

# Western School District Director's Report to Board

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April 2011

National Volunteer Week was April 10-16 and I take this opportunity to thank all volunteers in the Western School District who support student learning.

Thank you to the Board of Trustees for your commitment to education in the district and to staff who volunteer many hours above and beyond the regular workday so students can benefit from extra-curricular learning. I also thank all parents who volunteer as school council members or in other capacities in our schools. Many student activities would not take place without your dedication and commitment to youth. As well, I note many of our students volunteer within our schools and communities, and I thank them for their valuable contribution and demonstrated leadership.

## ~ FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING ~

### ■ Primary/Elementary Curriculum

The Department of Education will be implementing new curricula in the following areas in September: Kindergarten English Language Arts, Grade 2 Health and Religious Education, Grade 3 Social Studies, and Grade 6 Art. Information on professional development will be shared with teachers when available.

### ■ English Language Arts Curriculum (7-12)

Common Exams will be written in ELA 7, ELA 8, English 1201, and English 2201. A new course in English Language Arts 8 is scheduled for implementation in September 2011. The anchor resource has been selected and will be Nelson Literacy 8. Information on professional development will be shared with teachers as soon as it is finalized.

A provincial focus group for English 3201 has been selected to review the 3201 English course and assessment design. Two representatives from Western School District will serve on this committee.

### ■ Intermediate Text Renewal

The Intermediate Text Renewal initiative will continue in the 2011-12 school year. Similar to this year, the intent is to renew and expand upon adolescent literature in our intermediate schools. Guidelines around ordering will be made available in the coming weeks.

### ■ Senior High Mathematics Implementation

In September 2011, the new high school mathematics curriculum will commence implementation with the replacement of the current Mathematics 1204 and Mathematics 1206 courses with Mathematics 1201 (academic) and Mathematics 1202 (non-

academic/general). The new mathematics curriculum will be implemented in Level I in September 2011, Level II in September 2012, and in Level III in September 2013.

### ■ Mathematics Promotion

The Provincial Mathematics Strategy, originally announced in the 2007 Provincial Budget, has a promotional campaign as one of its components. The intent of this campaign is to build a culture of positive attitude toward mathematics among students and parents. Applications from individual schools in the Western School District were submitted to the Department of Education in December 2010. After reviewing the proposals, the Department has informed the district that it will receive a total of \$41,500 for the promotion of mathematics in 34 schools throughout the district. Information on individual school allocations and the procedures to be followed to attain this funding has been sent to school administrators.

### ■ Autism

The Department of Education has provided funding for Professional Learning Circles for teachers who are working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Professional Learning Circle works as a collaborative model in which small groups of teachers cooperate to share resources and engage in collaborative problem solving. Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and the Inclusion Itinerant have also been involved in the Professional Learning Circles as resources for participating teachers. Professional Learning Circles have been offered in the northern, southern, and central regions of the district. There is funding for an additional two sessions this year.

### ■ Working with At-Risk Students

This year Corner Brook Regional High received a new teacher to work with at risk youth. The province introduced four similar positions at that time in other districts as well. The role of Student Success Teachers is to focus on the development of initiatives and approaches designed to enhance students' learning options and improve the educational outcomes for high school students who are deemed to be at risk of leaving school early.

Student Success Teachers will also work with youth who have left high school early and may want to return, or who may want to connect with learning options at the community level and/or educational service agencies outside the K-12 system.

### ■ Inclusive Education Initiative

On May 10, school administrators, education officers and program specialists for twelve schools in the northern area will gather in Cow Head to receive training on collaborative teaching models and differentiated instruction as Phase 3 schools under the Inclusive Education Initiative. At the end of the 2012 school

year, twenty-eight schools in the Western School District will have received training and resources to support an inclusive model of education. The Department of Education is providing \$3000 per school to support and promote inclusive practices within the whole school community.

#### ■ **Enrichment**

As part of the Western School District Enrichment program, the cardboard boat race was re-initiated in our district this year after a one year break. There were thirty-two teams competing, representing nine schools. Teams had 90 minutes to build a boat out of two large sheets of cardboard and a roll of duct tape. Students then raced their boats across the pool at the Memorial University Grenfell Campus swimming pool, where they were timed and tested for how much weight they could hold. Congratulations to all participants and to the top three teams, who were all from Pasadena Academy.

#### ■ **Roots of Empathy**

The Roots of Empathy classroom program meets many of the goals of **Safe and Caring Schools**. The program has been shown to have a dramatic effect in reducing levels of aggression and violence among school children, while raising social and emotional competence and increasing empathy. Roots of Empathy's mission is to build caring, peaceful and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

At the heart of the program is a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom once a month for a full school year. A certified instructor works with a specialized curriculum and makes 27 class visits to coach students in observing the baby's development, celebrating milestones, interacting with the baby, and learning about infant needs and temperament. Roots of Empathy's success is due in part to the universal nature of the program: all students are positively engaged instead of the targeted approach used by some other programs. There are currently 400 children from eleven schools in the Western School District participating in this program.

For further information on the Roots of Empathy program, please contact Betty at [betty.tilley@wnlsd.ca](mailto:betty.tilley@wnlsd.ca) or visit their website at [www.rootsofempathy.org](http://www.rootsofempathy.org)

#### ■ **Regional Drama Festival**

Congratulations to all participants in the three Regional Theatre Festivals held at Canon Richards Memorial Academy, Flower's Cove; Corner Brook Regional High; and Burgeo Academy. Participating schools included Canon Richards Memorial Academy, Corner Brook Regional High, Gros Morne Academy, Rocky Harbour; G. C. Rowe Junior High, Corner Brook; Main River Academy, Pollard's Point; Elwood High School, Deer Lake; Templeton Academy, Meadows; Presentation Junior High, Corner Brook; Burgeo Academy; LeGallis Memorial, Isle aux Morts; and Appalachia High School, St. George's.

The three regional winners who will represent the Western School District at the 35<sup>th</sup> Provincial High School Drama Festival in Burin May 5-7 are: Viking Trail Academy, Xavier Jr. High, and St. James Regional High. I wish all three theatre groups the best of luck.

#### ■ **Spring Leadership Meeting**

The Spring Leadership Meeting was held April 12-13 at the Pepsi Centre in Corner Brook. The theme of this meeting was "From Intentions to Actions: Committing to our Collective Focus." Sessions focused on a number of important items, including the district's Student Assessment and Evaluation policy, strategies to improve student graduation rates, formative assessment practices to enhance student learning, strategic planning for 2011-14, new technology initiatives within the district, and strategies for administrators to engage in performance coaching with staff.

#### ■ **Creating Safe Places**

The Department of Education and the Western School District partnered to deliver a two-day training session entitled *Creating Safe Spaces: Affirming Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth and Adults*. Day 1 was attended by eleven junior/senior high school teachers and fifteen guidance counselors from throughout the district. This segment was entitled *Building the Foundation for Effective Intervention*. The focus was on themes related to myths that negatively influence attitudes and approaches toward these populations. Homophobic and heterosexist attitudes and beliefs still present in our culture were discussed. Participants also examined how such attitudes affect lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. Specifically the session looked at: What causes sexual orientation? Where do our beliefs come from? And how can I help?

Guidance Counselors attended Day 2, entitled *The Arduous Journey to Self-Acceptance*. This session explored the complexities of what is commonly referred to as the "coming-out" process. All lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals have had to journey towards an acceptance of their same-sex attractions and feelings. This process presents different challenges for both youth and adults. The session presented a six stage "coming out" model, detailing the challenges associated with each stage. The goal was to help guidance counselors identify where an individual may be in his/her process, which in turn would help guide interventions needed by the students.

The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian Schools research, completed through the University of Winnipeg, is scheduled to be released in May 2011 and will be made available to staff through First Class. This research focused on the opinions and feelings of youth in our schools on homophobia and will help staff create supportive environments based identified needs.