JOHNSON SHOYAMA GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

SUNWEST SCHOOL DIVISION REVIEW:

DISTANCE LEARNING CENTRE AND DIVISION SUPPORT SERVICES REVIEW

SUB REPORT ▶▶ JUNE 2014

University of Regina

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The consultants would like to convey our special thanks to Board members, Sun West School Division employees, parents, and students who responded to our requests for data in various forms. We are grateful to all those who participated in focus groups, and those who participated in our surveys and Thoughtstream conversation work.

We commend the Board and Staff of Sun West School Division for their earnest efforts, obvious dedication the success of all students in their communities, and beyond.

The Report is intended to provide a basis for Board dialogue, Division initiative, system learning, celebration of work well done and insights for enhanced effectiveness. This Report affirms the Sun West School Division work will aid the Board's further development of effective operations of the DLC and ongoing enhancement of support services delivery to the Division constituents.

JSGS Review Team
May 2014

BACKGROUND TO REPORT

In January 2014, the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy was informed by Sun West School Division that their proposal for a comprehensive review of Sun West School Division had been accepted. Part of this larger review required a review of the Sun West School Division's Distance Learning Centre and its Division-level support services. This aspect of the more comprehensive Division Review is a part of a continuing process of due diligence for the Sun West School Division Board as set forth in its policies. With this review, the Board seeks to continuously develop, and manage the maturing processes of its mandate for Sun West School Division. The elements of this sub-report consist of two elements: Distance Learning Centre Review and Review of Division-level Support Services.

DISTANCE LEARNING CENTRE REVIEW INTRODUCTION

Education as we know it is changing. No longer are students showing up exclusively in schools to learn. They are faced with both opportunities and challenges related to where they learn, their local educational options, family schooling decisions and other factors that make them what we might call non-traditional learners. To continue to support these diverse learners a new form of flexibility and access to education is required. Schools have to be more responsive to the changing needs of students and their families.

In 2008, the Sun West School Division recognized the changes that were occurring with their students and identified a need to diversify its course offerings to meet the needs of current and future students. SWSD saw an opportunity to use advances in pedagogy, technology, and infrastructure to offer learning to those who may have been missing out or not receiving a fully supported educational experience. The Division had schools where course offerings were limited by staff resources. There were students who were unable to receive a range of courses to prepare them for post-secondary education. A number of homeschool families were also reaching out to the division for resource and learning support.

To deal with this need, 12 print-based courses were designed and offered for distance students out of Kenaston Central School. The new hosting location was labelled the Distance Learning Centre (DLC). This small offering of courses has grown to service a large and growing number of students in the Sun West School Division and beyond. The DLC now offers the opportunity to take 70 different courses through traditional correspondence and technology support methods. Although perceived as very successful there is a need to explore specifically where the successes are found and how greater success can be achieved in other areas. As of

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April 2014, the DLC has 276 full-grant students. These are the students who are taking all of their classes from Sun West DLC and are not registered with any other school or school division. These students can be home-based, or students between 18 and 22. The number of classes each student takes varies. The Sun West DLC is also delivering 1998 classes to students who are not in the Kenaston building. These are delivered to students within SunWest, students in schools outside of Sun West, and adult students. Again, the number of classes per student varies from 1 to 5.

The role of the DLC is to provide access and opportunities to students studying in the Sun West School Division and for others working outside of traditional educational contexts. The overarching question we are looking to answer with this review is "What is the role of the Sun West Distance Learning Center (DLC) in supporting the success of students.
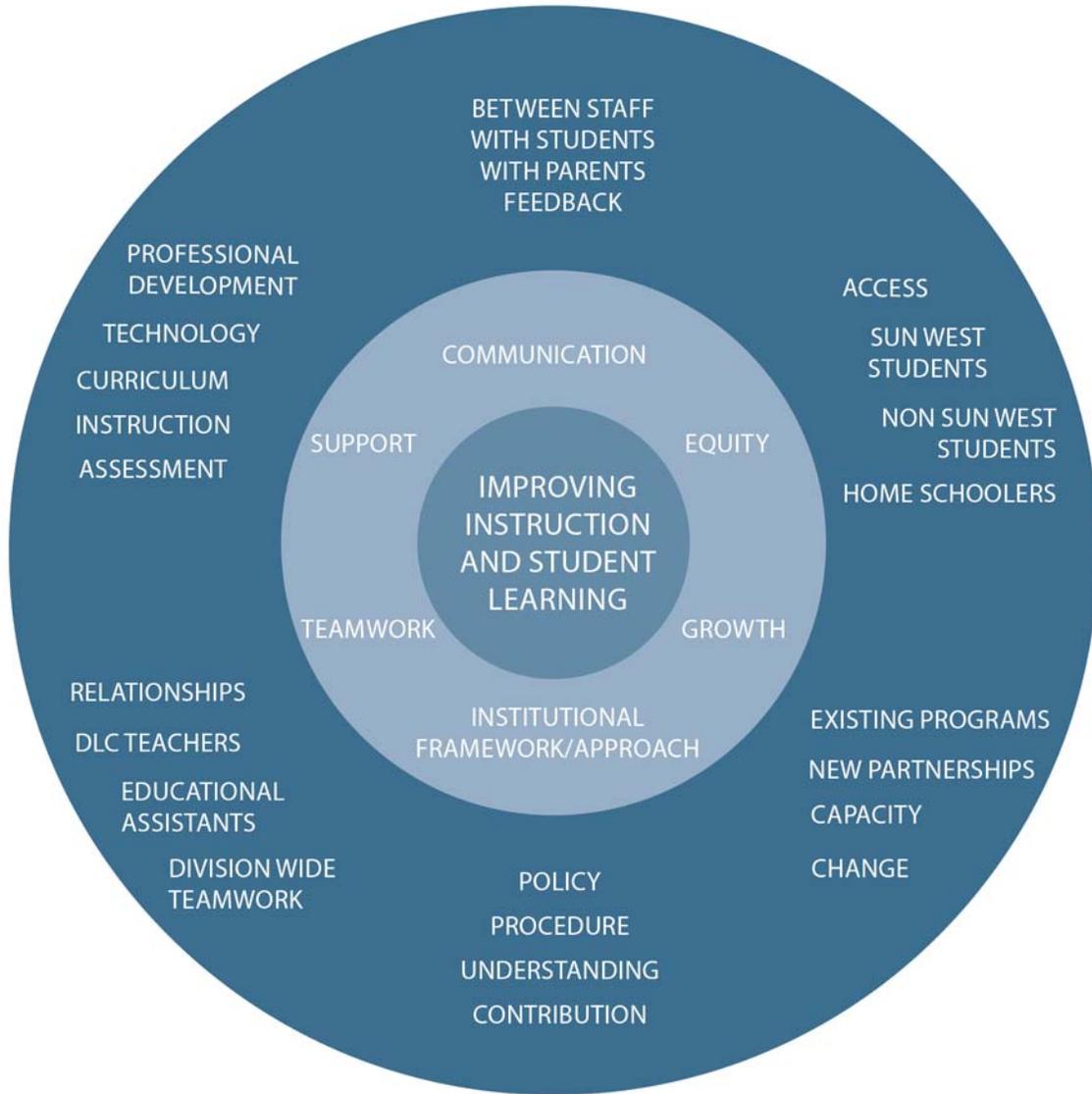
What are the reasons for doing a review of this role? The review of the DLC was requested by the Board of Sun West School Division to dig below the surface, to examine the impact and understandings of the day-to-day operation of the DLC. The SWSD Board outlined a need to gauge access, support, and equity for students. Those who take advantage of the DLC are a diverse group. They represent five major categories of learner . Without input from all of them it is difficult to truly judge the level of effectiveness in the DLC. The SWSD School Board has been supportive of the DLC and this review will give them an in-depth look at the impact of the organization and assist them in future planning.

BACKGROUND

Although many other provinces and school divisions offer online and correspondence courses there is not one prescribed model for K - 12 Distance Education in Canada. Each jurisdiction has their own particular approach to providing for students. There are traditional correspondence models where a majority of the information is print based. There are also others that use both asynchronous and synchronous student interaction models. In Saskatchewan the Provincial Ministry of Education turned responsibility for distance education over to the school divisions when it closed the provincial correspondence school in 2008. With this change went the leadership and directives specific to Distance Education in the Province of Saskatchewan were lost. To bridge the gap, SWSD decided to create its own approach to serving students' needs by creating a central site to deliver both synchronous and asynchronous courses.

Despite not finding a single comprehensive model that would be the gold standard that we would compare to the current SWSD DLC, our extensive literature review on K -12 distance education in Canada uncovered a number of key themes that were important to the success of delivering this form of education. There were successful aspects of each existing program we reviewed but all programs were very different. We would not even use the term best practices as the model would change from province to province or division to division. The key themes we found were support, teamwork, access, institutional framework/approach, communication, and growth. These themes were also found in the initial set of questions in the proposal for the project. All of these factors contribute to improving both instruction and student learning. We created the following model to guide our review of the DLC.

FIGURE 1. MODEL FOR DISTANCE LEARNING CENTRE REVIEW

BETWEEN STAFF
WITH STUDENTS
WITH PARENTS
FEEDBACK

PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

TECHNOLOGY

CURRICULUM

INSTRUCTION

ASSESSMENT

COMMUNICATION

ACCESS

SUN WEST
STUDENTS

NON SUN WEST
STUDENTS

HOME SCHOOLERS

SUPPORT

EQUITY

IMPROVING
INSTRUCTION
AND STUDENT
LEARNING

TEAMWORK

GROWTH

RELATIONSHIPS

DLC TEACHERS

EDUCATIONAL
ASSISTANTS

DIVISION WIDE
TEAMWORK

INSTITUTIONAL
FRAMEWORK/APPROACH

EXISTING PROGRAMS

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

CAPACITY

CHANGE

POLICY

PROCEDURE

UNDERSTANDING

CONTRIBUTION

METHODOLOGY OF DISTANCE LEARNING CENTRE REVIEW

The review of the DLC utilized a participatory review. In other words, we actively involved all stakeholders in the process. Initially a meeting was held with the Director, the Superintendent responsible for the DLC, and Vice-Principals of the DLC to determine the focus of the DLC review. This was followed by a review of existing DLC documentation. Based on this initial investigation as a guide, combined with the literature review, questions for the stakeholders were generated based on the six themes identified as contributing to an effective distance learning program. The questions were linked to specific areas of interest provided by the Sun West School Division in their Request for Proposals. Specifically,

- Is communication effectively managed and well perceived amongst all stakeholder groups?

- How do students, parents and community members perceive the SWSD?

- How effective is the Distance Learning Centre in providing educational programming equity to students in Sun West?

- Is there a sense of 'team' within the division?

- Are community partnerships developed to support student learning?

- Are there sufficient feedback processes in place?

Types of instruments used and why (in appendices): Anonymous surveys were used to find out more about the main themes. Schedule of events (chronology of methodology):

- Began with review of existing documents including web material and existing planning documents.

- A meeting was held with Administration to inquire about their understanding of the process and to receive their input.

- Literature review of K-12 Distance Learning in Canada.

- Creation of two specific DLC surveys were constructed based on an extensive literature review and stakeholder meetings.

- A survey of all Sun West Teachers

- A Survey of all Educational Assistants

- Once data had been collected through surveys a focus group with a sample of DLC staff in Kenaston was conducted.

- During the DLC staff specific data collection a broader division wide survey was conducted using the Thoughtstream online tool. A Thoughtstream Survey of DLC Students and a Thoughtstream Survey of DLC Parents

- Specific DLC Questions from Organizational Culture Inventory were also sent out to all staff in the SWSD.

TYPES OF DATA COLLECTED AND INTERPRETATION

Complete responses were collected from 25 members of the DLC staff. Complete responses were collected from 15 Educational Assistants. The Thoughtstream survey was completed by 60 students, 44 parents, and 21 individuals who identified themselves as "other." They contributed 425 individual thoughts related to the DLC.

Information in the next section represents the data collected through the various surveys and focus groups. Responses from both the DLC teachers and EAs are presented together in the first section. Both groups play an important role in the day-to-day operation of the DLC.

This section identifies understandings and opinions of daily tasks.

Table 01: At what grade level are the DLC courses you are assigned to teach/do you support? *select all that apply*

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 25)	EA/Support Staff (n = 15)
K-6	24%	0%
Grades 7, 8, 9	24%	20%
10 Level Courses	44%	93%
20 Level Courses	64%	100%
30 Level Courses	48%	93%
Practical & Applied Arts	8%	7%
Post-secondary Dual Credit Opportunities	0%	40%

Respondents were asked to identify what grade level(s) they are assigned to teach/support at the DLC and they were asked to select all the categories that apply to them. In response, Table 01 uncovers that both teachers and EAs were most likely to teach at the high school level.

Table 02: At what level are you employed to support DLC students?

Survey Items	EA/Support Staff (n = 15)
Full 1.0	40%
Less than 1.0, more than 0.5 FTE	13%
Less than 0.5 FTE	47%

EAs were additionally asked to identify what level they were employed to support DLC students and we found that 47% were less than 0.5 FTE, 40% were Full 1.0 and 13% were less than 1.0 and more than 0.5 FTE.

We asked respondents how many years they had worked at the DLC. According to teachers, the average years of experience at the DLC was 2.3 years and 1.6 years for EAs. Furthermore, respondents identified the number of courses they were assigned to teach/support in the 2013-2014 school year. On average, teachers were assigned to 3.9 courses and EAs supported an average of 20.9 courses in the 2013-2014 school year.

Teachers and EAs were given opportunity to express their comments on different aspects of the DLC. First, respondents were asked what they felt was the greatest strength of the DLC. In response, teachers generally expressed that the strength of the DLC lies within its unique opportunity to provide students in a variety of different circumstances and background with flexible educational opportunities and supports. They also felt that the collaborative environment of the DLC was strengths.

When asked what they felt was the DLC's greatest strength(s), EA respondents largely echo the responses from teachers. In addition, many EAs identify that the diversity of courses offered to students and the added value of being able to complete a course at your own pace as strengths.

Following, respondents were then asked to identify the area(s) most in need of improvement for the DLC. In response, teachers raised the concern of teacher-student ratio becoming unmanageable. Stemming from that theme are the concerns that there is a focus on quantity of students rather than quality of learning and that the DLC hiring and workload is reactive to student numbers rather than proactive. For teachers, the consequences of large class sizes are that it can compromise support and time needed to communicate with students to ensure their continued success in the class.

EAs identified that there continues to be a need to find ways to enhance communication with DLC students. Respondents perceive students' need for interaction, which is a common barrier for distance learning students. For EAs, finding increased opportunities for students to communicate with their teachers can engage and motivate them to complete the course.

When asked about the benefits experienced by DLC students as compared to non-DLC students, teachers articulated that the independence and flexibility in scheduling and environment for the student to work at their own pace to complete the course, and the opportunity to take courses that students in traditional school settings may not be able constituted benefits.

When asked about what benefits are experienced by DLC students, as compared to experiences of non-DLC students, EAs generally agreed with teachers that the independence

and flexibility in scheduling and environment for the student to work at their own pace to complete the course, and the opportunity to take courses that students in traditional school settings may not be able to constituted benefits. In addition, EAs also emphasized the gaining of valuable skills for students, such as working independently, self-discipline and organization.

When asked about the challenges of being a DLC student as compared to non-DLC students, teachers identified the lack of daily face-to-face contact with teachers and their peers, and the overall social aspect of school a key challenge. Another key challenge in the DLC is success in completing DLC courses is contingent upon students having developed certain skills, such as time management, work independently and self-motivation, all of which may be difficult for students at that young age.

When asked what are the challenges of being a DLC student as compared to non-DLC students, EAs emphasized that being able to complete DLC courses is contingent upon students having developed certain skills, such as time management, work independently and self-motivation, all of which may be difficult for students at that young age. Moreover, EAs identified the struggles for students when they are not able to obtain an immediate answer to a question from teachers and how the atmosphere of DLC courses can make it difficult to ask for help. For some, technology can act as a deterrent for students to ask questions, rather than an enabler.

Table 03: Division Level of Support

Survey Items	Teachers	Educational Assistants
Technology - Software	75%(0)*	67%(8)*
Technology - Hardware	83%(0)	75%(8)
Technology - Network	75%(4)*	75%(8)
Curriculum	54%(8)*	90(0)
Instruction	65%(4)*	82%(0)
Assessment	65%(0)*	72%(9)
Student Support Services	43%(26)*	80%(0)
Educational Assistants	74%(13)	75%(8)
DLC teachers	92%(0)	
Distance Learning Centre	96(0)	75%(0)*

Likert scale = 1 (No support), 2, 3, 4, 5 (Completely supported)

Responses of "3" over 20% are indicated with *

Percentage of disagreement (disagree or strongly disagree) are presented in brackets (xx)

Table 03 presents the teachers and educational assistants' perceptions of division support on different components within the DLC. Their responses indicate that the vast majority of teacher and EA respondents felt that there was a high level of support in technology, in terms of software, hardware and network, educational assistants, teachers and the DLC at large. Table 03 further found that teachers were less likely to view as strong of division support for the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student support

services in the DLC. This is in contrast to a majority of EA respondents who found these areas to be well supported.

Table 04: To what extent have you been provided with Division professional development opportunities in the following areas:

Survey Items	Teachers	Educational Assistants
Curriculum	30%(39)*	0%(83)
Instruction	39%(26)*	8%(42)*
Assessment	52%(13)*	8%(75)
Software	39%(17)*	8%(66)
Distance Education	43%(17)*	

Likert scale = 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Occasionally), 4 (Frequently), 5 (Always)

"Occasionally" responses over 20% are indicated with *

Percentage of disagreement (disagree or strongly disagree) are presented in brackets (xx)

When DLC teachers and EAs were asked about the regularity of professional development opportunities provided by the Division, Table 04 first reveals a varied response from teachers in the areas of curriculum and instruction. On the other hand, a majority of DLC teachers reported there were occasional or more frequent professional development opportunities in the areas of assessment, software and distance education. Meanwhile, a majority of the EAs reported that professional development opportunities were often not provided by the Division.

In addition to asking about the regularity of professional development opportunities provided by the Division, respondents were asked to list any specific training or supports that they had received that make them a more effective DLC teacher. In response, teachers

identified Apple product training, such as iPad training, and attendance at the Florida

Educational Technology Conference as helpful to their development. In addition, many teachers

also identified the importance of informal peer support in their professional development.

Meanwhile, EAs identified the Educational Assistant certificate and the training received at the

start of the year has been beneficial.

TEAMWORK AND DLC

Table 05: Teamwork

Survey Items	Teachers	Educational Assistants
I am encouraged to try new ways of doing things	100%(0)	85%(8)
I am encouraged to share ideas and resources	100%(0)	69%(0)*
My work is valued and appreciated by my colleagues	83%(0)	77%(0)*
I have the freedom to make decisions in my area of responsibility	96%(0)	69%(0)*
I understand the goals and objectives of the DLC	92%(0)	92%(0)
I participate in setting goals for the DLC	50%(17)*	38%(15)*
Collaboration amongst staff members is valued in the DLC	100%(0)	69%(0)*
The DLC team effectively facilitates communication	71%(4)*	85%(0)
I am in regular communication with teachers outside of the DLC	62%(21)	
I am in regular communication with other DLC colleagues in other locations		46%(31)*
I am in regular communication with other EAs outside of the DLC		8%(69)*

Likert scale = Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

Neutral responses over 20% are indicated with *

Percentage of disagreement (disagree or strongly disagree) are presented in brackets (xx)

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Table 05 explores the concept of teamwork and the overall sense of team within the DLC. With regards to fostering an atmosphere of inclusivity, the majority of DLC teachers and EAs felt that they were encouraged to try new ways of doing things, share ideas and resources, and have the freedom to make decisions in their areas of responsibility, while nearly all respondents unanimously reported that they understood the goals for the DLC. In contrast, both DLC teachers and EAs were found to be more lukewarm in their response when asked if they participated in setting goals for the DLC.

With regards to the overall sense of team, the majority of DLC teachers and EAs perceived their work to be valued and appreciated by their colleagues, that collaboration amongst staff members is valued in the DLC and the DLC team effectively facilitates communication. When asked if respondents were in regular communication with colleagues outside of the internal DLC team, 62% of DLC teachers are in regular communication with teachers outside of the DLC; 46% of EAs were in regular communication with other DLC colleagues in other locations; and 8% of EAs were in regular communication with other EAs outside the DLC.

Table 06: Teamwork - How would you rate your relationships with other DLC teachers over the past year?

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)
Poor	0%
Fair	0%
Good	25%
Very Good	33%
Excellent	42%

Overall, all DLC teachers reported positive relationships with other DLC teachers in the past year, with 42% rated their relationships with other DLC teachers as excellent, 33% rated theirs as very good and 25% rated theirs as good.

Table 07: Teamwork - How would you rate your relationships with other EAs over the past year?

Survey Items	Educational Assistants (n = 12)
Poor	8%
Fair	25%
Good	33%
Very Good	25%
Excellent	8%

When EAs were asked to rate their relationships with other EAs over the past year, we found a varied response. While a majority of respondents did report positive relationships with other EAs, 25% rated their relationships with other EAs as fair and 8% rated theirs as poor.

Table 08: Teamwork - How would you rate the relationship between educational assistants and teachers at the DLC?

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 22)	Educational Assistants (n = 12)
Poor	0%	0%
Fair	5%	0%
Good	54%	25%
Very Good	32%	42%
Excellent	9%	33%

DLC teachers and EA respondents were asked to rate the relationship between each other at the DLC. In turn, Table 08 found that both sets of respondents generally rated the relationship positively. A majority of DLC teachers rated the relationship to be good with 41% stating that it was very good to excellent. Meanwhile, EAs were most likely to rate the relationship as very good with 33% of respondents stating that the relationship was excellent.

In addition, respondents were given an opportunity to share the activities that they feel contribute to a sense of team in the DLC. Teachers, in turn, expressed that having shared workrooms supports collaborative problem-solving, and spontaneous and open communication. Moreover, teachers identified that their meetings were also beneficial in fostering a sense of team.

EQUITY AND DLC

Table 09: Equity - Rate the level of access to instruction for each of the types of DLC students

Survey Items	Teachers	Educational Assistants
Sun West student attending a school	100%(0)	90%(0)
Non-Sun West student attending a school	78%(4)	62%(0)*
Home-based (taking classes from DLC from home)	71%(0)*	57%(0)*
Traditional home schooler	68%(0)*	17%(50)**
Adult learner (18+, not attending a secondary school)	64%(0)*	33%(17)*

Likert scale = Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, Excellent

Responses of "Good" over 20% are indicate with *

Percentage of disagreement (disagree or strongly disagree) are presented in brackets (xx)

Table 09 presents the teachers and educational assistants' ratings on the level of access to instruction for different types of students served by the DLC. In response, both teachers and EAs rated Sun West students attending a school as having a high level of access to instruction. Following, Table 09 uncovers some discrepancy between the two types of respondents. Whereas over 60% of DLC teachers rated all other categories of students as having a high level of access to instruction, EA respondents provided more lukewarm ratings for the access to instruction for traditional home schoolers and adult learners.

Table 10: Equity - Rate the level of instructional support for each of the types of DLC students

Survey Items	Teachers	Educational Assistants
Sun West student attending a school	83%(0)	73%(0)*
Non-Sun West student attending a school	83%(4)	14%(0)*
Home-based (taking classes from DLC from home)	62%(4)*	57%(14)*
Traditional home schooler	43%(5)*	20%(40)*
Adult learner (18+, not attending a secondary school)	55%(9)*	33%(17)*

Likert scale = Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, Excellent

Responses of "Good" over 20% are indicate with *

Percentage of disagreement (disagree or strongly disagree) are presented in brackets (xx)

In addition to level of instruction, respondents were further asked to rate the level of instructional support provided to each distinct category of DLC students. Table 10 reveals that both teachers and EAs rated Sun West students attending a school as having the highest level of instructional support. While 83% of teachers rated the level of instructional support for Non-Sun West students attending a school as very good to excellent, this was only reflected in 14% of EA respondents. A similar trend emerged for the category of adult learners, where 55% of

DLC teachers rated the level of instructional support as very good to excellent in contrast to 33% of EAs. Approximately 60% of teachers and EAs rated the level of instructional support to home-based students as very good to excellent. Of the five categories, the level of instructional support for traditional home schoolers was rated the lowest by both groups of respondents.

Teachers and EAs were also asked to identify some of challenges to providing instruction to DLC students. In response, teachers highlighted that slow Internet connections for certain students in more remote or rural communities, and the fact that distance between the teacher and students creates barriers to better knowing the students, their specific needs and the level of support required to assist them. Meanwhile, EAs also echoed the technological challenges involved with providing instruction to DLC students. EAs further expressed challenges in their roles for when students need help. From the perspective of EAs, they can encourage and motivate the students as best as they can; however, they are not teachers and ultimately, it is the teachers who can only respond to the certain student questions. Finally, some EAs also expressed that because they are EAs, certain students don't like to take directions from them.

Respondents were further asked to describe the instructional model of the DLC, which elicited responses from teachers, including, "variety of teaching and delivery models," "teamwork approach with shared leadership," "student first," and "evolving, growing, changing and improving" and "a great opportunity to learn different subjects that might not be offered in a regular classroom" from EAs.

Table 11: Equity - The current DLC model effectively supports instruction.

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 10)
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%
Disagree	0%	0%
Neutral	12%	30%
Agree	75%	30%
Strongly Agree	13%	40%

Overall, 88% of teachers and 70% of EAs agreed that the current DLC model effectively

supports instruction.

Table 12: Equity - I am encouraged to contribute to the overall goals of the DLC.

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 12)
Strongly Disagree	4%	0%
Disagree	4%	25%
Neutral	13%	17%
Agree	54%	42%
Strongly Agree	25%	17%

As Table 12 illustrates, 79% of teachers and 59% of EAs who responded to the

questionnaire felt encouraged to contribute to the overall goals of the DLC.

Table 13: Equity - To what level are you connected to your students?

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 12)
Not at all connected	0%	0%
A little connected	17%	0%
Moderately connected	37%	8%
Connected	42%	42%
Very connected	4%	50%

Table 13 presents respondents' self-perceived feelings of connections to their students. For teachers, 46% felt connected to their students, while 37% felt moderately connected and 17% felt only a little connected. Meanwhile, 92% of EAs felt connected to their students and 8% felt moderately connected.

Table 14: Equity - There are necessary systems in place to receive feedback on the instruction offered by the DLC.

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)
Strongly Disagree	0%
Disagree	4%
Neutral	50%
Agree	42%
Strongly Agree	4%

Teachers were asked if they felt that there are necessary systems in place to receive feedback on the instruction offered by the DLC. Of the twenty-four responses to the item, half

of the respondents remained neutral on the statement, while 46% agreed that there are

necessary feedback systems on the offered instruction by the DLC in place.

Table 15: Equity - There are necessary systems in place to receive feedback on course planning offered by the DLC.

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)
Strongly Disagree	0%
Disagree	4%
Neutral	67%
Agree	25%
Strongly Agree	4%

Teachers were further asked if they felt that there are necessary systems in place to

receive feedback on course planning offered by the DLC. In response, 67% remained neutral on

the statement, while 29% agreed that there are feedback systems on course planning in place.

Table 16: Equity - There are effective systems in place to give feedback on the instruction offered by the DLC.

Survey Items	Educational Assistants (n = 12)
Strongly Disagree	0%
Disagree	8%
Neutral	58%
Agree	33%
Strongly Agree	0%

EAs were asked if they felt that there are effective systems in place to give feedback on the instruction offered by the DLC. While 33% reported that there are effective systems in place, the majority of respondents remained neutral on the statement.

Table 17: Equity - There are effective systems in place to give feedback on course planning offered by the DLC.

Survey Items	Educational Assistants (n = 12)
Strongly Disagree	8%
Disagree	25%
Neutral	58%
Agree	8%
Strongly Agree	0%

EAs were asked if they felt that there are effective systems in place to give feedback on course planning offered by the DLC. Only 8% felt that there are effective systems in place. In contrast, 33% disagreed and 58% remained neutral.

Table 18: Equity - Overall the DLC is fulfilling its mission.

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 12)
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%
Disagree	0%	0%
Neutral	0%	25%
Agree	92%	42%
Strongly Agree	8%	33%

Overall, 100% of teachers and 75% of EAs agreed that the DLC is fulfilling its mission.

GROWTH AND DLC

Table 19: Growth - Each year, the DLC course(s) I am assigned to teach:

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 18)
Do(es) not change	11%
Change(s) slightly	50%
Change(s) moderately	39%
Change(s) dramatically	0%

When asked about the extent to which change occurs in the courses assigned to DLC teachers each year, 50% of respondents reported slight change, 39% reported moderate change and 11% reported no change.

Table 20: Growth - Each year, the DLC course(s) I am assigned to support:

Survey Items	Educational Assistants (n = 11)
Do(es) not change	0%
Change(s) slightly	45.5%
Change(s) moderately	45.5%
Change(s) dramatically	9%

When asked about the extent to which change occurs in the courses EAs are assigned to

support, 45.5% of respondents reported slight change, 45.5% reported moderate change and

9% reported dramatic change.

Table 21: Growth - I am comfortable with major program change.

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 21)	Educational Assistants (n = 11)
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%
Disagree	33%	0%
Neutral	29%	36%
Agree	38%	55%
Strongly Agree	0%	9%

Respondents were asked about their comfort to major program change and we found

that 38% of teachers and 64% of EAs were comfortable with major program change. In

addition, 33% of teachers were found to be not comfortable with major program change.

Table 22: Growth - I am overwhelmed by my role in the DLC.

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 23)	Educational Assistants (n = 12)
Strongly Disagree	17%	0%
Disagree	42%	58%
Neutral	17%	25%
Agree	25%	17%
Strongly Agree	0%	0%

According to Table 22, 59% of teachers and 58% of EAs report that they are not overwhelmed by their role in the DLC. In contrast, 25% of teachers and 17% of EAs stated that they were overwhelmed.

Table 23: Growth - The level of capacity in the DLC is high.

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 12)
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%
Disagree	0%	8%
Neutral	21%	8%
Agree	71%	83%
Strongly Agree	8%	0%

Overall, Table 23 reports that 79% of teachers and 83% of EAs feel that the level of capacity in the DLC is high.

Table 24: Growth - The DLC is well-integrated into the division.

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 11)
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%
Disagree	12%	0%
Neutral	25%	18%
Agree	54%	64%
Strongly Agree	8%	18%

As seen in Table 24, 62% of teachers and 82% of EAs agree that the DLC is well-integrated into the Sun West School Division.

Table 25: Growth - Please indicate how important the following areas would be in expanding the course offerings of the DLC

Survey Items	Teachers	Educational Assistants
Course development time	100%(0)	60%(40)
Course development costs	71%(12)	60%(40)
Technological infrastructure	92%(8)	80%(20)
Course quality	100%(0)	80%(20)
Teacher training	87%(0)	80%(20)
Provincial Policy	62%(0)	30%(50)
Student Funding Transfer	54%(37)	44%(56)

Likert scale = Not at all important, A little bit important, Moderately important, Important, Very Important, Don't know

"Moderately Important" responses over 20% are indicate with *

Number in brackets indicates "don't know" responses

Table 25 presents results from our asking respondents about the importance of certain areas when expanding the course offerings of the DLC. In turn, teacher respondents unanimously placed a high level of important on course development time and course quality. 92% further emphasized the importance of technological infrastructure and 87% highlighted the importance of teaching training. A majority of teachers also found course development costs, provincial policy and student funding transfer to be important. For EAs, 80% found the areas of technological infrastructure, course quality and teacher training to be important. 60% further found course development time and course development costs to be of importance.

Finally, a majority EAs found provincial policy and student funding transfer to only be

moderately important.

Table 26: Growth - Over the next two years, I expect DLC enrollments for Sun West students attending a school to:

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 11)
Grow	92%	64%
Stay about the same	8%	36%
Decrease	0%	0%

Table 27: Growth - Over the next two years, I expect DLC enrollments for Non Sun West students attending a school to:

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 7)
Grow	96%	57%
Stay about the same	4%	43%
Decrease	0%	0%

Table 28: Growth - Over the next two years, I expect DLC enrollments for home based (taking classes from DLC from home to:

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 8)
Grow	92%	62%
Stay about the same	8%	38%
Decrease	0%	0%

Table 29: Growth - Over the next two years, I expect DLC enrollments for traditional home schooler to:

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 7)
Grow	79%	14%
Stay about the same	21%	71%
Decrease	0%	14%

Table 30: Growth - Over the next two years, I expect DLC enrollments for adult learner (18+, not attending a secondary school) to:

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 7)
Grow	75%	57%
Stay about the same	25%	43%
Decrease	0%	0%

Table 31: Growth - Over the next two years, I expect fully blended/hybrid course enrollments for the DLC to:

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 7)
Grow	67%	29%
Stay about the same	33%	71%
Decrease	0%	0%

As illustrated in Tables 26-31, the vast majority of teachers expect growth in enrollments for the DLC in each category of students, as well as for blended/hybrid courses. When asked to indicate how much growth respondents were expecting, the average response from teachers for each category was as follows: Sun West students attending a school to grow by 29.5%, Non Sun West students attending a school to grow by 34.8%, home-based students to grow by 26.4%, traditional home schoolers to grow by 31.2%, adult learners to grow by 24.4%, and blended/hybrid course enrollments to grow by 21.8%. The sentiment of growth was similarly expressed by a smaller majority of EAs with the exception of the enrollments for traditional home schoolers and blended/hybrid courses. For both, the majority of EAs believed these enrollments will likely stay the same in the next two years. Of those who predicted growth, the average response from EAs for each category was as follows: Sun West students attending a school to grow by 27.6%, Non Sun West students attending a school to grow by 17.4%, home-based students to grow by 13.7%, traditional home schoolers to grow by 5.5%, adult learners to grow by 16.2%, and blended/hybrid course enrollments to grow by 12%.

Table 32: Growth - I believe the Sun West School Division Distance Learning Centre will continue to be successful

Survey Items	Teachers (n = 24)	Educational Assistants (n = 11)
Strongly Disagree	21%	0%
Disagree	0%	0%
Neutral	0%	9%
Agree	25%	36%
Strongly Agree	54%	55%

Overall, 79% of teachers and 91% of EAs believe that the Sun West School Division Distance Learning Centre will continue to be successful. In contrast, 21% of teachers strongly disagreed with the statement.

DLC FOCUS GROUP DATA

The areas most in need of improvement were discussed further during a focus group session with DLC teachers and staff. From the focus group, it was found that a primary challenge experienced by the staff, has largely emerged due to the success of the DLC, which has led to its rapid growth. In response, DLC staff members expressed the need for policies that serve to communicate expectations on workload or a "magic number" that denotes a limit of students in a particular section of a class. According to DLC staff, current efforts have articulated a limit of 22 students. However, what is missing are policies that communicate guidelines on what action the Division will take when the student-teacher ratio becomes unbalanced. For DLC staff, there is a need for proactive policies to address the student-ratio before it becomes an issue, rather than reactive policies that remedy the situation.

Focus group participants identified that while there is definitely a sense of team amongst staff members in the trenches, they perceive there to be a gap between staff members on the ground and administration. Particularly, there is a feeling that, "the head doesn't talk to the body" in terms of vision and goals, and the vision set forth by administration may be exceeding the capabilities of the body. Another challenge that emerged through the focus group discussion was the minimal training received for the new curriculum. Furthermore, DLC staff expressed that they had very little time to pilot, implement and phase in the new curriculum. According to some staff, they felt the list of outcomes was "dropped on their desks"

with minimal support and a lack of model lessons. The DLC staff further echoed that they could use more support with maintaining communication with parents and students. Currently, teachers are expected to make a phone call at the start of the term to welcome parents and students, which has been identified to be an important, but time-consuming task. Having additional support to complete that task would be appreciated. Finally, the focus group identified internal communication as another area that could be improved. Specifically, it was expressed that communication within the DLC often happens on an ad-hoc basis with the most common channel of communication occurring informally within the individual workrooms or email. DLC staff suggested that finding more opportunities for all DLC staff to meet, such as a DLC-staff meeting, would be beneficial.

DLC THOUGHTSTREAM RESPONSES

All parents, students and those directly connected to DLC students were asked to comment on four general questions about the DLC. Once the first round of questions was completed the entire list of thoughts was shared with the original survey group to be ranked based on what they felt was valuable. Participants could assign up to three priority stars to an item. Overall rating was the total number of stars. Participant count refers to the number of different participants who chose that "thought" as worthy of 1 - 3 stars.

Question 1. What are some things we can do in the DLC to continue to improve.

Thought	Overall rating	Participant count
Keep adding more variety of DL classes	156	67
Better communication and connection to the teacher	113	58
Timely responses	83	40
Daily timeline or completion schedule	57	26
Provide more detailed lesson plans and review questions	53	23
Have distance ed teachers visit the schools to help students	41	26

The top two responses on this table "Keep adding more variety of DL classes" and

"Better communication and connection to the teacher" were the top choices on all three

response groups.

Question 2. What are some of the key things you appreciate or think are working well in the DLC?

Topic	Overall Rating	Participant Count
Working at our own pace.	157	64
Welcoming and supportive attitude of staff and administration.	104	47
Variety	96	52
Independent studying	64	35
The videos are helpful	57	32
Teachers are timely with their grading and their feedback.	53	33

The top two responses on this table "Working at our own pace" and "Welcoming and supportive attitude of staff and administration" were the top choices on all three response groups.

Question 3. What are some examples of things you think people in the DLC should be able to experience or accomplish that they currently can not?

Topic	Overall Rating	Participant Count
Field trip	100	44
Student could interact and do more group work.	94	52
Meeting our teachers	84	38
More new courses	60	28
Type answers online online rather than print and fax paper.	46	19
More courses related to a career they want.	38	19

"Field trip" was first choice of students. "Student interaction and group work" was top choice for both parents and others.

Question 4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

These comments were not prioritized by participants. The overall comments were positive mostly sending thanks to the DLC for their excellent work. A significant number of respondents urged the SWSD to continue to push forward on innovation related to the DLC. There were critical comments calling for improvement but not by a significant number of respondents.
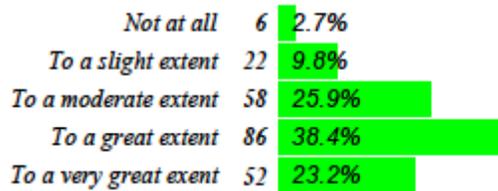
OCI SURVEY AS RELATED TO DLC

The Organizational Culture Inventory questionnaire included two DLC specific questions.

224 teachers and staff responded to these questions. When asked if the DLC contributed

positively to the SWSD average response was 3.7 on a scale of 5.

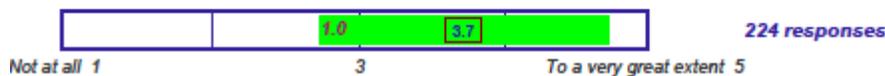': Has the Distance Learning Centre contributed positively to Sun West School Division?

	1.0	3.7		224 responses

Not at all 1   3   To a very great extent 5

': Has the Distance Learning Centre contributed positively to Sun West School Division?

Total responses out of 224

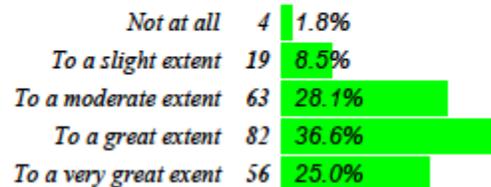|		
Not at all	6	2.7%
To a slight extent	22	9.8%
To a moderate extent	58	25.9%
To a great extent	86	38.4%
To a very great exent	52	23.2%

When asked if the DLC provided significantly enhanced access to learning opportunities

for SWSD students the average response was 3.7 on a scale of 5.

l : Has the Distance Learning Centre provided significantly enhanced assess (equity) to learning opportunities for Sun West School Division students?

	1.0	3.7		224 responses

Not at all 1   3   To a very great extent 5

: Has the Distance Learning Centre provided significantly enhanced assess (equity) to learning opportunities for Sun West School Division students?

Total responses out of 224

Not at all	4	1.8%
To a slight extent	19	8.5%
To a moderate extent	63	28.1%
To a great extent	82	36.6%
To a very great exent	56	25.0%

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING CENTRE

In summary there are many aspects of the Distance Learning Centre that are viewed in a positive light. Most teachers and EAs believe that the DLC provides a unique opportunity for learners to access a variety of classes. They see strengths of the program as the ability to work and learn at a pace that best suits the student. Providing the ability to be independent and flexible is also recognized as an important feature for learners. Diversity in course offerings was also a commonly held positive aspect of the DLC.

When asked to share their greatest concern teachers clearly identified the high teacher student ratio. Adding additional students to the online courses creates a workload and a marking load that is not manageable. They believe that administration needs to be more proactive around hiring in anticipation of number rising. With a lack of a clear policy related to many of the decisions impacting the DLC teachers are not certain about what the expectations are related to course numbers and support. As our survey results indicate, the vast majority of DLC teachers and EAs are anticipating continued growth in enrollments for all types of students over the next two years. It can be projected that addressing this concern will become increasingly important as the DLC continues to grow.

The other issue inherent in all distance education and online learning is a lack of face-to-face connection with students. This can be seen in the survey results where 37% of DLC teachers felt moderately connected to their students, while 17% felt only a little connected. The ability to establish relationships with students can be very beneficial for both teacher and learner. It was interesting that no teachers reported directly working with Dual credit students. As a result of the distance between teacher and student working through content can be a

challenge. Both the teachers and the EAs recognize that many students do not have the skills to manage their own learning. This includes study skills, time management, and sequencing learning and completing assessments. The EAs do what they can at local sites but struggle with the fact they are not content experts and lack of timely communication with teachers slows down the learning.

Participants feel that support is strong for DLC teachers and the DLC in general. Technology support is strong. The area that has the lowest perceived level of support minds of DLC teachers is student support services. When they reported on the level of professional development, teachers shared their belief that opportunities are low in all areas, especially curriculum. This finding was consistent with data from EAs who reported very low levels of professional development despite their important role in supporting DLC students and teachers.

Teamwork is a one of the most positive outcomes from the review. The strong teamwork is built upon being encouraged to try new things and share ideas. Teachers and EAs have a strong understanding of the goals and objectives of the DLC. Overall the DLC has very positive team atmosphere. The only factor related to teamwork that had a poor rating was involvement in setting goals for the DLC. Both teachers and EAs would like to have more open to input into planning.

Communication is an area of growth for the DLC. There is an opportunity to strengthen communication within the DLC and between the DLC and other parts of the Division. Teachers report that it is difficult to connect with parents at the beginning of the year. And we found that regular communication between EAs to be poor, especially with those outside of the DLC

framework. The communication gap also highlights an opportunity to strengthen DLC teacher - EA teamwork. Although the Internal DLC teacher relationships are viewed as strong the Teacher- EA relationship is not rated as positively from the individual teachers' perspective.

In the opinion of teachers and EAs equity and access are generally high for DLC students attending a Division school. As to be expected access decreases as the level of face-to-face contact also decreases. The level of support mirrors the data on access. Students who are considered Sun West Students receive the best access and support. Overall EAs report a stronger connection to students than teachers but the level of connectedness of DLC teachers is fairly strong. Only traditional home schoolers rate poorly on the access and support, which may be seen as both logical and an area for further program growth. Technology appears to be the number one factor limiting the access and support levels of DLC students.

Growth is a part of the reality of the DLC. This is a positive sign for any rural school division in Saskatchewan. It is the pace and impact of the growth that may become an issue. A sizeable number of teachers reported not comfortable with major program change. This coupled with a significant number feeling overwhelmed by their role in the DLC may be cause for further examination. The capacity of the DLC is high but investigating how much more room for growth is available with current resources may be necessary. A telling statistic may be the almost one quarter of teachers who strongly disagree that the DLC will continue to be successful. The most important issues related to growth according to teachers are course development time, course quality, and technological infrastructure which have significant human resource and budget implications.

In the Thoughtstream results there is a desire by parents and students for growth in course offerings. This supports the report's focus on the future of the DLC and connects with Central Administration priorities. Communication with teachers is also a highly rated "thought". The notion that the more contact the student has with a teacher the more successful they will be in their studies is supported in this well supported response. Teachers would support this notions but only if there were reduced course loads and other supports in place. It also reinforces the need to make early term contact with parents to create the initial bonds with teachers and families. Timely feedback was the third most highly ranked thought. Support for teachers and course loads and sizes impact the ability of teachers to respond to student in a timely fashion.

An element that was rated highly was the ability for students to work at their own pace. The welcoming and supportive attitude for staff and administration was also highly valued. Variety was also listed as highly important. We surmise that the variety refers to the range of courses offered by the DLC. This finding fits with feedback from DLC teachers and EAs that see the value in offering a wide range of courses.

To answer the Board's basic questions with respect to Distance Learning Centre, we offer the following:

1. **Is communication effectively managed and well perceived amongst all stakeholder groups?** Communication in DLC is not as effective as it needs to be. There are clearly identifiable gaps in the existing structure that negatively impact the success of the DLC.

2. **How do students, parents and community members perceive the SWSD?** For the most part the DLC is viewed positively by parents, students and members of the wider community. They see the DLC as providing a valuable service for students.

3. **How effective is the Distance Learning Centre in providing educational programming equity to students in Sun West?** Equity and access to education is rated highly by participants in the SWSD. The closer the group is to a physical location the better their equity is rated. That being said all five major target groups are being served to an acceptable degree by the DLC

4. **Is there a sense of 'team' within the division?** Those who work in the DLC and support DLC courses very much see themselves as part of a strong productive team.

5. **Are there sufficient feedback processes in place?** There is not a well-defined process for providing feedback amongst most of the stakeholder groups in the DLC. Teachers shared that the communication with administration should be better. Feedback from parents is lacking. Ability to communicate with parents does not work as well as it could.

With respect to implications from our findings: The Sun West School Division is heavily invested in the Distance Learning Centre. It not only provides unique opportunities for Division students but also makes its resources available to home schoolers, adult learners, and students in other divisions. The DLC has evolved to meet an ever-growing demand. The participants shared openly and honestly about their interactions with the DLC. A number of themes were found in distinct groups showing broad support for the outcomes. While we hope that the SWSD reviews the data we received, we would be remiss if we did not direct attention to areas that would benefit from attention and change.

1. There is a need to create specific policy related to all aspects of the DLC. This should be in the form of a document that outlines the direction and procedures that are currently used to guide the day-to-day operations and future growth of the DLC. An example that would be included in the document would be a policy to specify student/teacher ratios and course sizes. **We suggest developing** *a policy document that outlines the direction and procedures that are currently used to operate the Distance Learning Centre should be created and made available to all involved in the Centre.*

2. Teachers, EAs, students, and parents would benefit from a better feedback system. Students need to receive feedback on their work. Teachers need feedback on what is going well and is not going well. EAs need to connect with teachers when the students they support are in difficulty. Parents need a channel of communication with teachers. **We suggest the** *Division create a process integrated in all online courses to ensure an appropriate time for receiving feedback on assignments is met.* **It would be a benefit to** *regularly schedule contact between Educational Assistants and DLC teachers.* **We suggest that** *parents need a confidential online feedback system to share their thoughts about the DLC to improve course delivery.*

3. Teamwork is strong within the local DLC team but not amongst teachers and administration. A better system of consultation and communication between administration and teachers is required. Finding methods to improve the DLC teacher- EA relationships should be a priority. *We suggest scheduling regular consultation meetings with DLC teachers and Educational Assistants*.

4. Although it is clear that growth is expected it may not be readily embraced by a teaching and support staff that is work at a high capacity. The Division must ensure that growth is measured and resources are in place to facilitate proper support. **We suggest that *the division create and implement a long term plan for the DLC to prepare for future growth.***

5. Continuing to monitor advances in K - 12 distance education practice and looking for ways these tools and strategies can be integrated into the Sun West DLC is paramount. This includes looking for methods to mitigate transactional distance between teachers and students. Input from internal DLC staff and external partners is a key part of moving forward and well- informed approach to the DLC program. **We suggest that t*he Administration of the DLC create an oversight team to continue to research and study trends and innovation in K-12 Distance Education.***

SUN WEST SUPPORT SERVICES REVIEW INTRODUCTION

The role of the Support Services is to provide access, support, and opportunities to students studying in the Sun West School Division and teachers delivering that instruction. According to the Division website, Student Support Services personnel in Sun West School Division assist students to become successful, happy, well-rounded individuals. The Student Support Services team includes Learning Coaches, Technology Coaches, Educational Psychologists, an Addictions Educator, Speech and Language Pathologists, Student Support Consultants, and an Occupational Therapist. The Student Support Services team provides Sun West students with a full-range of professional services to help them with any issues that may arise, which could impact their education. (http://swsd-public.sharepoint.com/curriculum-programs-services/studen-support-services)

What are the reasons for doing a review of this role? With emphasis on equality of support for learning, the consultants chose to investigate how well students and staff in Sun West School Division are being served by support services.

Why this particular review? To determine what those providing the support services see are important issues related to their work. Identify opportunities to support existing effective practice and improve in areas where practice is not as effective as required or expected. Questions from the Sun West RFP specific to support services were:

- Is communication effectively managed and well perceived amongst all stakeholder groups?
- Is the division providing the appropriate support to schools to ensure the delivery of high quality educational services and programs to students?
- Are community partnerships developed to support student learning?
- Is there a sense of 'team' within the division?

METHODOLOGY OF SUPPORT SERVICES REVIEW

The review of the Support Services utilized a participatory approach: Various stakeholders and partners were contacted to share their understandings. Surveys were sent to all members of the support services staff. The review focus on the support services that examined teamwork, communication, equity, and growth. A focus group was conducted to gather qualitative insight into the survey findings. All Sun West teachers were asked two general questions in the OCI survey about support in the Division. Types of instruments used and why (in appendices): Anonymous surveys used to find out about the main themes in the proposal Questions. These surveys were modelled on the longer survey version used in the DLC review. The survey addressed similar themes deemed important by the Sun West School Division Central Administration.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS (CHRONOLOGY OF METHODOLOGY)

- Began with survey of all Support Services staff
- Focus group with sample of Support Services with 11 learning and technology coaches in Saskatoon on April 11, 2014.

TYPES OF DATA COLLECTED FOR DIVISION-LEVEL SUPPORT SERVICES REVIEW

Online surveys were sent to all members of Support Services in the Sun West School Division. 21 responses were received. Qualitative focus group data was collected from 11 of the SWSD Learning and Technology Coaches. The OCI questionnaire included two support services specific questions responded to by 224 teachers and staff.

Table 01: At what level are you employed to provide support?

Survey Items	Support Staff (n = 23)
Full 1.0	61%
Less than 1.0, more than 0.5 FTE	17%
0.5 FTE	22%
Less than 0.5 FTE	0%

Respondents were first asked to identify what level they were employed to support the Division and we found 61% were full 1.0s followed by 22% who were 0.5 FTE, and 17% who were less than 1.0 and more than 0.5 FTE. We asked respondents how many years they have provided support for the Sun West School Division. In response, the average years of experience was found to be 7.5 years.

We invited respondents to express their opinions on what they perceive the greatest strength(s) of the support services in the Sun West School Division. Many support staff respondents identified the diverse makeup in expertise, strengths and skill sets amongst staff members as one of its core strength. This diverse makeup is then paired with a culture of collaboration, support and teamwork amongst staff members in the Division. A third key ingredient in the work culture is the level of passion amongst the staff for their profession and their dedication to helping students.

Respondents were asked to identify the area(s) most in need of improvement with the support services in the Sun West School Division. We found that support staff identified three areas. First, respondents identified student support services as an area in need of improvement. Here, suggestions for how to improve student support services ranged from the

need for more people hired to strengthening the relationship between the Student Support Services team and the Curriculum team and finding more opportunities for the two teams to communicate and collaborate. One respondent further proposed the integration of all support services, such as learning coaches, students support consultants and technology coaches. Second, respondents expressed the desire for more focused goals and direction of the Division, rather than stretching staff members too thin through doing too much in too many areas. Finally, there is a need to provide additional training and mentorship for EAs.

Survey participants were then asked to comment on the benefits experienced by students due to the support services in the Sun West School Division. A key benefit is that students have access to teachers who are supported and encouraged to take risks. With this support students can be provided with differentiated instruction, innovative teaching, and the opportunity to develop to the best of their abilities. Students benefit by working in an environment that supports their personal success. This personal success is built through the creation of individualized curriculum and assessment. Sun West does its best to support students in their home schools by bringing the learning supports directly to them. Collaborative teams of highly skilled specialized professionals are employed by the SWSD to offer services like speech and language pathology to the students in need. Students benefit by the diversity of these teams. There are no gaps in what is offered to benefit student needs.

The next question asked about the greatest challenges experienced by students due to the of the support services in the Sun West School Division. Although it was identified that challenges will be different for each individual one of the most common responses was the need to develop learning skills such as independence, problem solving and mental health skills.

Some respondents identified the disconnect with the students' world at school and at home where they do not receive the same level of support as they do in the classroom. Dealing with life in a digital world where technology is everywhere and how to use it effectively has to be learned by students.

Overwhelmingly the greatest challenge faced by teachers in the Sun West School Division is the lack of time. Teachers work very hard to try to do everything but there is just not enough time to attend to all that is asked of them. Keeping up with innovation in programming and technology is challenging and stressful. Teachers feel the pressure to keep up with many demands and do not believe that they can pick and choose. Too many different program initiatives take the teachers in a variety of directions where they experience limited success. Support services believe that a narrower set of programming choices would create more success and allow teachers to better understand what is happening. This would ultimately help them manage their stress. Other challenges include access to qualified support in the form of EAs and specialized support staff and dealing with the diverse needs of students.

Table 02: Division Level of Support

Survey Items	Support Staff
Technology - Software	71%(5)*
Technology - Hardware	81%(0)
Technology - Network	76%(5)
Curriculum	81%(5)
Instruction	67%(5)*
Assessment	76%(10)
Student Support Services	60%(10)*
Educational Assistants	48%(19)*
Distance Learning Centre	71%(0)*

Likert scale = 1 (No support), 2, 3, 4, 5 (Completely supported)

Responses of "3" over 20% are indicated with *

Percentage of disagreement (1 and 2) are presented in brackets (xx)

Table 02 presents the support staff's perceptions of division level of support for the

Distance Learning Centre. In turn, a majority of respondents generally agreed that there was a

high level of Division support for each of the aforementioned areas. Specifically, support staff

perceived the areas of technology – hardware and curriculum to be the most supported. Over

70% of respondents further perceived the areas of technology – network, assessment and

technology – software are well-supported. 71% of support staff further agreed that the

Distance Learning Centre is well-supported by the Sun West School Division.

Table 03: To what extent have you been provided with Division professional development opportunities in the following areas:

Survey Items	Support Staff
Curriculum	40%(40)
Instruction	38%(24)*
Assessment	43%(24)*
Technology	43%(28)*

Likert scale = 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Occasionally), 4 (Frequently), 5 (Always)

"Occasionally" responses over 20% are indicated with *
Percentage of disagreement (Never or Rarely) are presented in brackets (xx)

When support staff members were asked about the regularity of professional development opportunities provided by the Division, less than 50% of respondents reported that they received professional development opportunities in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment and technology on a frequent basis. Within the four areas asked, support staff members were most likely to receive professional development opportunities in the areas of assessment and technology.

Respondents were further asked to specify any training or supports that have made them a more effective support of learning in the Division. In response, we received some enthusiastic comments from respondents who stated that the Division has been very supportive of PD and that numerous conferences, workshops and webinars have been beneficial to their work. Specific examples cited by respondents include the SSLA conference, the Sue Jackson Scholastic workshop, the FETC conference, SPDU, early learning workshops and

training provided by the Ministry of Education, Anne Davis, biennial ministry meetings, Sylvia Chard's Project-Based learning and many more.

TEAMWORK AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Table 04: Teamwork

Survey Items	Support Staff
I am encouraged to try new ways of doing things	86%(14)
I am encouraged to share ideas and resources	90%(5)
My work is valued and appreciated by my colleagues	86%(9)
I have the freedom to make decisions in my area of responsibility	95%(0)
I understand the goals and objectives of the SWSD	76%(5)
I participate in setting goals for the SWSD	45%(25)*
Collaboration amongst staff members is valued in the SWSD	86%(5)
The SWSD team effectively facilitates communication	62%(14)*
I am in regular communication with support services colleagues in other locations	76%(9)

Likert scale = Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

Neutral responses over 20% are indicated with *

Percentage of disagreement (disagree or strongly disagree) are presented in brackets (xx)

Table 04 explores the concept of teamwork and the overall sense of team from the perspective of the support staff. With regards to fostering an atmosphere of inclusivity, the vast majority of respondents are encouraged to try new ways of doing things, share ideas and resources, and have the freedom to make decisions in their area of responsibility. While 76% of support staff agreed that they understood the goals and objectives of the Division, only 45%

reported that they participate in setting goals for the Sun West School Division. With regards to

the overall sense of team, 86% of support staff perceives their work is valued and appreciated

by their colleagues and collaboration amongst staff members is valued in the Division. Finally,

when asked about the level of communication with colleagues, a majority of respondents

reported that they were in regular communication with support services colleagues in other

locations and the SWSD team effectively facilitates communication, though support staff

agreed to a lesser extent in contrast to the other areas of teamwork.

In addition, support staff respondents were given an opportunity to identify specific

activities that contribute to a sense of team in the Sun West School Division. Many respondents

echoed the importance of professional development opportunities and collaborative team

meetings to foster a sense of team. These opportunities help to develop friendships and team

culture, in addition to skills and competency. One respondent further expressed the importance

opportunities for personalized professional development in small groups, such as the 21st

Century Competency workshops or the Historical Thinking Group or the Science pilot teachers

group meetings. As identified by respondents, communicating online via Bridgit and the Sun

West wiki also help to foster a sense of team.

Support staff respondents were asked to share some of the challenges in providing

support to Sun West School Division students. In turn, respondents first expressed that the

distance to travel to and from schools in a vast geographic area can become very time-

consuming and expensive. Second, as the coaching model in the Sun West School Division

operates on invitation, support staff respondents find that there are teachers who are reluctant

to invite coaches into the classroom. At times, this can be attributed to a perceived fear from

teachers that asking for assistance is a sign of personal weakness. Finally, respondents

identified the challenge of student service staff members, such as student support consultants,

SLP and OTs, having high caseloads, and are being stretched thin.

Finally, when asked how respondents would characterize the support services model in

the Sun West School Division, we received the following common descriptors: collaborative,

diverse, team-focused, individualized and "just-in-time." Specifically, respondents utilized

descriptors such as collaborative, diverse and team-focused to depict the work culture and

atmosphere. Meanwhile, respondents used descriptors such as individualized and just-in-time

to illustrate the service and benefit they contribute in their one-on-one work with teachers,

which are very case-specific and respondents approach each case with an inclusive and

collaborative mentality.

Table 05: Teamwork - How would you rate your relationships with other support staff over the past year?

Survey Items	Support Staff (n = 21)
Poor	0%
Fair	5%
Good	24%
Very Good	38%
Excellent	33%

Overall, all support staff respondents reported positive relationships with other support staff in

the past year, with a majority of respondents rating it as very good to excellent.

Table 06: Teamwork - How would you rate the relationship between support staff and teachers in the SWSD?

Survey Items	Support Staff (n = 20)
Poor	0%
Fair	5%
Good	30%
Very Good	55%
Excellent	10%

A majority of support staff further rated their relationships with teachers as very good

with over 60% providing a rating of very good to excellent.

Table 07: The current support services model effectively supports instruction.

Survey Items	Support Staff (n = 21)
Strongly Disagree	0%
Disagree	0%
Neutral	43%
Agree	43%
Strongly Agree	14%

When asked if the current support services model effectively supports instruction, 57%

of support staff respondents agreed, while 43% remained neutral.

Table 08: Overall support services are well-integrated into the division.

Survey Items	Support Staff (n = 21)
Strongly Disagree	0%
Disagree	5%
Neutral	19%
Agree	67%
Strongly Agree	9%

As seen in Table 08, 76% of support staff perceived that support services are well-integrated into the Division.

Table 09: I am encouraged to contribute to the overall goals of the DLC.

Survey Items	Support Staff (n = 21)
Strongly Disagree	5%
Disagree	38%
Neutral	29%
Agree	24%
Strongly Agree	5%

When asked if respondents are encouraged to contribute to the overall goals of the

Distance Learning Centre, a more varied response was observed. Specifically, only 29% reported

that they are encouraged to contribute, in contrast to 43% who disagreed. Additionally, 29%

remained neutral.

Table 10: There are effective systems in place to give feedback on the support offered in the SWSD.

Survey Items	Support Staff (n = 21)
Strongly Disagree	5%
Disagree	43%
Neutral	29%
Agree	14%
Strongly Agree	9%

Respondents were asked if there are effective systems in place to give feedback on the support offered in the Sun West School Division. In turn, 48% did not perceive that there are effective feedback systems in place, while 23% agreed that there are. In addition, 29% remained neutral.

OCI QUESTIONS AS RELATED TO SUPPORT SERVICES

A majority of employees completing the OCI felt that the Sun West School Division provides excellent learning support services is provided for all its students.

: Does the Sun West School Division provide excellent learning support services for all its students?
Total responses out of 224
Not at all — 6 — 2.7%
To a slight extent — 38 — 17.0%
To a moderate extent — 73 — 32.6%
To a great extent — 83 — 37.1%
To a very great exent — 24 — 10.7%

The responses to the question "Are you provided adequate opportunities for on the job training and development for your role in this School Division?" shows a positive outcome with close to half believing that they are provided with adequate training supports for their job.

Total responses out of 225

Not at all	10	4.4%
To a slight extent	30	13.3%
To a moderate extent	74	32.9%
To a great extent	83	36.9%
To a very great exent	28	12.4%

SUPPORT SERVICES FOCUS GROUP WITH LEARNING COACHES

After the online survey data was collected and analyzed a focus group was carried out with learning coaches and technology coaches to generate discussion around main themes related to support. This section provides a summary of the data.

It was the opinion of the focus group that overall supports are well received by teachers. Depending on what they need assistance with there is strength on the learning coaches side. Teachers know they can find assistance from a variety of support people. There is a variety of experts in the Division and each brings a particular strength to their role. Focus group participants identified a strong push to focus on the needs of new teachers. This support can help new teachers when they are feeling overwhelmed and help to reduce the level of panic. The support staff members felt that all teachers know they can ask any question or send an email.

A key theme to emerge from the focus group was the positive change in the culture related to support services. In the past a visit from support services used to be viewed that someone was a bad teacher or was struggling. Now support visits are more about learning and improving teaching. Staff are more often providing support for innovation or responding to specific requests from teachers for help. A more open environment exists which couples with a Division wide initiative to provide more release time together to support 21st Century learning.

During the past year it was occasionally difficult to find in-school time, even when it was provided by the Division. Part of the added stress this year was a result of the Ministry of Education processes taking place. One participant referred to what the teachers were experiencing as "a bit shell shocked." This reduced some of the teacher capacity to be innovate or embrace change.

All of the focus group participants were positive about the work they are doing and realize that it comes with unique challenges. The first challenge that was discussed was around time and geography. The sheer size of the Division makes accessing each school a challenge. It is being done but it is a delicate process. The scheduling of support staff is new with number of assigned schools and teachers and is still evolving. The support for the coaches is inconsistent from school to school and there is still plenty of just-in-time support. It is the belief of the focus group that this will improve but there needs to be the development of trust. There is also a potential issue around the increasing number of EAL students. They are welcomed but there is an identified need more supports in this area.

It was mentioned a number of times that finding substitute teachers is the hardest part of providing out-of-class support. Principals are unable to find local substitutes to facilitate the releases to take advantage of the Technology support services. The problem is even greater for in school administrators because they are often pulled out of training and support around 21st Century competencies. This was identified as a gap in the support planning process. They see teachers really appreciating the 2 full or 4 half days of in-services but they also shared that new teachers need even more time.

The group working with technology and learning believes that their regular meetings go a long way in creating a cohesive team. They feel that they have the opportunity to have a say in strategic planning and freedom to be creative. However, they see a need for clearer long-term goals. They also see a need for a five-year plan and effective communication of long-term plans. They also comment that it was easier for coaches to develop a long term vision once they were out of the classroom.

The participants see many differences in the area of communication. Communication is key so that everyone in the school knows what is available. If they know the plan then they know when things break down or are not consistent. Part of the issue centers on too much or not enough information being passed on to teachers. They felt resources such as the Friday File or Bits'n Bites could be used better or shared more efficiently. They recognize that staff meetings are still important places to share information.

There has been a communication policy change from the previous administration where a stricter protocol was in place. The new administration is much less rigid regarding communication that has created both positives and negatives. There were parts of stricter previous communication plan that worked well such as who to cc in communication. With the loosening of the protocols staff need to be trained or reminded how to use communication channels such as email more effectively.

With a larger school division there needs to be more forward planning. This includes the creation of a strategic technology plan. Growth is scary and exciting at the same time but is less so when everyone can be part of the growth. Growth has come out of necessity or need. When new people are added to the support team it reminds current staff what they are capable of

and has become one of the unintended benefits of growth. The group sees that the Division has

been directed to have a planning structure but already had one. They see this outside

involvement as a difficult issue to navigate especially when they feel they are on track and the

ministry changes plans. A positive outcome is feeling a part of all superintendents not just

direct superintendents.

The support services staff in the SWSD is a diverse and collaborative group. They have the best interests of both the teachers and the students as their central focus. They value the unique skills that each member of the team brings to their work in the division. They value the collaboration that is a key part of the successful teamwork that exists. A structure that brings the two support services groups together to collaborate may make the team even more effective.

There are areas that present challenges and are in need of improvement. Finding more time and more efficient ways to engage teachers in developing innovative approaches to teaching is difficult. Student access to support and development of personal learning skills are also important. Although strong in most areas the level of support in Instruction, Support Services, and Educational Assistant needs to be improved. All areas of professional development opportunities rated low which presents an opportunity to provide more training for support staff. They pointed out that one of the best ways to continue to support the teamwork in the division is to provide more professional development opportunities. There is a need to have more qualified individuals working in the support services to increase the supports provided to students and teachers.

There is a strong sense of teamwork but general communication and feedback processes need to be improved. Communicating the roles of all support staff will be a useful way to ensure staff and students know what they do and make them feel welcomed into schools and classrooms.

Respondents reported not feeling involved in goal setting for the Division. There is little evidence for the effective support of the existing model. This is due to a lack of identifiable model or plan. As a result participants reported no encouragement to contribute to the overall goals of the division. The development of a thorough policy and long term plan for support services is needed.

In order to respond to Board's original questions to the consultants, we would say the following:

1. **Is communication effectively managed and well perceived amongst all stakeholder groups?** There is a generally held view by the support services staff that there is a need to improve the communication amongst stakeholder groups.

2. **Is the division providing the appropriate support to schools to ensure the delivery of high quality educational services and programs to students?** The Division has many excellent supports in place to deliver high quality educational services and programs to students.

3. **Are community partnerships developed to support student learning?** Survey participants did not identify any significant community partnerships engaged in supporting student learning.

4. **Is there a sense of 'team' within the division?** There is a strong sense of team within the support services staff in the Division.

There are a number of implications for Board consideration from these findings. Obviously, the Sun West School Division is heavily invested in the Support Services. It not only

provides unique opportunities for Division students but also makes its resources available

parents. The Support Services area works hard to meet an ever growing demand from teachers

and for students.

1. In addition to yearly work, a longer five-year approach to support services is needed.

A vision is needed to ensure proactive and not reactive work is taking place. Including all

support services staff in Division wide planning process related to issues that directly impact

their work will create a stronger more comprehensive group. **We suggest that the Division**

create and share a comprehensive long-term support services plan.

2. Teachers need to know what the roles of each support services position is, how they

may benefit from the position, and how to access the services provided. With this information

not only can student learning and teacher effectiveness improve but support services staff can

connect with those who may feel uncertain or uneasy about contacting them. **We suggest that**

the Division ***create and implement a better system of communication around the specific***

work of support services staff to teachers.

3. Our society is currently dealing with information overload. We not only have more

information but we also have many ways to access it. Teachers and the teaching profession are

not immune to this change. Part of being successful in supporting teachers and students is to

ensure they are kept informed. Email, websites, handouts and texts are all used to share

important guidelines, procedures, and instructions. In the Division there are key pieces of

information being circulated but there is no way of knowing if what is sent is being received by

the proper audience. **We suggest that the Division** ***reorganize existing communications***

protocols to ensure support services information is being shared with the proper audience.

4. To continue to learn and grow all staff need to be involved in on-going professional development. Support and encouragement from the Division makes the ability to thrive possible for all staff members especially those expected to be leaders in the Division. **We suggest that the Division *develop a clear process to address the professional development needs of all support services staff.***

5. Teamwork is strong in the Division but needs to be nurtured to maintain its strength. Existing systems that bring support staff together allow for the exchange of information and building of positive relationships are crucial for morale and communication. Collaboration between all support services staff not just internal to the two main groupings needs to be supported. **We suggest that the Division c*ontinue to have support services staff meet regularly to share ideas and maintain strong sense of teamwork.***

6. With an increase in expectations each year new ideas and program are put in place. Although well-meaning this continued layering can cause confusion and stress for staff. Programs that may need more time to develop are expected to be in place in short order. Overlap and mixed messages may arise from too much innovation and change. All of this in turn creates extra stress on staff. **Therefore, we suggest that the Division c*hoose to support a narrower band of Division-wide initiatives to reduce stress on teachers and make the work of the support services staff more focused and efficient.***

7. Finally, each student learns differently. Some are lucky to have well developed coping skills or are adaptable to different learning situations and content. However capable they may be the majority of students struggle at some point in their learning. If they are not equipped with basic skillsets, learning becomes difficult and they do not thrive. Only when they have an

appreciation of the skills necessary and how to develop and apply them can they reach their full individual potential. Learning about how to learn should be a key aspect of instruction in the division. **We suggest that *the Division should develop a strategy to nurture personal learning skills in all students.***