

Western School District Director's Report to Board

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I take this opportunity to thank all schools for their continued focus on student learning and improved educational outcomes for all students. I also wish all trustees and all staff of the Western School District a very happy Christmas and all the best in the New Year.

~ FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING ~

The Western School District remains committed to our strategic issue of student learning. Our collective, concentrated focus on student assessment, evaluation, and improved program/educational opportunities is designed to ensure maximum learning for all students.

■ **Primary/Elementary Assessment**

Common assessments in Mathematics and English Language Arts for Grades 5 and 6 are scheduled for January and February. Lead teachers from all regions of our district will be involved in the construction of the common assessments and the facilitation of regional scoring teams to be established this year. Small groups of Grades 5 and 6 teachers will receive training on the provincial scoring rubrics and score a percentage of student work. It is hoped that this experience will serve as a model for school-based formative assessment work in these and other curriculum areas.

■ **Primary/Elementary Professional Development for New Curricula**

Teachers delivering new courses received two days of professional development. The first day was provided during the regional fall conferences and the second day for each new curriculum area is scheduled for early in the New Year. These sessions will be held regionally and will involve the following curriculum areas: Kindergarten English Language Arts, Grade 2 Health and Religious Education, and Grade 3 Social Studies.

■ **Intermediate/High School District Common Exams**

A common district mid-year examination will be constructed again this year and administered in Grade 9 English Language Arts, English 3201, World Geography 3202, and World History 3201. The construction committees for these exams have all met and exams are in the process of being validated.

We are continuing to grow as a Professional Learning Community through initiatives such as the Cohort Program. Cohorts of two 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 communication technology 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, Grade 8, 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 above for collaboration within a restricted-access virtual environment.

■ **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 teaching responsibilities. Teachers in our district availed of this time early in the fall. Also, one full day was provided to Grade 8 English Language Arts teachers, as part of this model, during the district's Regional Fall Conference. 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 involve clusters of teachers mobilizing throughout the district.

New course implementation for Grade 9 English Language Arts will occur in the spring and fall of 2012.

■ **Mathematics**

A high school common mid-year examination for all students of Mathematics 3204 will be administered again this year. A construction committee for the Mathematics 3204 course will be established in the near future to construct the district common mid-year examination for late January.

■ **Robotics System Technology**

All teachers who currently teach the senior high technology course Robotics Systems Technology 3205 recently attended a two-day inservice in Corner Brook. This inservice was sponsored by the Western School District and jointly facilitated with assistance from the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation. The focus of this inservice was on remote interface control systems and related fabrication techniques, and programming. We are hoping to expand the number of schools currently offering this course during the next school year.

■ **Assistive Technology**

There are many teachers in the Western School District availing of Assistive Technology to support students with identified exceptionalities. Assistive Technology is any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of students with exceptionalities.

Assistive Technology allows students to be more independent in their learning and increase their academic success. The use of technology to enhance learning allows students to use their abilities (strengths) to work around their exceptionalities (challenges). The most commonly used devices in the district

include: Word Q/Speak Q, Kurzweil, Reading Pen, Writing Pen, and Prolouqe2Go. Recently, iPads have been made available for students who are nonverbal. In November, two webinar training sessions, one on Proloque2Go and one on the iPad, were made available to teachers in the district to help support students with the use of these devices.

■ **Healthy Youth Relationships**

The Western School District has partnered with the Canadian Red Cross to provide programming focused on healthy peer relationships to junior and senior high school students. The program focuses on dispelling relationship and gender stereotyping, building healthy communication skills, and empowering youth to make healthy relationship choices. This program fits the learning outcomes for junior and senior high school courses in areas such as Health, Adolescent Relationships, Human Dynamics, and Healthy Living.

■ **Addictions Prevention/Outreach Initiative**

The Western School District has partnered with the Department of Health and Community Services to present the play "The Incinerator Road Tour" to high school students. The play outlines an account of life issues and addictions with the goal of increasing awareness of (and prevention of) addictions. Five schools availed of this learning opportunity last year. An additional four schools have been selected to avail of the opportunity this year: Belanger Memorial High, Upper Ferry; Elwood High School, Deer Lake; Templeton Collegiate, Gillams; and Stephenville High School, for a total of nine schools to have viewed this play by the end of this year.

■ **Kids Eat Healthy School Programs**

The Coleman's Group of Companies recently held a *Kids Eat Healthy* fundraising promotion to promote healthy eating among youth. Congratulations to the thirty-two schools in the Western School District that received \$500 each towards healthy eating initiatives and thank you to all schools that applied. Special thanks to Coleman's as the corporate sponsors of this event for their wonderful support and also for their Kids Get Active promotion coming in January and February 2012.

~ FOCUS ON ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ~

Student learning is enhanced when teachers and other professionals in the district engage in continuous professional development. The wise use of planning, time and resources enables staff to support student learning through organizational learning and effectiveness.

■ **Winter Internship Program, Memorial University**

The Western School District, in partnership with the Faculty of Education - Memorial University, continues its collaborative efforts to host teacher interns at our schools. During the Winter Semester, beginning January 3, 2012, thirty-eight new teacher interns will begin their thirteen week placements at various schools throughout the district. These interns, who are now completing Education degree programs in primary/elementary and intermediate/high school levels, are eager to network with

youth and staff. The internship program provides excellent opportunities to learn practical teaching experiences alongside our district's teachers and other district personnel. It is a richly rewarding experience for the entire school community and all teacher interns are warmly welcomed to the Western School District.

■ **Student Support Services**

Four meetings have been held this year with Educational Psychologists, Student Support Services Itinerants, Guidance Counselors and Lead Instructional Resource Teachers. While some agenda items were role specific, the main goals were: 1) to provide some clarity to the many main themes or topics associated with Inclusion and our Service Delivery Model for students with exceptionalities; 2) to explore the contents of a Professional Learning Package that will soon be available to Principals via the Department of Education; 3) to explore the tools this professional learning package offers to support teacher professional learning for stakeholders, and to explore the leadership needed to implement Department guidelines around inclusion and service delivery at the school and district level; and 4) to consider how we can individually and collectively communicate the messages that need to be consistently delivered to the field as follow up to these meetings.

■ **Non-Violent Crisis Intervention**

Non-Violent Crisis Intervention training was held November 17-18 for a number of teachers and administrators. The training was facilitated by two educational psychologists from the district. This certified training session emphasizes early intervention and non-physical methods of preventing or managing disruptive behavior. Personal safety techniques are included. As well, the study and practice of crisis prevention methods, including restraint positions, transport techniques and team strategies are introduced.

■ **School Development**

During the months of September and October, internal and external assessment data were analyzed and reports were developed to help guide schools in identifying strengths and challenges. These strengths and challenges were used to improve school development plans to guide individual staffs in their creation of action plans developed to meet the learning needs of students.

In the 2011-12 school year, eighteen schools are renewing their school growth plans and engaging in the school development model for the second time. By the end of January, the seventeen schools currently engaged in the school development model will have completed the internal review portion of the process, which will include the writing of their school development plan. These schools will begin the process of external review at the end of January. The goal is for all schools to have external validation completed by the end of April.

Thank you to all schools for your commitment to the school development process, which is designed to improve student learning in the Western School District.