

Western School District Director's Report to Board

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The theme of Education Week, *techKNOWLEDGEy* •*technoSAVOIR*, places emphasis on the use of technology in the learning environment, with heightened awareness of the positive role technology can play in the accumulation of knowledge.

Thank you to teachers, administrators and all staff, for your continued contribution and commitment to student learning.

~ FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING ~

■ Elementary Common Assessments

Common Assessments were administered in January and February in elementary schools to Grades 5 and 6 students in Mathematics and English Language Arts. In English Language Arts, students were assessed in writing, reading, and viewing strands. In Mathematics, students had opportunities to demonstrate their ability through selected response, written response, and constructed response in a number of strands.

One of the fundamental aspects of the assessment process is the professional learning provided to teachers. It is very important to build capacity in schools so that we can have an ever-increasing number of people who can lead teacher professional development sessions and provide assistance to teachers, specifically with information around the provincial scoring rubrics. In the spirit of building capacity among the teachers in schools, there were some changes to the Common Assessment process this year.

For the first time in three years, teachers were invited to become involved with the actual assessment construction. Lead teachers and Literacy Numeracy Support teachers, assisted by Program Specialists, were instrumental in selecting the reading pieces as well as constructing the draft assessments. For the Mathematics assessments, Numeracy Support teachers were involved as well.

Lead teachers engaged in a training session whereby they chose exemplars to use with the scoring panel. These teachers also wrote the rationale for each piece that was selected as an exemplar. During the scoring process, the lead teachers were also involved in the training of other teachers who had been selected as a part of the District Scoring Teams.

Another change that occurred this year is that scoring took place in all three regions: Stephenville, St. Anthony, and Corner Brook. In the two previous years all teachers came to Corner Brook to work on the Scoring Team. All three sites reported this as a very positive experience. This meant less travel than in previous years.

Assessment results will be returned to teachers, who will then use these results as formative assessment to see where their students are doing well and to determine future instruction in areas that may be of concern. In an effort to enhance teacher effectiveness in providing the best learning opportunity for their students for the remainder of this year, the scoring teams from all three locations provided a list of observations and suggestions for each assessment. This list is currently being collated and will be sent to schools in the near future. Finally, the assessment process is intended to provide teachers with an indication of whether or not they require further professional development in the scoring rubrics.

■ Common District Exams

In the February Director's report, information was shared regarding the District's initiatives around mid-year common assessments in English Language Arts at the intermediate and senior high school levels. Final reports on results are being prepared and will be distributed to schools soon. In addition to this focus on common mid-year assessments, District committees are currently developing common final examinations for Grade 8 English Language Arts and English 2201, to be administered in June. These common examinations help maintain a focus on the core curriculum outcomes. Teachers who serve and/or have served on the examination construction committees consistently indicate that this experience provides them with valuable professional development. The Western School District leads the province in this initiative, and we thank all those involved for your time and commitment to this work.

■ English Language Arts – New Course Implementation

All teachers in the district have now had the follow-up half day session to provide feedback on the new resources and changes to the Grade 8 English Language Arts curriculum. A new Grade 9 program will be implemented in September 2012. The Professional Learning Model that was launched by the Department of Education to introduce any new curriculum has been the model employed in the implementation and professional learning for the English Language Arts program in Grades 7 and 8, with the model to be revisited for Grade 9.

■ Senior High Mathematics Implementation

In September 2012, implementation of the new Level II Mathematics curriculum will begin with the replacement of the current Mathematics 2204, 2205, and 2206 with Mathematics 2200 (Advanced), Mathematics 2201 (Academic), and Mathematics 2202 (Applied/General). The implementation of the new Mathematics curriculum will continue for Level III in September 2013.

■ Mathematics Promotion Grants Awarded

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 early November. After reviewing the proposals, the Department informed the District that it will receive a total of \$38,000 for this initiative in thirty schools throughout the district as one continued component of the Excellence in Mathematics Strategy. Information on individual school allocations and the procedures to be followed to attain this funding has been sent to school administrators.

■ **Inclusive Education**

As an ongoing part of the Inclusive Education Initiative, ten Phase 4 (Inclusion Pilot) schools have been selected for the 2012-13 school year. The selection was made regionally to include south eastern coastal Labrador schools and the remaining schools south of Cow Head to Trout River. The schools selected are: Basque Memorial, Raymond Ward Memorial, William Gillett Academy, Bayside Academy, St. Lewis Academy, St. Mary's All-Grade, Gros Morne Academy, Bonne Bay Academy, Jakeman All-Grade, and Hampden Academy.

Training for school administrators will take place in March and April. Training for the Labrador schools will take place on March 28 in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in collaboration with the Labrador School District. The remaining schools will receive training on April 17 in Deer Lake.

Each of these ten schools will receive full staff professional development using the resource *Moving Towards an Inclusive Environment*. Funding for resources will be made available to all schools and an order will be sent in before the end of this year. Also, schools will receive additional resources and substitute days to facilitate collaboration and planning within and between schools.

At the end of the 2013 school year, Western School District will have 38 schools trained under the Inclusive Education Pilot Initiative.

■ **Autism**

In January, two professional learning circles were conducted for teachers who are working with students with autism. One learning circle was held in the Port aux Basques area, and the other was held in the Stephenville area. Each teacher brought a strategy, a resource, or material that they found useful in working with a student with Autism. As a result of this meeting, an internet Autism Group was set up on First Class and teachers uploaded resources that can now be accessed through that link.

During the learning circle, discussions took place around a number of topics that are relevant to teaching students with autism. For example, developing friendships, use of reinforcers, transitions, understanding emotions, and promoting independence were all topics that generated a great deal of discussion and personal sharing from teachers. There was a focus on the Intervention Ziggurat and needs of individuals with autism, starting with sensory and biological needs, reinforcement, structure and visual supports, tasks demands, and the skills to be taught.

There will be three more learning circles in the next few months: one will be on the Northern Peninsula (involving teachers from Labrador on Polycom), one in the Deer Lake, and one in Corner Brook.

■ **Positive Behaviour Supports**

Positive Behaviour Supports (PBS) remains a significant focus for the Western School District. So far this year, two schools have completed a one-day school-wide training and information session. Two other schools included a PBS presentation during a staff meeting.

■ **School Nutrition**

March is Nutrition Month, a perfect time to promote healthy eating with students. As Nutrition is an important part of the Health curriculum, we would encourage teachers to promote healthy eating this month. Please visit the student health section of our website for additional information on school-based initiatives that promote healthy eating.

~ FOCUS ON ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ~

■ **Assistive Technology**

Many teachers throughout the Western School District are taking the initiative to become more informed on the different types of Assistive Technology that are available for use within the classroom. During January and February two half-day sessions were provided to 23 Instructional Resource Teachers on Kurzweil (text to speech reader software) and the benefits to the student in the classroom. This training was provided by the Department of Education and additional training was provided to other teachers by the District Itinerant for Assistive Technology. Teachers who are interested in receiving training are asked to contact Student Support Services.

■ **Safe and Caring Schools Partner with the Corner Brook Crime Prevention Committee**

The Corner Brook Crime Prevention Committee supported anti-bullying initiatives, in partnership with the Western School District, February 27 to March 2. Representatives from the District and the Committee attended a proclamation signing with the Mayor of Corner Brook, declaring February 29 Bullying Prevention and Awareness Day in the City of Corner Brook.

Corner Brook Café dedicated the full program on Wednesday, February 29, to anti-bullying awareness. Guests for the panel discussion included a representative from the Western School District, the Western Regional Coalition to End Violence, the Corner Brook Women's Centre, and the Corner Brook Crime Prevention Committee. The panel discussion focused on how significant the issue of bullying is, what can be done to reduce/eliminate it, and provided an opportunity to highlight some of the initiatives of various organizations.

I thank everyone who was involved in bringing public visibility to this very important issue. I am confident our continued collective efforts, in partnerships with community, will help promote respectful environments.