

# Western School District Director's Report to Board

Volume 7, No. 3

December 2010

I take this opportunity to wish all trustees and staff of the Western School District a safe, healthy, happy holiday season, and all the best in the New Year.

Thank you to all staff and all schools for your continued focus on student learning.

## ~ FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING ~

### ■ Elementary Common Assessments

Western School District will be administering a common assessment again this year to Grades 4-6 students. The assessment is constructed to focus on Mathematics and English Language Arts. The English Language Arts section of the assessment is scheduled to be written in the week of January 10-14. Mathematics will be written in the following week, January 17-21.

It is the intent of this assessment to be formative in nature. It is designed to provide rich feedback to teachers on how their students are achieving in these disciplines, which will help direct future teaching and learning in our elementary classrooms. There is also a strong professional development component built into this initiative. The Western School District will provide training for about sixty of our elementary teachers in the provincial scoring rubrics for Mathematics and English Language Arts. Teachers will spend up to three days on this training and the actual scoring of student work. Teachers can apply for this professional development opportunity by submitting an application to District Office. The Scoring Team applications, along with the assessment materials, are scheduled to be sent to teachers in the first week of January.

### ■ Intermediate and High School Common Examinations

Again this year, a common district mid-year examination will be constructed and administered in Grade 9 English Language Arts and for the first time, in English 3201, World Geography 3202, and World History 3201. The construction committees for each of these mid-year exams have all met and exams are in the process of being validated. A marking panel to score components of the Grade 9 assessment will be formed in the New Year. This panel will direct its efforts towards addressing consistency in assessment practices, providing rubric training, and identifying challenges facing intermediate writing.

We are continuing to grow as a Professional Learning Community through initiatives such as the Cohort Program. Cohorts of three schools have been formed to construct mid-year examinations in Grades 7 and 8 English Language Arts. Participants will collaborate to construct mid-year examinations utilizing virtual tools, such as the First Class restricted-access

conference areas, Instant Messaging, Email, PolyCom, SMART Bridgit and Elluminate Live.

The district will also administer common final exams for English Language Arts and Mathematics, Grades 7 and 8, English 1201, and English 2201 again this year. Examination construction committees will be formed in the New Year to develop and validate the examinations. These committees will also make use of the technology noted previously for collaboration and discussion within a restricted-access virtual environment.

### ■ Mathematics Promotions

The provincial Excellence in Mathematics Strategy was implemented three years ago by the Department of Education. Schools have the opportunity to apply for mathematics promotion funding through this strategy. Successful applicants receive funding for the promotion of mathematics with their student and parent populations, and to support efforts to help foster a positive attitude toward mathematics. Schools in the Western School District have been very successful in receiving significant funding through this strategy in the past. The Department of Education is currently reviewing this year's applications and will be releasing the results in the near future.

### ■ Drama Theatre Festival

Sites for each of the district's High School Theatre competitions have been confirmed: Northern area – Canon Richards Memorial Academy; Central area - Corner Brook Regional High; Southern area - Burgeo Academy. Thespians from around the district will take to the stage during the second weekend in April 2011. The best production from each competition will move on to showcase their talents at the 35<sup>th</sup> Provincial High School Theatre Festival, which will be held in Burin during the first week in May 2011.

### ■ For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology (FIRST) Competition

On November 27, five schools from our district competed in the FIRST Lego Competition in Mount Pearl. This competition is for junior high students and involves building a robot capable of specific task completion using Lego materials. Participating teams were from William Gillett Academy, D.C. Young School, Main River Academy, Pasadena Academy, and G.C. Rowe Junior High. With the exception of G. C. Rowe, this was the first time these schools took part in this competition. By all accounts, the students had an excellent time at the event and some are already planning for next year. Several of our schools received awards including, "Team Perseverance", "Best Innovative Solution", "Gracious Professionalism", "Inspiration", and the "Rising Star Judges Award". Congratulations to all participating students and staff.

### ■ National Non-Smoking Week Student Contest

Again this year, the Tobacco-Free Network, Alliance for the Control of Tobacco, Western Health, and the Western School District are sponsoring a radio ad contest for National Non-Smoking Week. Submissions from schools were due by December 10. This project assimilated well with curriculum in Language Arts, Health, and/or Drama.

In January, five ads will be selected to represent the Western School District. Teachers of winning classes will receive \$200 to promote healthy living within the school, and a pool, skating or bowling party for the class. Students will also have a chance to have their ad played on CBC radio or Rogers Cable during National Non-Smoking Week, January 17-21, 2011. Best of luck to all entrants and thank you for promoting a smoke-free message for healthy living.

### ■ School Walking Clubs

Walking Clubs are an excellent way to promote healthy living. Students can walk during lunch, recess, or before/after school. In an effort to encourage more schools to set up walking clubs, a random draw for participating schools will be held monthly for the next five months. The selected school will receive \$100 to go towards promotion of healthy living within the school. All participating schools should be registered with the School Health Promotion Consultant.

## ~ FOCUS ON ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ~

### ■ Mathematics Curriculum Implementation

A new curriculum is currently in its first year of implementation for Mathematics in Grades 3, 6, and 9. A full day regional inservice (Session C) was recently held for Grades 3, 6, and 9 mathematics teachers throughout the district. Where possible, instructional support teachers with direct responsibility for mathematics in the grades noted also participated in these sessions. Mathematics implementation inservicing for a new Senior High Mathematics curriculum will begin in the spring of 2011.

### ■ Intermediate English Language Arts New Course Implementation

The Professional Learning model of the Department of Education provides time for teachers to review new resources in a course for which they have responsibilities. Teachers in our district availed of this time early in the fall. Also, one full day, face-to-face, was provided to Grade 7 ELA teachers, as part of this model, during the Fall Conference of the Western School District. Another half day has been allocated to this group of teachers for reflection and follow-up. This will occur in the New Year and will see clusters of teachers mobilize throughout our district.

### ■ Cultural Connections

Schools are currently taking part in an inventory of Fine Arts equipment and a 50/50 cost share program for new acquisitions and repairs to support the curriculum in Theatre Arts, Visual Arts, and Music.

Cloud River Academy has been selected to pilot the Arts Infused Curriculum Project, which will see a new level of just-in-time professional development for a Fine Arts teacher through 25 hours of work, both within and outside of the classroom environment with a local artist.

### ■ Inclusion

As the province moves toward more inclusive practices, the audience for many student support services guidelines and policies has broadened. The intended audience for the "Pathways 4 Guidelines", "Pervasive Needs Criteria", and "Roles of Teachers in Inclusive Schools" documents is all teaching staff. The Department of Education has asked that district staff, both from within and outside of Student Support Services, be prepared to speak to documents related to the province's move to an inclusive philosophy of education. Districts were asked to consider how to use the expertise of their personnel to deliver professional learning to educators. In an attempt to facilitate the coordinated and consistent delivery of professional learning related to these documents, our district is supporting schools through a phased approach.

Phase 1 included information sharing sessions throughout the fall for lead stakeholders (Educational Psychologists, Lead Instructional Resource Teachers, Guidance Counselors, School Administrators, and Student Support Services District Personnel). On December 14, the final session was held with District Program Staff and the Senior Administration Team.

Phase 2 has begun implementation with Information Sharing sessions underway for all Student Support Services School Teams. These sessions are being facilitated by lead stakeholders.

Phase 3 will involve information sharing for all teachers. This may take the form of professional development as part of a School Development Planning; staff meetings; District sessions offered as expression of interest; information incorporated into curriculum related professional development; and/or on-going consultation supported through lead stakeholders. Decisions related to Phase 3 implementation will be left to the discretion of individual schools, in consultation with the district.