



Behind the classroom door: A Guide to the High School Report Card

AIMS Interim Report Card for
Western Canadian High Schools

RICK AUDAS
BOBBY O'KEEFE

In cooperation with



February 2010

Atlantic Institute for Market Studies

The Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS) is an independent, non-partisan, social and economic policy think tank based in Halifax. The Institute was founded by a group of Atlantic Canadians to broaden the debate about the realistic options available to build our economy.

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- b) investigating and analyzing the full range of options for public and private sector responses to the issues identified and acting as a catalyst for informed debate on those options, with a particular focus on strategies for overcoming Atlantic Canada's economic challenges in terms of regional disparities;
- c) communicating the conclusions of its research to a regional and national audience in a clear, non-partisan way; and
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Introduction

Canada's schools are perhaps its most important public institutions. They have the critical job of training the next generation of entrepreneurs, engineers, health professionals, artists, trades people and teachers. They are supposed to teach about citizenship, morality and justice. What institution could be more important? Despite this critical role – and growing evidence that we aren't doing well enough in this training - we know very little about what happens inside schools. There's very little information for parents or students to make an informed decision about whether the school they attend (or plan to attend) are effective at meeting these challenges. Does the school do well on standardized exams? Does it encourage its students to pursue post-secondary education? Does it prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead?

AIMS has been at the forefront of a movement to objectively examine school performance. We believe that developing an understanding of what schools need to do to succeed and having a forum through which all stakeholders can discuss and debate what a successful school looks like is a crucial step in building better schools.

Releasing information on high schools at the school level means that poorly-performing schools do not get to hide behind strong board results. At the same time, high-performing schools don't see their performance misrepresented by poorly performing school boards – and people in those schools' communities can celebrate that success, build upon it, and show others the way.

School systems, including ministries and departments of education and school districts, don't always see it that way. Often, they simply say "we're the experts, we've got the information we need, and that's enough." However, that contradicts research that finds simply making school level (not board, division, or provincial level information) available, makes schools perform better.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report on the 2006 Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) makes a compelling case for releasing results publicly on a school by school basis. The OECD's analysis found that making school level performance results public brought about improved performance in those schools. Further, the impact of the performance improvement was still significant when demographic and socio-economic factors were taken into consideration. Put simply, making achievement data public at the school level results in improved performance across the education system.

Openly distributing all of the information available within the public school system ensures that no one has to accept a "just trust us, we're the experts" response as a sufficient indicator of performance from a public institution. Nor should they have to.

With that in mind, this report looks at one way of getting good information on schools out in the open. The Atlantic Institute for Market Studies is currently working on its Eighth Annual Report Card on Atlantic Canadian High Schools. In cooperation with the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, we've now taken our "show on the road" and examine what a report card would look like for the Western provinces. This interim report will examine the information that's currently available, what that information looks like, and how it would be used in developing a report card for Western Canadian high schools.

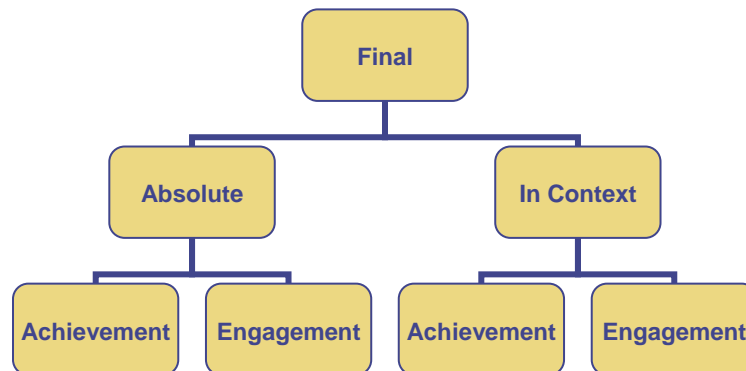
The *AIMS* Model

The AIMS Report Card on High Schools is a comprehensive scorecard approach to assessing school performance. The AIMS report looks not just at any one exam or set of exams to judge performance. Instead, AIMS looks at both a range of school achievement measures, including exams, as well as a range of school engagement measures, including attendance and student participation in university preparatory courses.

Additionally, the AIMS Report Card examines these results from two perspectives. First, each measure is evaluated in *Absolute* terms – each school’s performance on each individual measure is compared to the performance of all other schools in the province. Second, each measure is also measured *In Context* of the situation in which the school operates – that is, the school’s performance taking into consideration factors that are generally beyond a school’s control.

Each aspect of the above grading is given an equal weight in determining the overall result for each individual school. The Overall model for the AIMS Report Card is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – AIMS Report Card Overall Model



The Measures

For any school system examined through the AIMS’ model, there are three groups of measures – Inputs, Engagement Outcomes, and Achievement Outcomes.

Inputs are those measures that are beyond the control of the school but have an impact on school or student performance, like the relative affluence of the school population, the ratio of students to teachers within a school, or the achievement of students before they reach high school. Each input measure used has been shown to have an impact on student performance, but is primarily outside the control of the school. In the report card input measures are not used to directly compare schools, but rather to control for variables outside a school’s influence.

Engagement Outcomes are the outcome measures that assess how well students are engaged in their education, such as attendance. Achievement Outcomes are those measures people tend to associate with

grades – like provincial exam results and teacher assigned grades. The model also looks at achievement beyond high school, examining, where possible, the grades of students in post-secondary study.

The measures that AIMS uses for its existing Atlantic Canadian High School Report Card are:

Inputs:

- *HS Enrolment:* The number of students enrolled in high school grades.
- *PTR:* Pupil to teacher ratio, the ratio of all students to full-time equivalent teaching staff.
- *Average Teacher Certification:* An indicator of the average level of teaching qualifications and experience possessed by the teaching staff in a school.
- *SES:* The socio-economic status uses a number of measures to capture the social and economic conditions of the school's catchment area.
- *Feeder achievement:* An indicator of the performance of junior high or middle school students who go on to attend each high school.

Engagement:

- *Attendance:* Where available, the attendance rate of high school students.
- *Moving-on rates:* Based on the number of students who move from one grade to the next grade. The Grade 12 moving-on rate is calculated by dividing the number of graduating students by the number enrolled at the beginning of the year.
- *Post-secondary preparation:* Where available, the proportion of students participating in college preparatory math and language arts courses.
- *Post-secondary participation:* Where available, the proportion of students moving on, or intending to move on, to post-secondary education the year after graduation.

Achievement:

- *School marks:* Where available, the average teacher-assigned grades for general, academic and advanced level courses in math, science, language arts and humanities.
- *Provincial exams:* Where available, the average grade on provincial exams including math, science, language arts and humanities.
- *Post-secondary achievement:* Is based on the comparative academic success of Atlantic Canadian post-secondary students in their first year of post-secondary studies at 21 Atlantic Canadian universities and community colleges.

Western Canada Data

Western Canada's four provinces have varying viewpoints on the collection, use of, and distribution of school level data. Some provinces are quite open with their data and have the majority of their school level information available on their Ministry or Department of Education websites. Other provinces are quite cooperative in sharing the information they have collected, even if not currently available publicly. In one province school level information is not available to the public and they refuse to release any information that would allow school level comparisons to take place.

As a result of this variety of positions, to this point the data collected for Western Canadian high schools has varied a great deal depending on the province.

British Columbia

British Columbia is perhaps the most open of the four Western provinces in terms of the school level data they make available for students, parents, and the public. For every high school in British Columbia, one can download a "School Data Summary", a 51 page document with five-year comparisons of achievement results, enrollment reports, school and community demographics, and even student and parent satisfaction survey results.

If there is a complaint about British Columbia system of data collection and distribution, it is that there is not a more user friendly comparison between schools. All of the school level data is made available in individual school reports, but no comparison tables with data for all schools is made available at this time. Only district level comparisons are currently made public. However, Ministry representatives have indicated they will be remedying this and making more user friendly school level results.

The measures we currently have for British Columbia high schools are:

Inputs:

- Pupil Head Count: Enrollment in the high school grades at each school
- Average Class Size: High School Grade Class Sizes as reported by the Ministry of Education
- Socio-economic Factors: Measures listed below (all from Statistics Canada Census data) combined into a single indicator
 - Percentage of Single-parent households
 - Percentage of Low Income Households
 - Percentage high status occupations (Managerial and Professional)
 - Percent of People ≥ 25 with University Degree
 - Percent of People ≥ 25 with less than a High School Diploma
 - Median Household Income
 - Percent of 15-24 Year Olds Not in Education
 - Median Home Value (\$)
 - Median Gross Rent (\$)
 - Percent Employed ≥ 25 Years Old
 - Percent Unemployed ≥ 25 Years Old

- Percent Employed of Youth Ages 16-24
- Percent Unemployed of Youth Ages 16-24

Engagement:

- Moving-on rates: The number of students who move from one grade to the next grade. Each grade's moving-on rate is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in a grade into the number of students who enroll in a higher grade the following year. The grade 12 moving-on rate divides the number of graduating students by the number enrolled at the beginning of the year
- Student Satisfaction Survey: The percentage of students in Grade 12 who respond "Many times" or "All of the time" to the survey questions "Are you satisfied that school is preparing you for a job in the future?" and "Are you satisfied that school is preparing you for post-secondary education (for example, college, university, trade school)?"
- Parent Satisfaction Survey: The percentage of parents of high school students who respond "Many times" or "All of the time" to the survey questions "Are you satisfied that school is preparing you for a job in the future?" and "Are you satisfied that school is preparing you for post-secondary education (for example, college, university, trade school)?"

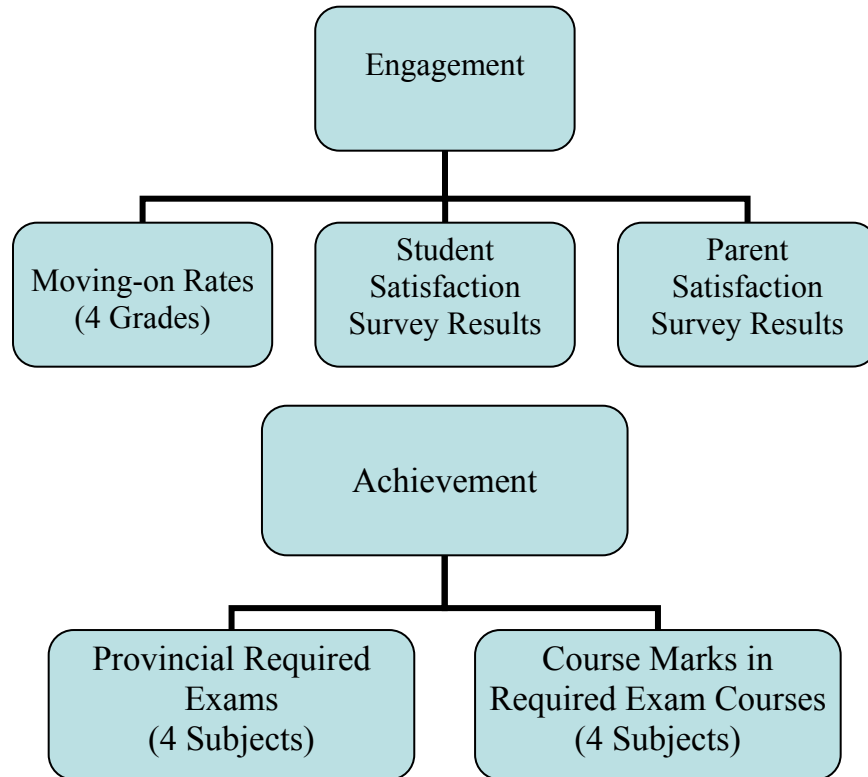
Achievement:

- British Columbia Grade 10, 11, and 12 Required Exams Provincial Exam Marks – including four subject areas
 - Math
 - Science
 - English Language Arts
 - Social Studies
- British Columbia Grade 10, 11, and 12 Teacher Assigned Grades in courses with Required Exams – including four subject areas
 - Math
 - Science
 - English Language Arts
 - Social Studies

[*Link to British Columbia school results*](#)

The overall model with these measures would add the levels shown in Figure 2 to that shown in Figure 1 above.

Figure 2 – British Columbia Engagement and Achievement Measures in the Overall Report Card Model



Alberta

The province of Alberta currently runs a close second to British Columbia in terms of the amount of school level information made available to the public. However, it also scores extra points for the ease of accessing that data. Alberta makes available all exam scores, teacher assigned grades, final grades, and enrolment data at the school level on the Ministry of Education website. The data are also presented in easy to use spreadsheet format which makes sorting schools an easier task for making comparisons. However the overall breadth is less comprehensive than that in British Columbia. As an example, graduation and drop-out rates are available are publically available for every school in British Columbia, while only district level information is available for schools in Alberta.

The results we currently have for Alberta high schools are:

Inputs:

- Pupil Head Count: Enrollment in the high school grades at each school
- Average Class Size: High School Grade Class Sizes as reported by the Ministry of Education¹
- Socio-economic Factors: Measures listed below combined into a single indicator
 - Percentage of Single-parent households
 - Percentage of Low Income Households
 - Percentage high status occupations (Managerial and Professional)
 - Percent of People ≥ 25 with University Degree
 - Percent of People ≥ 25 with less than a High School Diploma
 - Median Household Income
 - Percent of 15-24 Year Olds Not in Education
 - Median Home Value (\$)
 - Median Gross Rent (\$)
 - Percent Employed ≥ 25 Years Old
 - Percent Unemployed ≥ 25 Years Old
 - Percent Employed of Youth Ages 16-24
 - Percent Unemployed of Youth Ages 16-24

Engagement:

- Moving-on rates: The number of students who move from one grade to the next grade. Each grade's moving-on rate is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in a grade into the number of students who enroll in a higher grade the following year. The grade 12 moving-on rate divides the number of graduating students by the number enrolled at the beginning of the year.
- Diploma Exam Participation rates: As a proxy for the number of students participating or intending to participate in post-secondary education, we have the percentage of students participating in Alberta's Diploma Exam program.

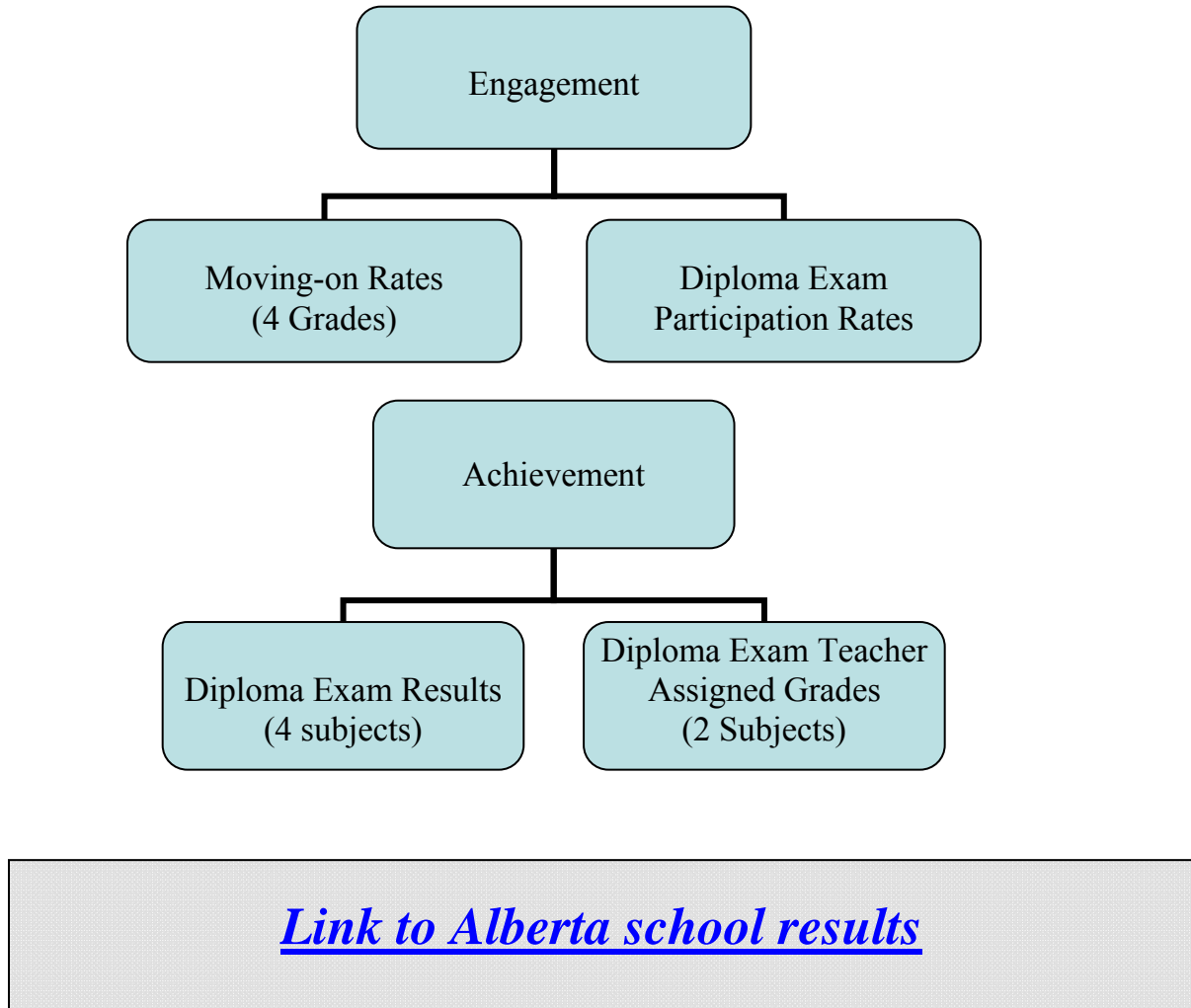
Achievement:

- Alberta Grade 12 Diploma Exam Results – including four subject areas:
 - Math
 - Science
 - English Language Arts
 - Social Studies
- Teacher Assigned Grades, or the portion of the final grade assigned by teacher assessments in each Grade 12 Diploma Exam course – including four subject areas:
 - Math
 - Science
 - English Language Arts
 - Social Studies

¹ The data included here uses the average class size at the district level. School level information will be requested from the districts prior to the first formal report card.

The overall model for Alberta with these measures would add the levels shown in Figure 3 to that shown in Figure 1 above.

Figure 3 – Alberta Engagement and Achievement Measures in the Overall Report Card Model



Saskatchewan

What the province of Saskatchewan lacked in available school level data online, they make up for in cooperation with requests for that data. So while the data for the measures used in AIMS model is not publicly available in a standard report, the Ministry of Education was very willing to participate and respond to requests for school level information. The ministry provided school level achievement data for both its provincial Assessment for Learning Program and teacher assigned grades in addition to a variety of measures on school enrollment demographics and engagement. Additionally the ministry has indicated they are working towards making more school level information available.

The dataset we currently have for Saskatchewan high schools includes the following measures.

Inputs:

- Pupil Head Count: Enrollment in the high school grades at each school
- Pupil Teacher Ratio: Enrollment in each building per the number of Full-Time Equivalent Educators in the building
- Socio-economic Factors: Measures listed below combined into a single indicator
 - Percentage of Single-parent households
 - Percentage of Low Income Households
 - Percentage high status occupations (Managerial and Professional)
 - Percent of People ≥ 25 with University Degree
 - Percent of People ≥ 25 with less than a High School Diploma
 - Median Household Income
 - Percent of 15-24 Year Olds Not in Education
 - Median Home Value (\$)
 - Median Gross Rent (\$)
 - Percent Employed ≥ 25 Years Old
 - Percent Unemployed ≥ 25 Years Old
 - Percent Employed of Youth Ages 16-24
 - Percent Unemployed of Youth Ages 16-24

Engagement:

- Moving-on rates: The number of students who move from one grade to the next grade. Each grade's moving-on rate is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in a grade into the number of students who enroll in a higher grade the following year.
- Persistence Rates: The Ministry of Education tracks the percentage of students who graduate within a 5 year period after starting grade 10.
- Preparation and Commitment to Learn / Home Support for Learning: As part of the Assessment for Learning program, Saskatchewan tracks measures of student Preparation and Commitment to Learn as well as Home Support for Learning in both Math and Reading.

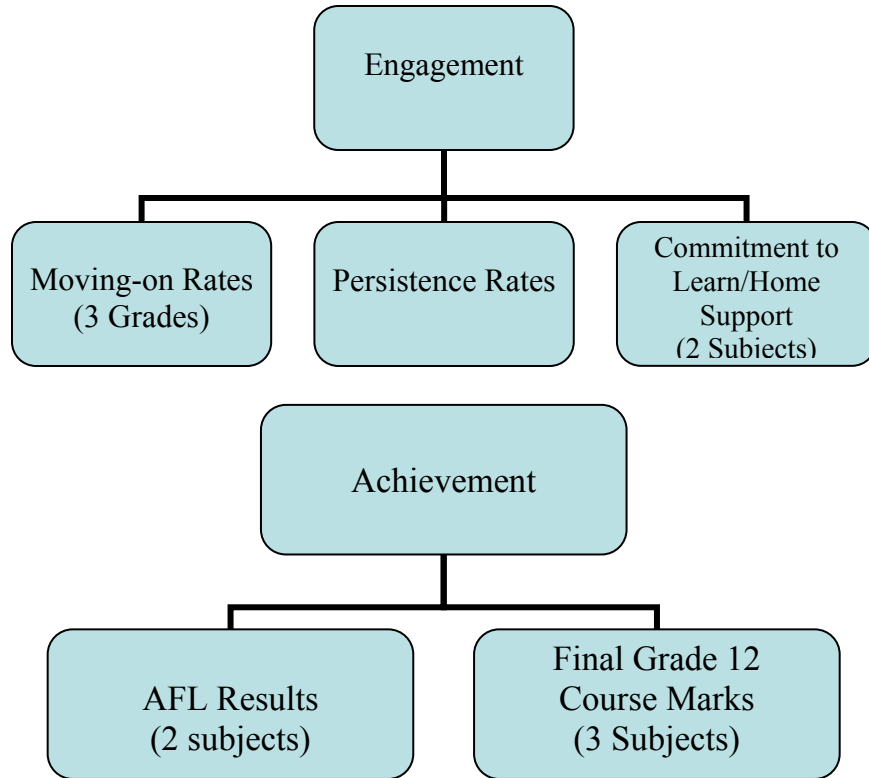
Achievement:

- Saskatchewan Provincial Assessment for Learning (AFL) Results – including 2 subject areas:
 - Math
 - Reading
- Final Marks awarded in three level 30 (Grade 12) subject areas:

- Math
- Science
- English Language Arts

The overall model for Saskatchewan with these measures would add the levels shown in Figure 4 to that shown in Figure 1 above.

Figure 4 – Saskatchewan Engagement and Achievement Measures in the Overall Report Card Model



[*Link to Saskatchewan school results*](#)

Manitoba

Finally we turn to Manitoba, where unfortunately we find the most limited access to valuable school level data. The department neither provides much school level data publicly, nor were they willing to provide many of the indicators that are widely available in other Canadian provinces. The province does provide school level grade-by-grade enrollment data publicly. As well, the Manitoba Department of Education did provide student postal codes which enable a Socio-economic profile to be constructed for schools. However, a 20 postal code cut-off for privacy purposes leaves many schools with no data available. It does not, however, provide any school level results of provincial assessments, number of graduating students at schools, attendance, or track participation in post-secondary study. Attempts to gather this additional data from individual school divisions were met with similar resistance; however there were a few divisions willing to provide information for their schools.

The dataset we currently have for Manitoba high schools includes the following measures.

Inputs:

- Pupils Head Count: Enrollment in the high school grades at each school
- Pupil Teacher Ratio: Enrollment in each building per the number of Full-Time Equivalent Educators in the building
- Socio-economic Factors: Measures listed below combined into a single indicator
 - Percentage of Single-parent households
 - Percentage of Low Income Households
 - Percentage high status occupations (Managerial and Professional)
 - Percent of People ≥ 25 with University Degree
 - Percent of People ≥ 25 with less than a High School Diploma
 - Median Household Income
 - Percent of 15-24 Year Olds Not in Education
 - Median Home Value (\$)
 - Median Gross Rent (\$)
 - Percent Employed ≥ 25 Years Old
 - Percent Unemployed ≥ 25 Years Old
 - Percent Employed of Youth Ages 16-24
 - Percent Unemployed of Youth Ages 16-24

Engagement:

- Moving-on rates: The number of students who move from one grade to the next grade. Each grade's moving-on rate is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in a grade into the number of students who enroll in a higher grade the following year.
- Post-Secondary Preparation: The percentage of students participating in post-secondary preparatory courses was reported by a limited number of school divisions, however many simply reported that "virtually all" of their students were enrolled in higher level courses.
- Attendance: Attendance rates were also reported by a limited number of school divisions.

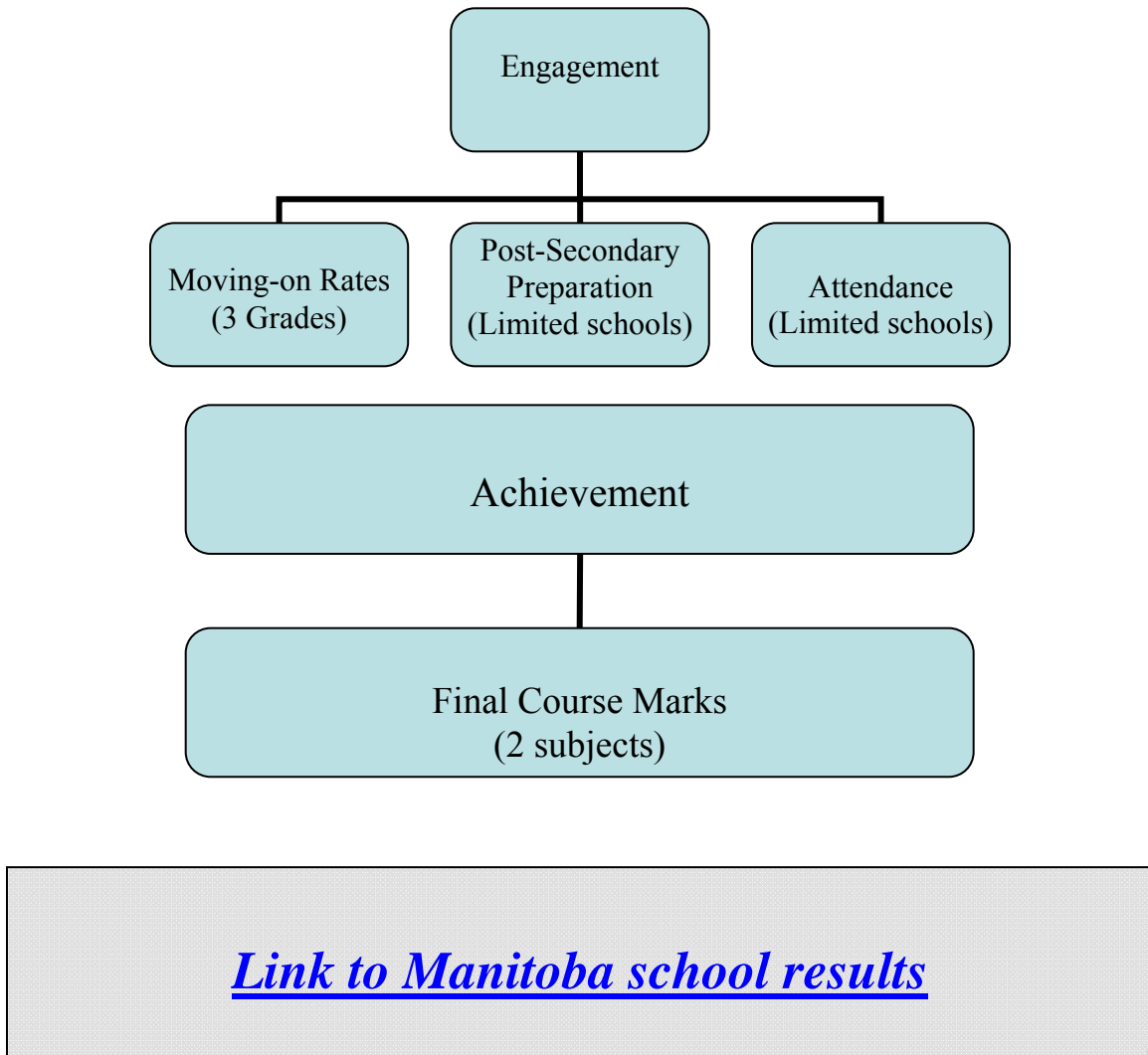
Achievement:

- Final Marks were reported by a limited number of school divisions in two subject areas:
 - Math

- English Language Arts

The overall model for Manitoba with these measures would add the levels shown in Figure 5 to that shown in Figure 1 above.

Figure 5 – Manitoba Engagement and Achievement Measures in the Overall Report Card Model



What's Missing

Compared to the AIMS report for Atlantic Canadian High Schools, a report card for Western Canadian High Schools would have a somewhat different array of measures. However, it would still maintain the comprehensive reporting approach with multiple measures for both engagement and achievement outcomes. A possible exception is Manitoba, which would have only final marks available for its achievement measures and only moving-on rates with a full set of data for engagement outcomes. Despite maintaining the balanced approach, there are a few measures or categories of measures that we have not been able to collect. Table 1 summarizes the availability of measures by each province.

Table 1 – Availability of Report Card Measures by province

	Measure	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	British Columbia
Inputs	High School Size	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	PTR	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Teacher Certification	No	Yes	No	No
	SES-Postal Codes	Yes - 20+	Yes - 5+	Yes - 5+	Yes - 5+
	Feeder Achievement ²	No	Yes	Yes	No
Achievement	PS Performance	Limited			
	PE Marks	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	School Marks	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Engagement	Moving On Rate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Persistence Rates	*	Yes	*	*
	Parent/Student Satisfaction	*	*	*	Yes
	Diploma Exam Participation	*	*	Yes	*
	PS Preparation	No	No	No	No
	PS Participation	No	No	No	No
	Attendance Rate	Limited	No	No	No

* Indicates a measure that is available in a particular province but is being used as a substitute for traditional measures included in the model, so was not requested from other provinces.

The most notable exception is a measure of post-secondary achievement. In spite of requests to both universities and community colleges across Western Canada, the vast majority of post-secondary institutions would not release average grades for first year students coming from Western Canadian high schools or could not readily access the data. Only two institutions, the University of Lethbridge and the University of Manitoba, either provided or stated they would provide the requested information. A few others replied to Freedom of Information requests with high fee estimates in return for providing the data.

² While school level feeder achievement data is available in Alberta and Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education indicated a willingness to supply the information, open choice policies of each province make it difficult to ascribe feeder results at a particular feeder school to a specific high school.

Another prominent piece of missing information is the lack of school level data tracking students transitioning from high school to further education or the workforce. While at least two of the four Atlantic provinces track and make available information on students moving from schools to university, community college, or other training through surveys of intentions or actual participation, only British Columbia provides a measure of this transition in Western Canada. Even in the case of British Columbia, the data for post-secondary transition is limited to those students who attend public post-secondary institutions within British Columbia.

School level attendance reports are another area that is not readily available for schools province-wide. Even British Columbia, in its 50-page reports for individual schools, does not report an average attendance for schools. This despite the fact that prior to each section it includes a disclaimer stating:

“When reviewing transitions, it may be valuable to examine and discuss achievement results with respect to prescribed learning outcomes, and the significance of the variety of factors that could affect transition, **such as student experiences and attendance**, curriculum relevance, instructional strategies, school policies and planning, etc.”³

Given the agreement among researchers and ministries/departments of education on the importance of attendance as a factor affecting educational outcomes, it appears that few see the need to make that information public for all stakeholders to consider.

Two input factors are also missing from our Western Canadian High School datasets, though for two quite different reasons. A measure of the average teacher qualification, education, or experience would be a valuable measure to take into consideration when measuring school performance – particularly in those jurisdictions where schools and principals do not have complete control over teacher selection. However only Saskatchewan makes that data available and that province only provides information by pay class, which may not provide the best measure of average teacher qualification.

The second is a measure of feeder achievement – how well students were doing in class before they reached high school. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba each have provincial assessments of some kind in Grade 8 or 9 for their students, with Alberta making those results public at the school level. British Columbia’s assessment program only covers grade 4 and 7, while provincial exams at the secondary level start in grade 10. The major issue here is the lack of available tracking data to determine where students from feeder schools are attending high school. To their credit, each province offers some measure of school choice, whether throughout the schools system or for high school, whereby students and their parents choose which high schools they attend. While this policy has shown a positive impact on students, it does have the drawback of not allowing a cohort or even a quasi-cohort analysis comparing feeder achievement to high school achievement and beyond in the absence of individual student level data. As a result we have left this measure out of our datasets at this point.

The note above from the British Columbia School reports also points to the importance of looking at multiple measures rather than single pieces of school information. As an example, take the case of two schools with low math exam scores. If one school also has low attendance to go with those low math scores, while the other doesn’t have a problem with attendance, clearly different measures may be required. In another example, high teacher assigned grades in a school might not be a good thing if a

³ This example is taken from Page 8 of the School Data Summary for Abbotsford Collegiate, available at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/school_perf/03434022.pdf.

school has low exam scores to go with it – but no one knows if it's high performance or simply grade inflation without other measures of performance to compare.

Now it's your turn

In Atlantic Canada we have a standing and open invitation – if anyone inside or outside the school system has other measures that should be included in measuring school performance, let us know and we will consider whether or not to include them in future reports. The choice of any such additional service measure or control variable will depend upon several things: it of course would have to be relevant; it would have to be amenable to quantitative measurement; and actual data would have to be available.

We look forward to timely and constructive comments and suggestions on the indicators, data, and methodologies that will go into our High School Report Cards: this is your chance to help us in ensuring that the best possible information goes into and comes out of the process. Forward comments to AIMS@AIMS.ca or write AIMS; 2000 Barrington Street – Suite 1302; Halifax, NS B3J 3K1.

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