

Western School District Director's Report to Board

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Thank you to all teachers and to all staff for your continued efforts and commitment to maximizing learning for all students.

~ FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING ~

■ New Curriculum Implementation (K-6)

Teacher professional learning sessions for new curriculum implementations in K-6 have been completed in the Southern and Central Regions. Northern sessions are scheduled for February 16-17.

■ Elementary Mid-Year Assessments

All grade 5 and 6 students in the district will complete a mid-year assessment in both Mathematics and English Language Arts. Mathematics will be written during the week of January 30-February 2 and English Language Arts will be written in the week of February 6-10. Regional Scoring Teams will meet to score the assessments. Guidelines and timelines have been sent to all schools including information for classroom teachers to score the assessments for their students, for returning the assessments to their Regional Offices, and for applying for Regional Scoring Teams.

■ Skills for the 21st Century Learner

The Program Development Consultants at the Department of Education are embedding 21st Century Skills into new curriculum development. For example, the new Social Studies curriculum addresses this issue and has provided information on specific skills which would do just that. The emphasis is on developing students who are critical thinkers, have critical literacy skills, and who collaborate to solve problems. Linked to student engagement and motivation are the essentials of curriculum being meaningful, dealing with significant issues, being appropriately challenging, involving active engagement and responsibility, and being integrated across subject-specific borders. The direction focuses on "Forms of Analysis" which encourage students to engage in text with the purpose of gaining information in order to make an informed decision on an issue.

The forms of analysis include: Use Information, Make Comparisons, Identify Cause and Consequence, Consider Perspective, Determine Significance, and Make Value Judgements. While these forms of analysis are specific to the new social studies programs, specifically Grades 3 and 4, we urge teachers to review this material and, where appropriate, use these "forms of analysis" in other subject areas.

K-6 students will complete both internal common assessments-created within their school, District Common Assessments created by program specialists and teachers, and Provincial Assessments in the form of CRTs at end of Grades 3 and 6. These assessments require students to be able to read text and engage with text to make connections to prior knowledge and

understanding. To make informed inferences and successfully respond to text and answer questions on these assessments, students will need to be versed on the forms of analysis. Classrooms where teachers spend significant time introducing the forms of analysis, and where students spend time practicing these skills using descriptive feedback provided by their teacher, will have a greater potential for higher academic achievement on both their internal and external assessments.

A key to creating the 21st Century Learner is the encouragement for students to "create inquiry questions" and to "question answers". In order for students to become critically literate citizens who have the skills needed to achieve success in the future, it is necessary to provide these rich learning opportunities early in their school years.

■ English Language Arts Curriculum

Professional development for the new English Language Arts Grade 8 program is nearing completion for this year. In accordance with the Department of Education's Professional Learning Model, all teachers with responsibilities in English Language Arts 8 will receive another half day of inservice, which is scheduled to take place in February. A curriculum working group is currently revising the English Language Arts Grade 9 program, with implementation scheduled for September 2012.

While outcomes have NOT changed, the vehicle with which we use to achieve these outcomes has. The revised anchor resources in English Language Arts Grades 7, 8, and 9 are more current and better situate students to achieve the expected outcomes. Also, these revised resources appeal to the adolescent student and provide students with more experiences with 21st century literacies, i.e., media, information gathering.

■ Intermediate/High School Mid-Year Assessments

During the week of January 23-27, senior high school students throughout the district wrote mid-year examinations in a variety of courses, including English, Mathematics, Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Earth Systems), Social Studies, and French. Intermediate students completed mid-year examinations in English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and French. Additionally, five cohorts involving eleven schools collaborated on the construction of a common midyear exam in English Language Arts for Grades 7 and 8. Creation of these exams was made possible through online collaboration, with direction provided by Program Specialists.

These exams provide summative assessment of student progress for the first half of the school year. In line with the provisions in our new policy and its focus on intervention and maximizing academic achievement for all students, teachers will now ensure the exams are also used as formative assessment tools. This will entail providing students with descriptive feedback focused on improving their work, and ensuring strategic use of instructional

time to review the exam and to provide exemplars of quality responses.

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

Common mid-year assessments constructed by teacher panels were administered in Grade 9 English Language Arts and English 3201. Assessment results will be communicated to parents in February.

■ **Internal Assessment Program**

Common examination committees for English Language Arts Grade 8 and English 2201 will be selected in the near future. The committees will construct district common examinations for administration in June 2012.

■ **Mathematics**

A common mid-year examination for all students of Mathematics 3204 was administered on January 24. A detailed analysis of the selected response items will now be compiled and communicated to teachers by district staff to help inform instruction and student learning for the remainder of the school year.

Common examination construction committees for Mathematics Grade 8, Math 2204, and Math 2205 will soon be selected to construct the district common examinations for June 2012.

The Department of Education is currently developing curriculum resources for three new courses for Level 2 Mathematics. Inservicing for these courses will begin in the spring, for curriculum implementation in September 2012.

■ **Mathematics Promotion**

The Department of Education has once again allocated a significant amount of money for schools throughout the province related to mathematics promotion. Applications from individual schools were submitted to the Department of Education in early November 2011. Department personnel have reviewed these proposals and decisions regarding allocation of funds will be communicated directly to schools in the near future.

~ FOCUS ON ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ~

■ **School Development**

Currently, fourteen of the eighteen schools involved in the School Development renewal stage have completed their internal review and have developed both their one year plan and their long term plan. Three of the remaining schools will complete their plan by the end of February, and the one outstanding school at this stage will be completed in the spring of 2012, using the small schools model. On February 7, we will begin the process of externally validating schools.

■ **Inclusive Education**

The Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador defines inclusive education as a philosophy that promotes the rights of all students to attend school with their peers and to receive appropriate and quality programming. Inclusive education involves a continuum of supports and services in the most appropriate setting respecting the dignity of the student and

values the participation of all members of the school community. This implies a welcoming school culture where all members of the school community feel they belong, realize their potential, and contribute to the life of the school. Inclusive education celebrates diversity in a safe and caring environment.

As an ongoing part of the inclusive education initiative, an additional twelve schools have been selected for the 2011-12 school year as part of the Phase 3 (Inclusion Pilot). The selection was made regionally to include all schools north of Cow Head, including Cloud River Academy, H.G. Fillier Academy, Mary Simms All-Grade, St. Anthony Elementary, Bayview Regional Collegiate, Truman Edison Memorial, Harriot Curtis Collegiate, Holy Cross All-Grade, French Shore Academy, Sacred Heart All-Grade and James Cook Memorial. One school from Corner Brook, St. Gerard's Elementary, was also selected.

Each of these twelve schools have received full staff professional development using the resource "Moving Towards an Inclusive Environment". Each school has completed an inclusive action plan which is embedded in the school development plan. Also, schools have received additional resources and substitute days to facilitate collaboration and planning within and between their school and others.

■ **Safe and Caring School Awards**

Safe and Caring Schools Special Projects Awards are funded by the Department of Education and awarded annually. This year, nineteen applications were received from across the district and all were submitted to the Provincial Safe & Caring Schools committee for selection. Congratulations to the nine schools with approved projects for \$500 awards.

■ **Creating Safe Spaces: Affirming Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth and Adults**

On January 12, senior district staff attended a one-day session, Creating Safe Spaces: Affirming Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth and Adults, sponsored by the Department of Education. This awareness session examined the dynamics of an effective school system's response to homophobic bullying by presenting current research, sensitizing the participants to the dynamics and impact of homophobic bullying, presenting the landmark Canadian legal decisions related to bullying, particularly that which is homophobic in nature, and proposing a systemic intervention which would contribute to eliminating this form of violence in schools. The aim is to build awareness of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning) concerns and to prevent all forms of bullying and harassment in the school environment.

The next step is to facilitate awareness sessions with all administrators and guidance counselors in each of the districts. The Department of Education will also provide teacher resources to establish *My GSAs* (My Gay Straight Alliances) in junior and senior high schools across the province, which is a student club with LGBTQ and heterosexual student membership. The focus of *My GSA* is to provide safer community spaces where students can promote rights for all people, build safer and more accepting school environments, and promote diversity and inclusiveness among the entire school community.