

Western School District Director's Report to Board

Volume 8, No. 2

October 2011

The Western School District priority continues to be maximum achievement for all students. This fall there has been a significant focus on professional development opportunities for all staff, and detailed data analysis to ensure assessment for learning to enhance student achievement.

~ FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING ~

■ Student Assessment Results, 2010-2011

Assessment results from Criterion Reference Tests at grades three, six and nine, and Public Exams at Level III were made available to the Western School District in September. Results of these assessments were communicated to all districts and schools early in the 2011-12 school year.

At the end of Primary (Grade 3), Western School District results on both the English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments were below provincial average in the majority of strands assessed, with the exception of three strands of the selected response sections. The Western School District average was above the province for the previous three years in rubric-assessed and open-constructed response strands. Western School District students experienced growth in Listening and Problem Solving strands however, still placed below provincial average, indicating that the province experienced more substantial growth during 2010-11.

At the end of Elementary (Grade 6), Western School District results on the English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments varied across subject and strands assessed. With the exception of Demand Writing, which showed substantial growth, the results of all other strands of English Language Arts were below provincial average, some dipping below for the first time in three years. In the Mathematics assessment, with the exception of two selected/written response strands, Western School District students performed above the provincial average, a trend experienced for the past five years in Open Constructed Response sections of the assessment.

At the Intermediate (Grade 9), Western School District results in both English Language Arts and Mathematics have historically been above provincial average in all strands of the assessments. This is true again for the 2010-11 school year with the exception of one strand in English Language Arts. This marks the first time in three years that results on the Poetic strand dipped below the provincial mean.

At the Public Exam level (Grade 12), Western School District results vary from course to course. Results in Academic Mathematics and World Geography continue to be above the province in all strands of the assessments, a trend experienced for the last four years in both subjects. In English Language Arts

and Biology, results have historically been below provincial means in most strands, a trend that continued in 2011-12.

For the past four years, the Western School District has increased its overall graduation rate, placing at or above the provincial mean in all years. Another focus was to increase our percentage of students graduating with an academic status. In doing so, we have decreased our General Status Graduation Rate from 45 % down to 35.78% over the same four years. Our continued efforts around ensuring all students are on the correct path to graduation have resulted in significantly lower numbers of students being placed in general stream courses. Current statistics indicate that increasingly more students will graduate from Western School District schools with an academic status, thus continuing to lower our General Status Graduation Rate and increase opportunities for our graduates. However, our success in keeping more students in academic programs has resulted in lower averages in various subjects.

■ First Lego League

This year we have 7 schools competing in the First Lego League, 4 of what are brand new schools. The First Lego League is a robotics competition where Junior High students build a robot using lego robotics materials. These robots are then used to compete in a predesigned challenge. The competition will take place in St. John's on November 26.

■ Healthy Eating - Engaging Parents

At school curriculum nights in the Western School District in September, public health nurses spoke to parents on the importance of healthy eating. The nurses presented a PowerPoint presentation and distributed over 40,000 brochures, 1000 posters, and 7500 fridge magnets to promote good nutrition among parents and students. From feedback received, the presentation was well received by parents. Thank you to Western Health for their participation in this initiative.

~ FOCUS ON ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ~

■ Regional Conferences

Throughout the fall, district and school staff continued their efforts to provide quality professional learning opportunities for teachers, which included a two-day Regional Conference in three locations across the district. The first conference was held in St. Anthony October 4-5, for all 210 teachers from all 7 Labrador schools and from French Shore Academy north to St. Anthony. Similar conferences were held October 20-21 in Corner Brook for 610 teachers and on October 27-28 in Stephenville for 240 teachers in the southern region of the district.

The first day of the conference was focused on the topic of assessment, evaluation and grading. Mr. David Nagel, Senior Professional Development Consultant with the Leadership and

Learning Center, delivered a Keynote address entitled "What Does Effective Grading Really Mean and How Can We Get There?" Following this custom-designed DVD interactive session, district staff delivered sessions that facilitated the deep exploration of the district's assessment, evaluation and grading policy. Throughout the day there were many opportunities for teachers to engage in dialogue regarding differentiated instructional and assessment/evaluation practices that help all students achieve success.

Day two of the conference provided both curriculum-specific and generic professional learning sessions for teachers. There were sessions for teachers responsible for teaching new curricula this year in a wide range of subject areas from Kindergarten to grade 12. These included programs such as kindergarten English Language Arts, Grade 6 Art, Grade 9 Social Studies, Math 1201/1202 and Entrepreneurship 3209 to mention a few. As well, there were a number of curriculum-related generic sessions such as Literature Circles (K-6, 7-12), Grade 5 Math, Visual Arts (intermediate), Math and Science (intermediate), and Music (k-12). Other generic sessions included First Aid training, Career Cruising, Introduction to Smart Technology and a host of sessions relating to student support services.

■ **Primary/Elementary Programs**

Before the end of October, teachers throughout the district will have received professional development in the following areas: Kindergarten English Language Arts, Grade 2 Health, Grade 2 Religious Education, Grade 3 Social Studies, Grade 4 Art, and Grade 6 Art. In all areas, excluding Art, teachers will be given a second follow-up day of inservice in these areas.

Three teachers from the Western School District have been selected to participate in a K-6 Technology Integration Pilot for our district, one from each of our regions. This pilot involves teachers integrating technology in the different subject areas.

■ **English Language Arts**

During the Western School District's fall professional development conferences, several sessions in the area of English Language Arts (ELA) were held. New course implementation in ELA 8 was a full day session attended by all ELA 8 teachers. The day consisted of an overview of the new anchor resources and program design, the revised curriculum guide, the Specific Curriculum Outcomes, and assessment. Time on the agenda was allocated for sharing best practices. Teachers shared lesson plans and effective teaching strategies, particularly in the area of differentiated instruction.

Literature Circles is one of many strategies teachers may use in their classes to motivate and encourage students to read. A full day session on the pedagogy, set up, expectations, assignment of roles and assessment was attended by many English teachers in grades 7-9. Also, because a thrust in the program design of intermediate ELA is the workshop model, a session around readers'/writers' workshopping was held. During this session, teachers were provided with information around the philosophy of workshopping, its set up, intent and effectiveness. In the afternoon, a writers' workshop was modeled for participants to demonstrate its functionality.

Both sessions (Literature Circles and Workshopping) were offered as a result of two things: the program design of the revised intermediate ELA program which has workshopping as its focus, and the quest of teachers to motivate our adolescent readers.

■ **Social Studies**

Social Studies (Grade 9) and Entrepreneurship 3209 New Course Implementations involved teachers working with the program specialist and a lead teacher in a practical introduction to the curriculum outcomes and framework, and the use of the guide as a primary support for teaching and learning. Teachers were provided with a variety of practical strategies for formative assessment, as well as being introduced to the integrated concepts and processes for the social sciences and the use of models for inquiry and analysis.

■ **Fine Arts**

Fine Arts teachers met with lead teachers and colleagues to explore practical strategies for assessing and evaluating students' achievement of curriculum outcomes in the disciplines of Visual Art, Music and Theatre Arts. There was a focus on the conceptual strands which govern the Fine Arts, various methods for teaching, and assessment tools for measuring performance based outcomes.

■ **Mathematics Curriculum Implementation**

A new mathematics curriculum is currently in its first year of implementation for Level I. Initial inservicing occurred last spring for all classroom and instructional resource teachers for Mathematics 1201 and 1202. A second full day regional inservice (Session C) will soon be completed, as most of these sessions occurred during Day 2 of the regional closeout professional development conferences. For those unable to attend the session, a follow-up session will be provided in the near future. Mathematics implementation inservicing for the new Level II mathematics curriculum will begin in the spring of 2012.

■ **Technology Professional Development**

During the regional closeouts, teachers were offered two sessions using new technologies, with a focus on differentiated instruction and formative assessment. In one session, teacher learned how to use Notebook software, in conjunction with SMART Boards, to create lessons that were both engaging and fun. In another session, teachers were shown how to use SMART response systems (individual student clickers) as an effective tool for formative assessment.

■ **Common Assessments**

In 2011, teachers across the district participated in mid-year exam cohorts. Seven cohorts made up from three schools each, collectively and collaboratively created a common mid-year exam in ELA at the intermediate level. This initiative will continue this year with the hope that an even greater number of schools participates in the experience. Exams for the 2011-2012 school year include ELA Grade 8 final, ELA Grade 9 mid-year, English 2201 final, and English 3201 mid-year.