentage of persons who moved in the past five calendar years; and
- two measures of income: average household income and average family income.

Additional information on this study can be obtained from www.cdhowe.org. Detailed information for a particular school can be requested from the Institute.

Appendix 3 - Sample Focus Group/Interview Questions

The following core and supplementary questions are suggested to assist with the development of the focus group/interview process. As noted in the body of this Guide, more specific questions may be developed using information from the school profile.

Core Questions

- What are the school's greatest strengths?
- What are the school's greatest challenges?
- Who are the major stakeholders in our school community?
- What events, characteristics or behaviours from the outside community do you observe that have either a positive or a negative impact on the school and classroom?
- How can the school gather information about student and school needs and use this to develop action plans?
- What are some of the activities in the school that you think are the best in helping students learn?
- Are there any aspects of the school that you think could be improved?
- Do you have any suggestions about how the school staff might be able to make you a more successful student?

Supplementary or Alternative Questions

- How important are the school's vision, mission and value statements or the school motto?
- What ceremonies, traditions or rituals in the school support the school's vision, mission and value statements?
- What actions and strategies can we use to deal with issues that may impact student citizenship and/or character?
- How does the school assist students to form caring attachments to each other?
- How does the school help students form relationships and sensitivity to other students?
- How does the school help staff form collegial relationships with each other?
- What are some things that you do with your family that enable you to help each other in your home, school and community?

NOTE: All questions need to be tailored to the specific role, age group and background of the respondents. Questions developed for any focus group are intended to be of a *template* nature only and the answers of the respondents may lead to other questions that were not previously scripted and are intended to drill deeper into the responses to prior questions.

Appendix 4 – Additional Background

The VSR model evolved from the *School Quality Review Project* which was conducted by Alberta Education's System Improvement Group and the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) between 2001 and 2003. The VSR process has evolved from the results of the earlier project, having been shaped to meet the needs of CBE schools and to support student outcomes reporting for the CBE Chief Superintendent and the Board of Trustees. This model was successfully field tested in five CBE schools during the 2006-07 school year. Schools that participated in the field testing represented all grade levels (elementary, junior high and senior high) and ranged in size from approximately 140 to 1,400 students. The CBE has since expanded this school review opportunity and trained 28 school administrators who have been placed onto teams of four and initially undertook the *value added review* of seven junior and senior high schools in the CBE. This expanded opportunity began in April 2008 and the review team reports were completed in November 2008. Additional school opportunities were explored by the CBE in the spring of 2009.

Three other school authorities have also participated using the VSR model at schools of varying grade configurations: Rocky View School Division, Grande Yellowhead Regional District and Grande Prairie School District. Each school authority indicated their belief that the experience was positive both for each school in the review process and for the school authority itself.

A presentation on the Value Added School Review was made to the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) Issues Forum in Calgary in November 2008 by representatives from the CBE and System Improvement Group and an earlier draft of this document was distributed to a large number of participants at the break-out session.

As noted earlier, the VSR model is different from the Collaborative School Improvement Review (CSIR) developed by Zone 1 Field Services Branch, Alberta Education. However, before these differences are elaborated, it is worth considering two key similarities. Both models offer opportunities for schools to address continuous improvement using a range of data-gathering and analytical techniques, depending upon the needs of the school and authority. Both models are based on data analysis, with Accountability Pillar (AP) results at the core and both can also be used for the study of an entire authority.

Nonetheless, the VSR is distinctive in the following ways:

- It is designed to include information gathered from a wider range of sources than is contemplated in the CSIR. These include community demographic and economic data, school-level measures that are not formally required for authority reporting, and qualitative feedback from staff, students and parents, gathered primarily through focus group discussions and interviews.
- It is designed to be used in any school, regardless of its AP results, including high-performing schools (to analyze why a school is high-performing and if other schools in the jurisdiction might benefit from the knowledge).
- It is organized around a central research question developed by school leaders and may be undertaken by the school or authority on its own initiative. The central research question may have no direct connection to the school's AP data.

- It involves key data review by both an internal team consisting of school and authority staff and an external team consisting of individuals from the wider community in which the school sits. The external team is intended to include a clear majority of members of the local business community, academic researchers, and/or professionals who work with children and young people in community health or other support capacities.
- It is designed to include, as one of its most distinctive features, an examination of the citizenship and character dimensions of a school.
- Given its focus on school-level outcomes, it explicitly excludes any examination of classroom instructional practices.

For these reasons, the VSR offers a useful alternative to the Collaborative School Improvement Review model which was developed with the primary aim of providing a way for Alberta Education and school authorities to provide support to schools that showed significant declines or continuing poor results on their Accountability Pillar results. While the CSIR model can be used voluntarily by schools or authorities when these conditions are not present, the design of the CSIR clearly contemplates a direct focus on Accountability Pillar results improvement. The CSIR also includes the possibility of observing classroom instructional practices and is used to assist in developing school improvement plans, where they are required by virtue of a school's performance challenges.

As noted above, the VSR model does not involve explicit examination of pedagogical practices by individual teachers.