

Western School District Director's Report to Board

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The priority of the Western School District continues to be maximum achievement for all students and ensuring that our organizational learning and infrastructure goals support our goal of student learning. The District remains committed to professional growth of staff and the provision of safe and caring learning environments and facilities. Schools again this fall had opportunities to complete data analysis, develop professional learning plans, and prepare for new course implementation.

~ FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING ~

Provincial curriculum undergoes changes periodically as the Department of Education is always improving student learning opportunities through new instructional approaches and engaging material. Professional development for new courses assists teachers in preparing for these new programs, provides opportunity to network with other teachers, and also provides an opportunity to reflect on instructional practices. New programs, and the professional development related to them, are crucial elements of our student achievement focus.

■ New Course Implementation

There are two new curriculum implementations this year in K-6, Grade 4 English Language Arts (ELA) and Grade 5 Social Studies. The professional learning for teachers with responsibilities for these courses involves three sessions. The first session (half day) was completed independently at individual schools where teachers familiarized themselves with the new curriculum guide and the authorized resource. The second (full day) session involved the teachers meeting for one day at a regional level. During this time, teachers reflected on their experience with the new curriculum to date and spent time with colleagues to address areas of challenge, as well as collaboratively plan for upcoming units/topics. The third session (half day) will take place over this fall, with teachers meeting in small groups to collaborate on various topics associated with the curriculum.

Grade 4 English Language Arts teachers, along with Literacy Numeracy teachers and Instructional Resource teachers, also had an opportunity this fall to participate in a professional learning session developed specifically for the new Grade 4 ELA curriculum. The session was facilitated by the National Literacy Consultant for Scholastic Canada. The main focus was the importance of a Balanced Literacy Approach, which advocates the importance of establishing a Literacy Block of uninterrupted time in which students and teachers are immersed in rich literacy activities to enhance student engagement in reading and writing. The session also focused on the importance of oral language development to promote literacy.

The Balanced Literacy Approach is endorsed in the ELA Curriculum which promotes the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model. This model immerses students in modeled

reading, shared reading and guided reading, with the aim being to have all students become proficient, independent readers.

■ English Language Arts

New course implementation sessions for Grade 9 English Language Arts have been completed in all regions of our District, with follow up sessions to occur in February. The English 3201 Public Exam has been revised and teachers have been sent a sample of the new revisions. It can be found on the Department of Education website, along with a revised Table of Specifications and answer key.

Intermediate Print Resources ordered last spring have been arriving at Learning Resource Distribution Centre (LRDC). LRDC is in the process of distributing these to schools. Some schools still have a balance in the Library Resource Grant. A memo was sent to schools to advise them of their balances, with suggestions as to how the remaining funds might be used.

■ Mathematics Curriculum Implementation

A new Mathematics curriculum is currently in its first year of implementation for Level II. The second full day professional learning session for Mathematics 2201 (Academic) and 2202 (Applied) occurred during the regional close-out in October. Teachers with responsibilities for Mathematics 2200 (Advanced) will engage in professional learning in late November. Mathematics professional learning sessions for the new Level III Mathematics curriculum will begin in the spring of 2013.

■ Technology Curriculum Implementation

A new technology module is being implemented in Grade 8. Each teacher with responsibilities for this production module has received a full day professional learning session on this new curriculum during the regional close-out in October. Teachers were engaged in developing a deep understanding of the curriculum outcomes for this module. In addition, an introduction to the safe use of tools and equipment used in the Skilled Trades component of this module was provided.

■ Scientific Literacy

The Department of Education is placing significant emphasis on scientific literacy within the Intermediate Science program. The 2014 Provincial Assessment will be based largely on students being able to answer questions on case studies and articles which link science with the real world. At recent regional closeout days, intermediate science teachers participated in sessions which focused on understanding what scientific literacy is and in creating scientific literacy articles which could be used in classroom assessment.

■ Safe and Caring Schools Programming

The Western Scholl District is committed to ensuring safe and caring learning environments for all students. Schools are encouraged to become familiar with the approaches supported by the District, and the programs available within the District,

that promote cultural change within schools and enhance safe, respectful learning environments.

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) remains a significant focus for the Western School District. The Department of Education's Safe and Caring Schools initiative includes PBS as a school-wide approach in which clear, consistent expectations are established for student conduct and various methods are employed to support all students in meeting identified expectations. Many schools have completed a one day school-wide training session on the implementation of this approach.

Roots of Empathy, an evidenced-based classroom program that reduces levels of aggression among school children while raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy, is expanding in the Western region. Three individuals, including one guidance counsellor and two community partners, completed training on the delivery of this program in late September. There are now 17 active programs in the district.

The c.a.r.e. Program - Preventing Child Sexual Abuse through Education - is a personal safety program for students ages 5-9 years, focused on the prevention of child sexual abuse. The program educates young students on body ownership and personal safety rules. Guidance counsellors in 80% of our primary schools have now been provided with c.a.r.e. kits.

Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student group that promotes a safe place for all students to meet and learn about different sexual orientations. The student group supports each other, while working together to end homophobia and to raise awareness and promote equality for all. The Western School District, in partnership with the Department of Education, is moving towards the implementation of GSAs in all junior/senior high schools. This is a priority initiative and supporting materials have been purchased by the Department of Education to be distributed to schools across the province.

■ **Autism**

This fall the District Itinerant for Autism has been visiting the kindergarten students with autism (and staff who are working with them) to ensure that the transition into school has been as successful as possible. Continued support has also been offered to teachers who require assistance. In addition to professional development sessions for student assistants, professional development has also been provided for teachers working with students with autism.

■ **Report Card Revisions**

As a result of changes to our Service Delivery Model for students with identified exceptionalities, revisions to the K-9 report card templates were necessary. These revisions are now complete and all new templates have been uploaded to the Teacher Area of First Class. Two important documents, one explaining revisions to the templates and the other providing technical information, have been forwarded to schools.

■ **Assistive Technology**

The Department of Education is embarking on a new pilot project for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The

Department will provide five iPads to the selected school for Instructional Resource Teachers and classroom teachers to use with students with ASD. There will also be an additional iPad for the Speech Language Pathologist for the school. These iPads will have the latest Augmentative and Alternative Communication applications installed that will provide the student with an opportunity to enhance his/her learning experience. Professional Development will also be provided to all teachers participating in this project. The school selected for this pilot project is Stephenville Primary.

~ FOCUS ON ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ~

■ **School Development and Assessment Report**

In October, all schools reviewed their internal and external assessment data to identify strengths and challenges relating to student learning. This information was used to make necessary adjustments to the School Development Plan to ensure appropriate action plans to effectively respond to priority student learning needs.

Fourteen schools are currently involved in the formal process of school development. Three schools have completed the internal review and new school development plans, and all but two schools on the small school model have completed part of the process. Thirteen schools are scheduled to have completed their new plan before the Christmas break. The goal is to have all schools' plans externally validated by May 2013.

■ **Student Support Services Professional Development**

To create a common vision related to inclusive education/service delivery model and to ensure consistency of service and practice for students with exceptionalities, the Student Support Services Division has held a number of professional learning/collaborative meetings this fall.

Educational Psychologists and Guidance Counsellors met on October 11. The purpose of the day was to discuss the following topics: technology and service delivery; career development for students; the Central Referral Committee and the referral tracking system; the verification process for decision-making (modifying prescribed curriculum/alternate curricular courses for non-credit K-12); the role of the Child Youth Advocate; changes to Child Youth and Family Services; and utilizing key assessment tools.

During the fall professional development days in October, all student assistants were provided with professional learning relevant to their roles. Sessions were held in Stephenville, Corner Brook, Deer Lake, Port Aux Basques, Labrador Straits and Plum Point. Topics were varied and included the following: Assistive Technology; Supportive Language strategies; Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder; best practices in behavior management; Non-Violent Crisis Prevention-Intervention Training; Self-Regulation approaches; the role of the student assistant; and strategies for supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.