



Dartmouth High School
Plan for Improvement
May 2010

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Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) Mission Statement

The mission of the Halifax Regional School Board is to ensure that each student develops passion for learning, for achieving personal success, and for building a harmonious, global community.

Dartmouth High School (DHS) Mission Statement

Dartmouth High School; a diverse, progressive, educational community; is committed to engaging, challenging, and supporting each of its citizens to attain academic and personal excellence through the practice of respect and responsibility within a safe environment that meets the needs of all of its learners.

Foreward

DHS currently has a student body of approximately 1100 students, a teaching staff of 57 and a support staff of 14. Our school encompasses grades 10 through 12. We offer a broad-based academic program to students from grades 10-12 including French Immersion, Options and Opportunities, Co-operative Education, instrumental music and many advanced level courses. DHS first opened its doors in 1959. It serves a clientele of diverse cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Its feeder schools include Bicentennial, Prince Arthur, John Martin, Ellenvale and Caledonia (late French Immersion). As the only secondary French Immersion school in the former city of Dartmouth, it is home to students from a variety of neighbourhoods from within the Dartmouth area. DHS offers a wide variety of teams, clubs and activities for all students. In 2008, our audio-visual room underwent a major renovation and was renamed Keating Hall. This has enhanced our fine arts program immensely and serves as an asset to our feeder schools and the community as a whole.

Over the past few years, there has been a large turnover of staff due mostly to retirements. In spite of this turnover, DHS is very proud of its diverse and dedicated staff that is committed to improving the school in all aspects. All members of our school community work hard to ensure a positive and welcoming school environment where student success is the primary focus.

This PFI plan represents the collaborative effort of the DHS staff, students, administration, community and School Advisory Council. Our plan acknowledges and embraces the principles of the Halifax Regional School Board in that "Every student will learn. Every school will improve."

What are you doing well?

Implementing the PSP

DHS is proud of the wide variety of courses it currently offers. As a progressive school, we are constantly looking for ways to meet our students' diverse needs by implementing programs such as Options and Opportunities, French Immersion and Credit Recovery. DHS's goals, departmental budgets, classroom resources and professional development activities are all aligned with the PSP. All classroom teachers are required to submit course outlines at the beginning of each semester and all students receive these course outlines and agendas annually/each semester.

Classroom teachers ensure that curriculum outcomes are the focus of their teaching practices. Specific Learning Outcomes (SCOs) are a focus of department, grade-level and course-level meetings. DHS is committed to improving access to technology within the school. Our school was recently awarded a \$50,000. grant from Future Shop in the form of an Innovations Lab. With encouragement and support from administration and in consultation with several staff members, we were able to develop a proposal that met with the approval of Future Shop and the Halifax Regional School Board. We had a very historic and successful launch in September 2009. We believe that the Innovations Lab will further enhance our educational philosophy, which is based on current best practices. This will allow us to maximize student achievement and overall school success. Among the most recent cutting edge technology, the lab houses and supports an audio-video broadcasting centre, weather station technology and multi-media tablets. Thanks to the new technology, our school programs will have access to the resources it needs to better prepare our graduates for post-secondary opportunities or the work force.

The teachers at DHS are dedicated to the principles of lifelong learning as evident by the number of teachers who have received certification upgrades through graduate studies as well as ongoing professional development opportunities.

DHS invites student success with a large number, and variety, of extra curricular activities. A list of these activities includes the following:

Clubs, Groups and Organizations:

- African Nova Scotian youth support worker
- Anti-Bullying Pink Day
- Art Show
- Book Club
- Breakfast Club
- Capoeira
- Chemistry Club
- Duke of Edinburgh program
- Ecobuddies Club
- Fashion Show
- Gay Straight Alliance Club
- Grassroots Club
- Greenhouse Club
- Guitar Club
- Improv Club
- International Students Club
- Judo Club

- Model Parliament
- NSSSA
- PEBS dance
- Peer Tutoring Club
- Poetry Club
- Police liaison officer
- Robotics Club
- Student Council
- Teen Health Centre
- Trebled Youth Choir
- Yearbook Club

Varsity Sports (NSSAF):

- Badminton
- Basketball
- Cross Country
- Curling
- Field Hockey
- Football
- Field Hockey
- Golf
- Hockey
- Rugby
- Soccer
- Softball
- Table Tennis
- Track and Field
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Volleyball

Assessment and Evaluation

Classroom teachers at DHS use a wide variety of assessment tools as per the HRSB Student Assessment and Evaluation Policy. Students know that their grades are based many different tasks. It is evident in the Professional Growth Plan of each teacher at Dartmouth High that teachers are focused on implementing new practices surrounding assessment and evaluation. Staff and administration are committed to making early contact with both parents and students to ensure proper course placement is taking place.

The parents of DHS students know how their children are doing in school and that is largely due to a number of reporting periods throughout each semester, as well as access to the Parentwise/Studentwise programs on our website.

DHS has had significant professional development with regards to assessment for learning successful practices. We currently have an Assessment Coordinator who oversees the administration of all external large-scale assessments, as well as collaborates with teachers to identify and facilitate professional development opportunities around assessment.

Many school-based departments are attempting to expand their development and use of common course assessments. More professional development would assist teachers in how to do this effectively while following successful practices.

Strategies for Student Achievement

DHS continues to implement multiple strategies to facilitate student achievement. Programs like Credit Recovery and the Students-at-Risk Initiative play a significant role. Students at Dartmouth High School are given the opportunity to attend curriculum-related assemblies and many classes bring in guest speakers to support the curriculum.

Transition meetings occur early in the year with both students and parents of our incoming Grade 9 students. Grade 12 students have many opportunities to meet with secondary institutions at various times throughout the year. DHS has a variety of support services geared toward increasing student success including Mathematics and Literacy coaches, Student Support Worker, Student Health Centre, English as a Second Language (ESL), police liaison officer and Student Services personnel.

Safe and Inviting Learning Environments

DHS has recently implemented PEBS (Positive Effective Behaviour Systems) and is seeing positive results. Students are being rewarded with Spartan Gold Coins and have the opportunity to win a prize during draws every Friday. We are hoping that we can affect change by focusing on the positive behaviours of our students.

Students at DHS feel their teachers truly care for them and want them to be successful. Not only do our teachers support their students academically, but they also volunteer their time to get involved with sports teams as well as many other extra-curricular activities (see below).

As the result of discussions by members of a discipline ad-hoc committee, teachers and administrators at DHS have implemented the use of hall passes for students leaving class. It has had a significant impact on the volume of students wandering the building.

Our Planning for Improvement data shows that racism and discrimination are a concern at Dartmouth High. As a staff, we are making changes in the school to try and overcome these issues. We have more visible minorities on staff that act as positive role models for our African Nova Scotian students. We are implementing groups in the school such as the Cultural Awareness Youth Group, who started up an International Night, Community Outreach and an At Risk team.

Family and Community Involvement with the School

DHS strongly encourages parental involvement in a variety of ways. We have an active SAC committee that is reflective of our diverse community. Many parents of our students have volunteered to assist with our athletic program as well as many of our extra-curricular and graduation activities.

In addition to regular teacher phone calls, DHS has implemented an electronic messenger system that calls and emails parents (for whom we have relevant contact information) to inform them of attendance as well as other important school information.

Effective Communication

DHS is committed to improving communication to parents and guardians, community members, staff and students. Along with the traditional methods of communicating, such as school sign, newsletters, course outlines and student agendas, DHS has also added more technological tools such as School Messenger, up-to-date school web site and email correspondence. Parents also have many opportunities to communicate with school personnel through events such as curriculum night, parent-teacher interviews, and various orientation sessions for different school programs.

Administrative Leadership

DHS's administrative team is committed to setting high expectations for all staff, focusing on the quality of teaching for all students. Staff members are encouraged to take on active leadership roles in various groups and committees. Students have a multitude of opportunities to engage in leadership roles through a multitude of co-curricular organizations and activities.

Literacy

There are many literacy strategies used in many classrooms at DHS. Some of these strategies include: Literacy Support Plans, Literacy Coach, writing workshops, active reading strategies, multiple representations, non-fiction reading and journaling. All English classes implement daily silent reading. The English department has developed a common Grade 10 Writing Assessment (non-fiction). Circulation numbers from our school library indicate that there is an increase in the number of students taking an interest in reading.

In terms of the NSE final exams, English students at DHS are performing as well, if not better, than the board as a whole.

Mathematics

The Math Department is a strong group of teachers who work cooperatively to improve student achievement in the area of mathematics. There is ongoing discussion with teams of teachers to share ideas to improve daily teaching practices.

Math teachers are constantly developing more common assessments, not only with final exams, but also with tests and assignments throughout each semester. Grade 10 math teachers participated in a common marking session for the final exam and it was a very positive experience for the teachers involved. The math department is hoping this will happen with more courses as we move forward with our PFI plan.

The Math department is committed to providing additional support to students by offering courses such as Math Essentials 10 and 11, Math Support Room, Math competitions, peer tutoring and technology integration.

Social and Personal Development of Students

DHS is very proud to offer a large number of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities and programs that allow students to express themselves and share their ideas with others. Staff and students work together to develop and implement programs that address important social issues and build on confidence and personal development.

Student work can be seen regularly throughout the building and during special events. DHS has taken on a number of projects dealing with social awareness on important issues such as fundraising to help people in Haiti, 30-hour famine and Pennies for Patients.

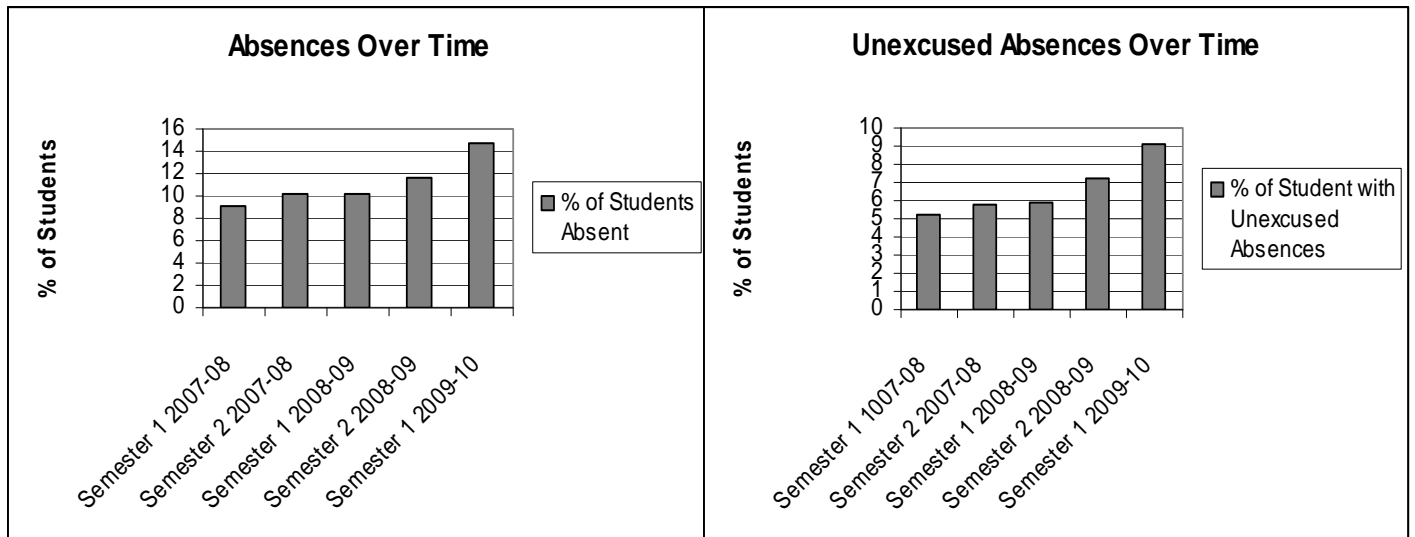
What trends do you see in the data?

Our school PFI team has been collecting data from various sources for the past eight months. Such data include HRSB surveys, provincial assessments, classroom-based assessments, attendance data, parent-teacher data and school-derived surveys.

Upon examination of the HRSB surveys, we can see trends in the data from 2005 to 2008. DHS has remained consistent in most areas surveyed. The results generally demonstrate positive feedback from all three survey groups. The school PFI team will closely examine the 2009 survey results so as to identify areas that require improvement.

Attendance

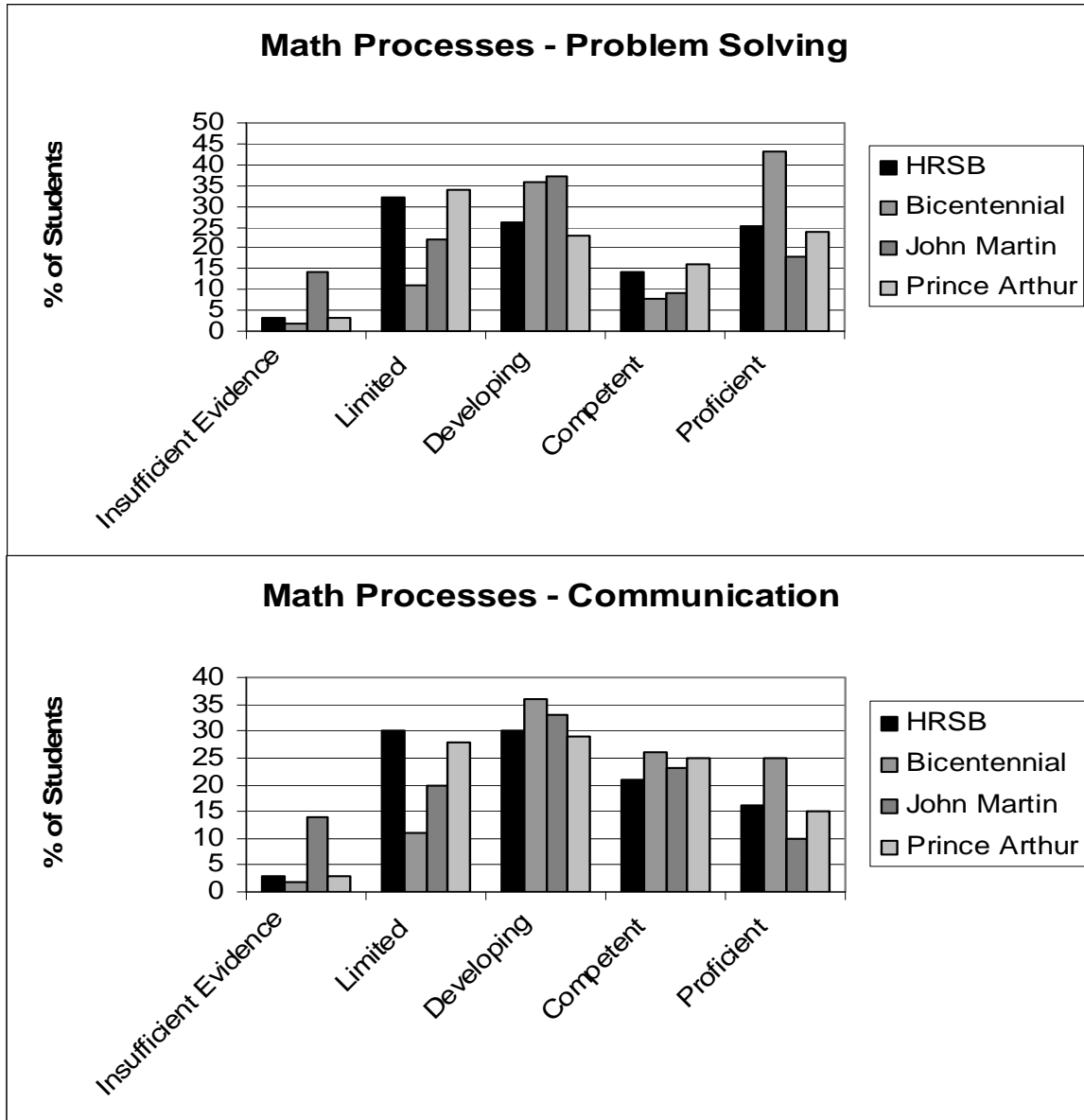
The following graphs show the trends in attendance over the past 2½ years at Dartmouth High. It is clear from the graphs that Semester 1 of the current school year has shown a significant increase in the number of absences (including unexcused). The lack of an effective attendance policy is a huge concern with teachers.



Mathematics

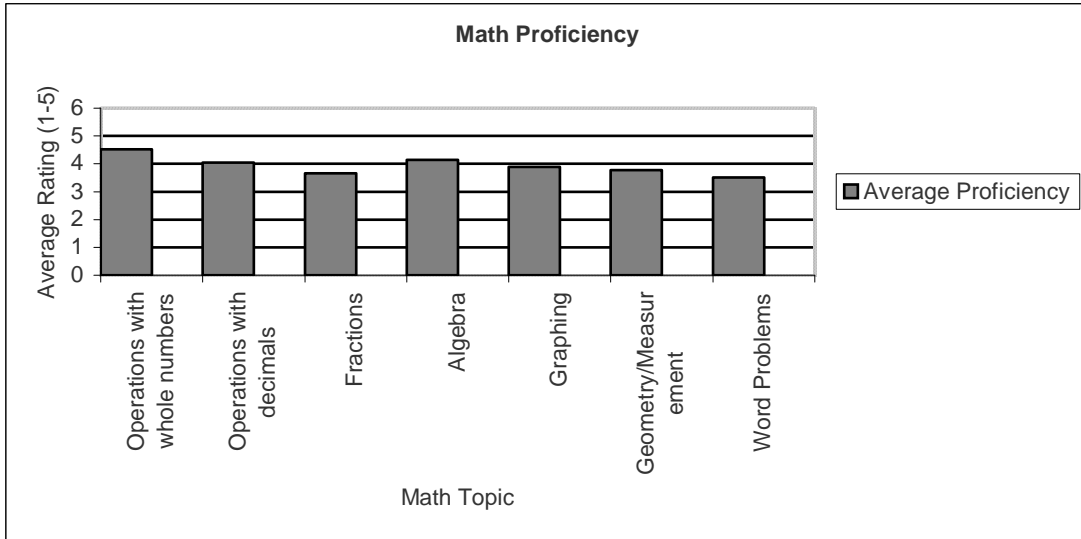
Junior High Assessments

The following data is a summary of the Grade 8 CAT 3 data from our 3 feeder schools, in comparison with the board, as it pertains to problem solving and communication:



The data shows that the majority of students fall in the limited and developing stages of both problem solving and communication. Our goal is to have more of those students move to the competent and proficient stages in these areas.

During March 2010, the Math department surveyed several math classes (total of 210 students in grades 10-12) and asked them to rate their proficiency in 7 major mathematical concepts on a rating scale of 1-5, 1 being not very proficient and 5 being very proficient. The following graph gives the average of the ratings of all 210 students:



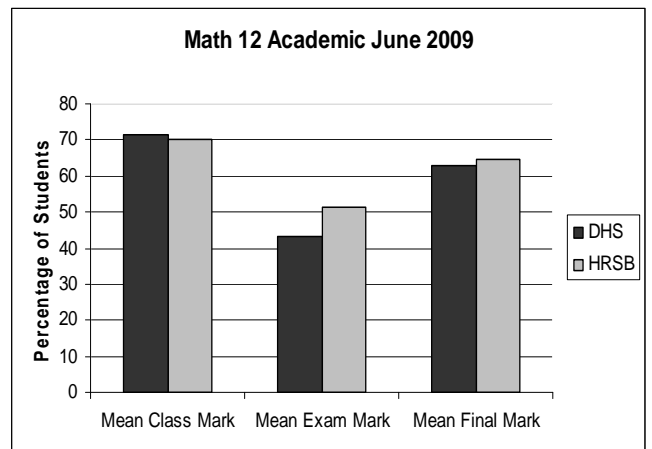
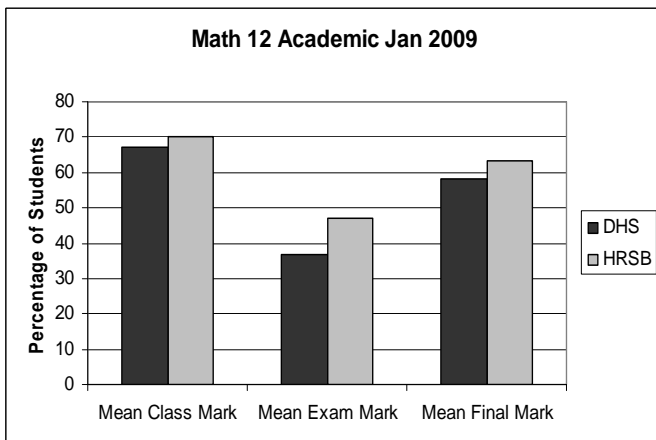
According to the graph, the two lowest proficiency areas are fractions and word problems. This data is supported by the following anecdotal observations.

Anecdotal comments from teachers:

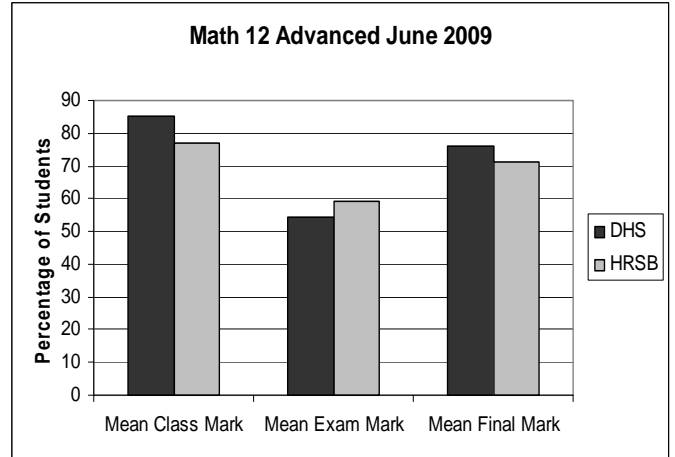
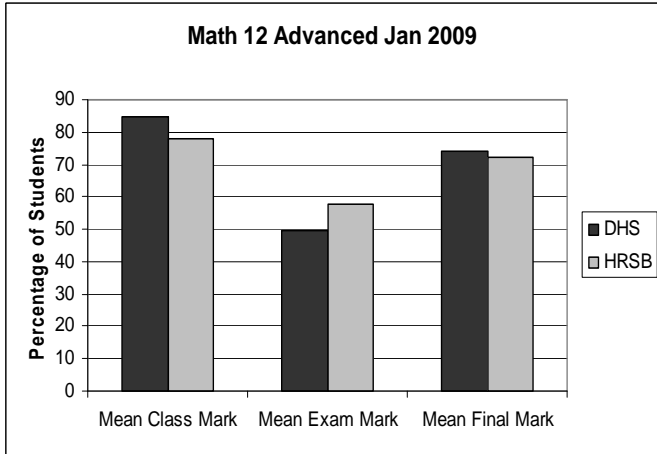
- Word problems appear to be an issue for many teachers, not just math teachers.
- Graphing skills are weak in science classes
- Students are not always comfortable trying a strategy if they don't know where to begin or can't determine what the question is asking
- On regular exams, students have the most difficulty with word problems

2009 Nova Scotia Examination data:

Overall Summary Comparison:



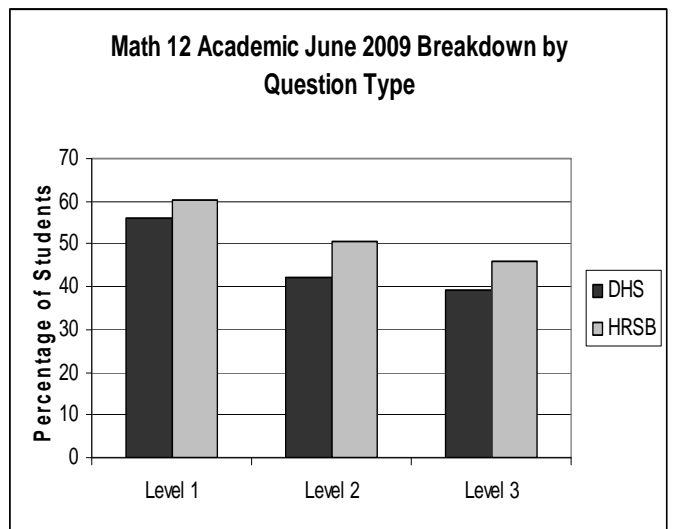
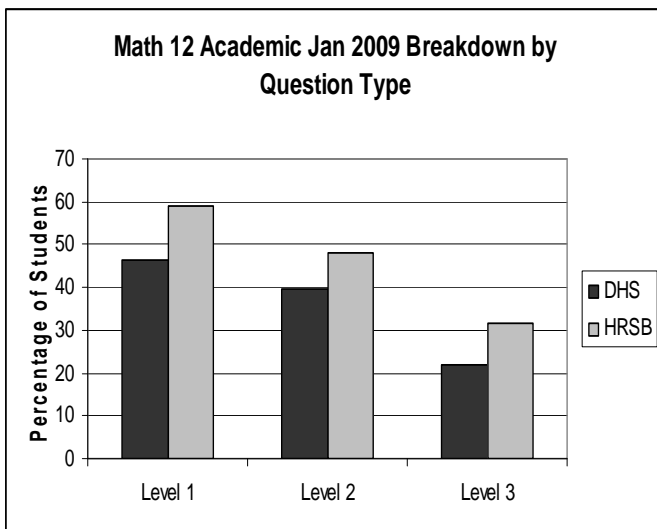
On the Math 12 Academic NSE, Dartmouth High's exam average is considerably lower than the HRSB average, although the average final mark is more in line with the board's average.

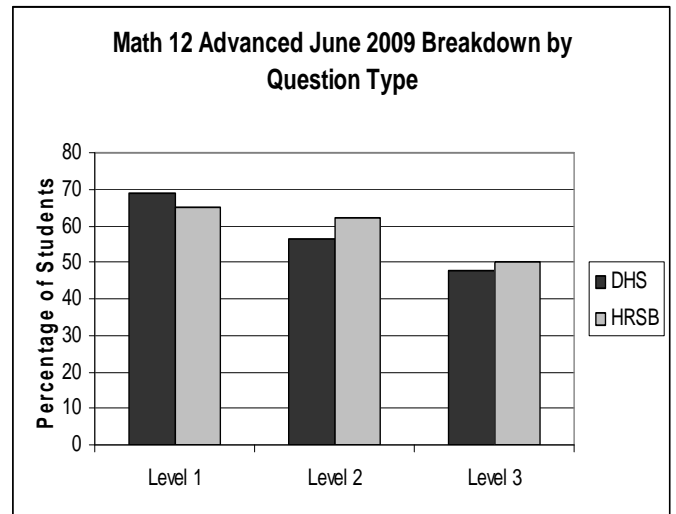
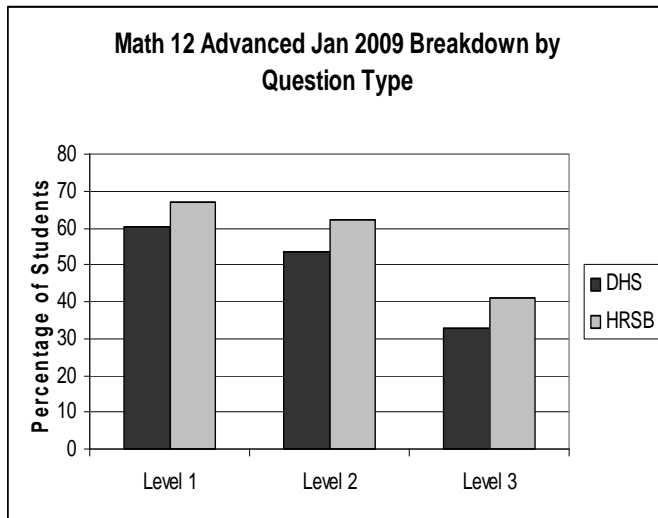


On the Math 12 Advanced NSE, Dartmouth High's exam average is slightly lower than the HRSB average, while the average final mark is slightly higher than the board's average.

Summary According to Question Type:

The following graphs give a comparison of how Dartmouth High students performed on Level 1, 2 and 3 questioning.

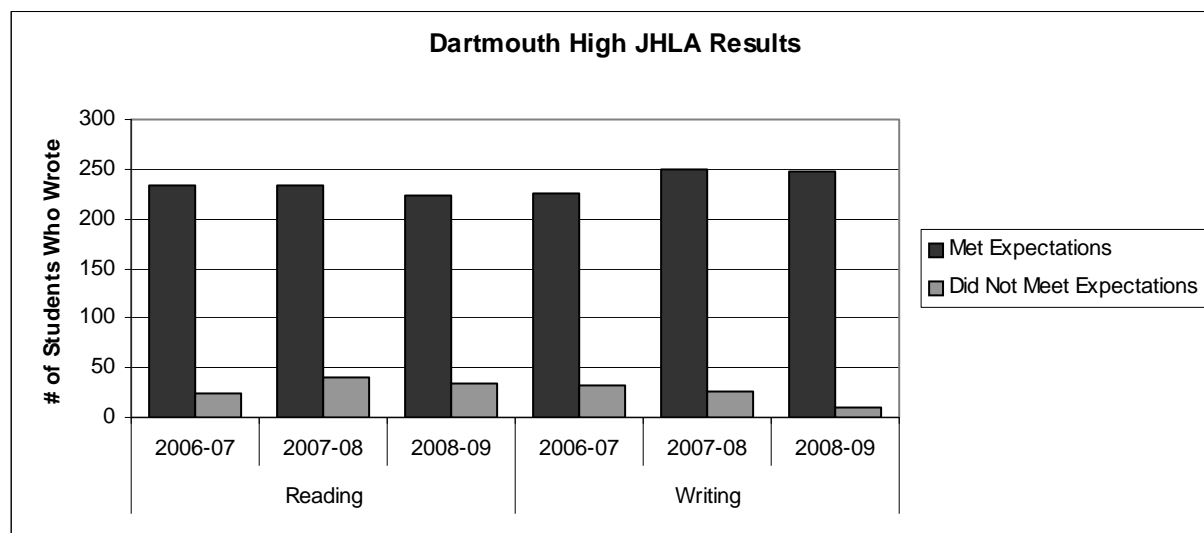




The data shows that Dartmouth High students are scoring lower on all levels of questions except for Level 1 questions on the Math 12 Advanced exam in June 2009. Our goal is to improve performance on all levels of questioning, particularly levels 2 and 3 where students are faced with more complex questions that include word problems and higher cognitive thinking problems.

Literacy

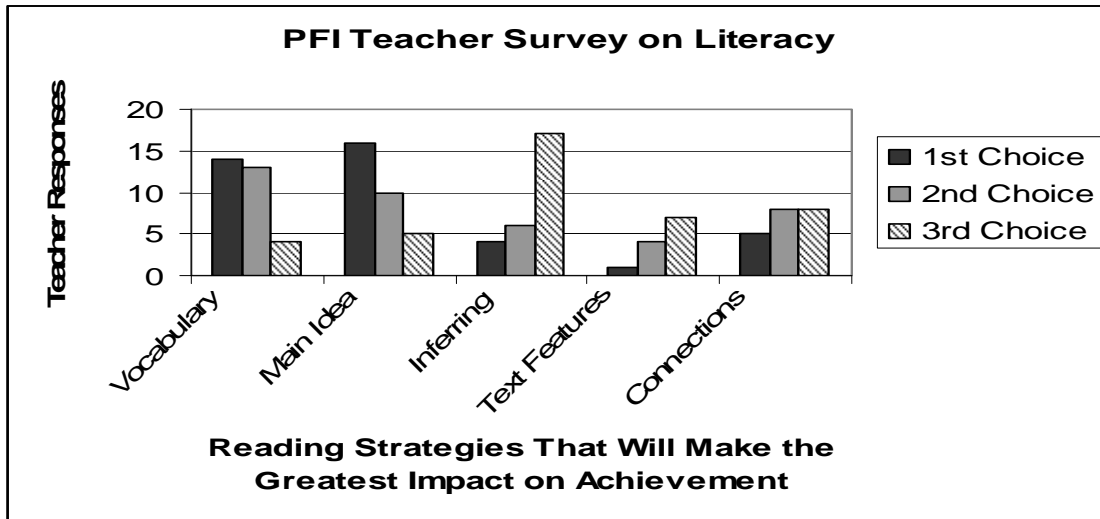
Results of Students who wrote the Junior High Literacy Assessment (JHLA)



The data shows that reading is more of a concern than writing. More students met expectations in writing and fewer didn't meet expectations. The students who wrote this assessment are currently in grades 10, 11 and 12 at Dartmouth High.

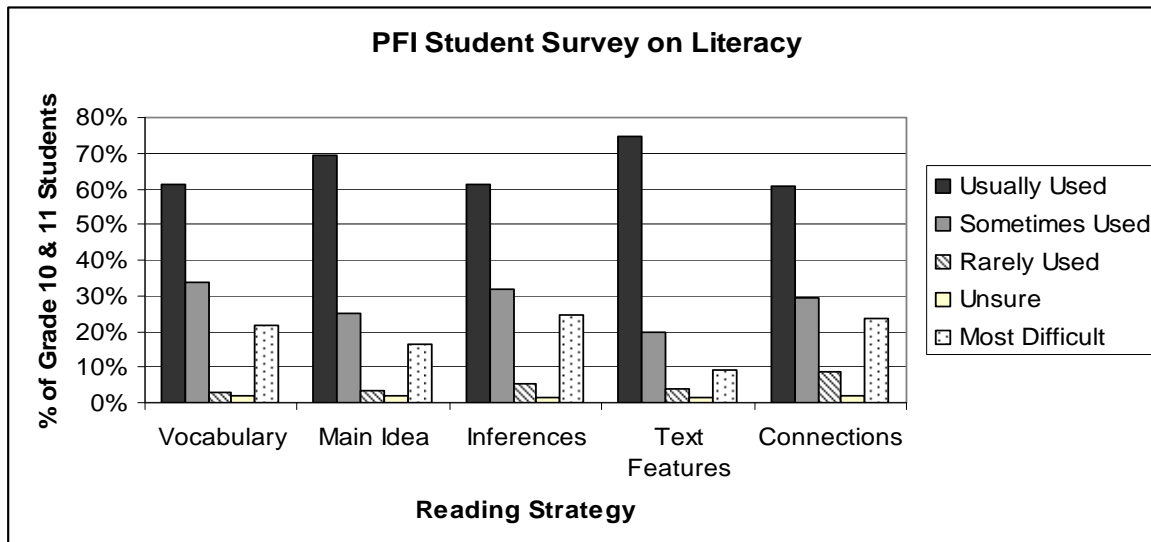
During April 2010, the English department conducted 2 surveys – one for all classroom teachers and one for English students in grades 11 and 12 (total of 119 students).
 Teacher Survey

Teachers were asked to rank the reading skills that needed to improve the most in order to be more successful. The results are shown below:



Student Survey

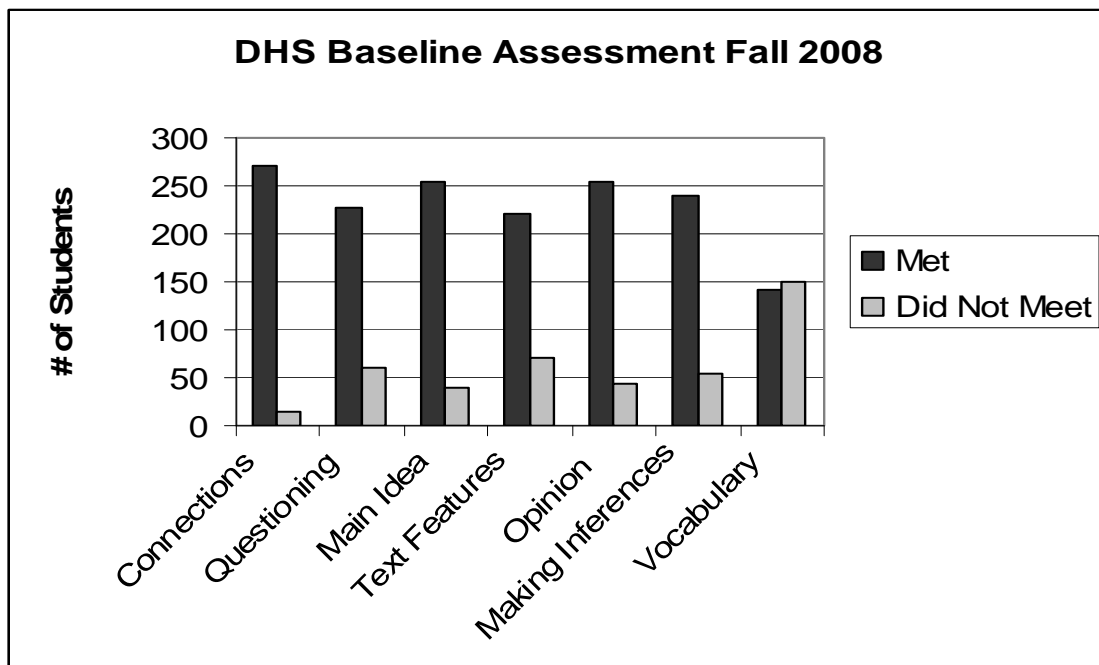
Students were asked to identify what strategies they use the most when reading and what strategy they find the most difficult. The results are shown below:



From this student survey, several areas of need were identified and discussed as a staff. The two of most concern were main idea and vocabulary. Staff felt these areas could be worked on in all subject areas and would help improve reading comprehension.

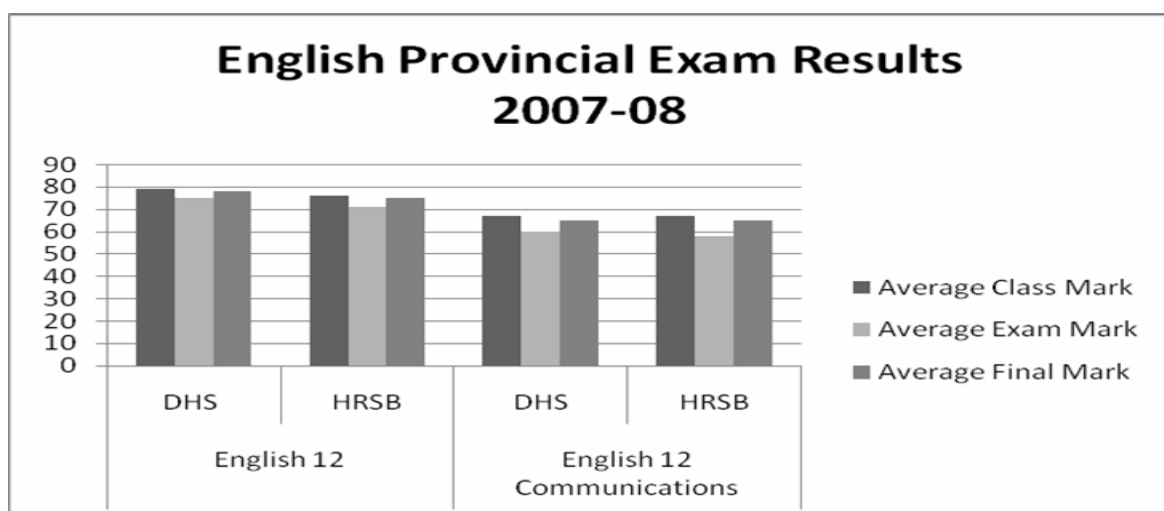
Grade 10 Reading Assessment (Fall 2008)

All grade 10 English students were assessed in the fall of 2008 and the data is shown below. Students were given a short reading passage from a Global Geography textbook and questions were designed based on the reading strategies needed to become more independent readers. As clearly shown in the graph, the biggest area of concern was vocabulary, followed by text features, questioning and main idea.



NSE English Results:

The following graphs show the performance of DHS students vs HRSB for both English 12 and English 12 Communications over the past couple of years. Although final marks in both courses are consistent over time, and rank very close to the board results, DHS staff believes there is need for improvement in reading.



What challenges do you need to address in order to make the greatest difference in student achievement?

Implementation of the PSP

One challenge DHS teachers face is the lack of provincially mandated curriculum documents for some courses. At the same time, teachers would like to see more time in their daily schedules for Professional Learning Communities to happen.

Assessment and Evaluation

Although DHS staff has had some professional development around assessment and evaluation, more is needed, particularly in the area of assessment for learning. HRSB survey data indicates that students do not receive regular feedback from teachers and are not given the opportunity to do self-assessments. Teachers are being encouraged to build on existing common assessments best practices. DHS teachers would like to find more time for PLCs to discuss and share assessment practices.

Strategies for Student Success

One of our greatest challenges is attendance. The data shows that failure rates have increased since the removal of both exemptions and an effective attendance policy. Strategies need to be put in place so that students are shown how poor attendance will have a great impact on their success and so that parents are contacted on a more regular basis when students' attendance and performance begin to decline.

Safe and Inviting Learning Environments

DHS needs to address the different perceptions related to racism and discrimination. We also need to examine why students feel that there is a lack of equity in how student behaviour is treated differently by teachers and administrators. DHS teachers are concerned with the lack of respect throughout the building and are working on ways to address this in a constructive and productive manner.

Family and Community Involvement with the School

Our biggest challenge is continue implementing a variety of strategies to support student learning at home and to encourage parents to take a more active role in their child's education. Parents say they feel welcome yet the attendance at curriculum nights and parent-teacher sessions is quite low. We need to gather more feedback from parents and use that information to inform our plan for improving student achievement.

Effective Communication

One of the biggest challenges DHS staff faces is contacting parents on a more regular basis to discuss student progress. School Messenger can only be effective if all parents are being contacted. We need to revisit sending letters home when students reach a certain attendance number. Our daily announcements also need to be revisited to ensure all students are getting the same information.

Administrative Leadership

One of the biggest challenges for our administrators is to assist teachers in developing PLC's within our daily schedules. DHS staff is concerned with the lack of continuity from one PD session to another and feels that there needs to be a clearer vision from the administration.

Literacy

One of the biggest challenges is the need for more common assessments in both writing and reading and more time for teachers to participate in PLC's to be able to discuss strategies and best teaching practices. Dartmouth High teachers would like to be able to provide more opportunities for students to write for authentic purposes and audiences. There is an obvious need from the data to improve reading comprehension of all types of texts. It is imperative that literacy skills are imbedded in all classrooms at Dartmouth High, with a focus on vocabulary.

Mathematics

One of the biggest challenges is to ensure students are placed in the correct math course for their level of learning in order to realize more success. Data shows that problem solving (solving word problems in particular) and fractions are the weakest areas for our math students. Our goal is to improve our results on the NSE exams, as we fall below the board average, and in doing so, we must focus on the areas where our students are weakest.

Social and Personal Development of Students

The environment appears to be a concern with both students and teachers. More of an effort needs to be made to make DHS "greener". A large percentage of our students are not involved in extra-curricular activities. Our challenge is to find ways to get as many students involved in school events as possible and to encourage more staff members to take active roles in clubs and activities. At the same time, teachers need to know their volunteering is appreciated and valued.

Based on the challenges identified, what are your goals for student achievement?

After careful consideration and examination of data from a variety of sources, DHS has chosen the following goals to be implemented in September 2010:

Literacy Goal:

"Students will increase their proficiency in reading comprehension of information texts."

Numeracy Goal:

"Students will increase their proficiency in solving word problems."

What strategies and data will you use to achieve your goal?

The following tables outline the strategies and data that will be used to achieve our goals:

Literacy Goal: Students will increase their proficiency in reading comprehension of information texts	
Strategies to achieve the goal:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers will develop common vocabulary lists for each subject area • Explore and implement a variety of strategies for teaching vocabulary • Teachers will come to a common understanding of the eight reading comprehension strategies • Teachers will use explicit strategies to help students improve reading comprehension • Teachers will work in PLC's, with the support of the literacy coach to develop a common understanding of information texts • Teachers will work in their departments to develop and implement formative assessments; these results will be discussed and analyzed in PLC's • Teachers in all subject areas will use a variety of texts at different reading levels • English teachers will teach and apply reading comprehension strategies 	
Professional development to support achievement of the goal:	
What will staff learn?	How will the learning take place?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reading strategies that can be used to create a richer curriculum and how can these strategies be implemented in each classroom • How to collaborate more effectively with other teachers for exchange of ideas of the most effective strategies • How to write an effective rubric • Assessment strategies (formative and summative) • How to give descriptive feedback in a timely fashion • Vocabulary strategies and instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLC/Common planning time/Time with Literacy Coach • Staff meetings/PD Days early in September to make sure all teachers understand all of the reading strategies that exist and how they can be useful for all students • PD using assessment experts • Reading of articles pertaining to feedback, assessment and rubrics • PD360 and other online resources in collaboration with Literacy Coach

Data Sources:		
What data will you collect?	When will you collect the data?	Who will be responsible for collecting the data?
Classroom based reading task with all English courses around comprehension	A minimum of 3 times per semester	English Teachers
NSE English Results	End of each semester	English Department Head
“Getting to Great” PFI Survey results	Spring of each year as available	PFI Core Team
Survey to Staff to report on strategies being used and success teachers are seeing	End of each semester	PFI Core Team

Numeracy Goal: Students will increase their proficiency at solving word problems	
Strategies to achieve the goal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers will deliver curriculum using correct vocabulary/terminology • Teachers will develop a common understanding of best practices pertaining to problem solving and higher level cognitive thinking looks like and implement an ongoing basis • Math teachers will work in PLC’s and with the Math coach to develop a bank of rich tasks common to each course and implement appropriately throughout the course curriculum • Teachers will establish common expectations about strategies involved in solving word problems and teach various strategies for deconstructing word problems • Teachers outside of the math department will work on incorporating more mathematical concepts where applicable and incorporate higher level cognitive thinking tasks in all subject areas • Math teachers will teach explicit problem solving strategies to enhance critical thinking 	
Professional development to support achievement of the goal:	
What will staff learn?	How will the learning take place?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to incorporate rich tasks as they relate to specific subject areas • How to develop, evaluate and analyze common assessments around problem solving • The different levels of questioning • What critical thinking is and what is meant by rich tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers will take part in PD opportunities around solving word problems and communication • PLC’s and time with the Math coach • PD opportunities around assessment (particularly formative) and data collecting/analysis • PD on levels of questioning and critical thinking early in the school year • PD360 and other online resources in collaboration with the Math Coach

Data Sources:		
What data will you collect?	When will you collect the data?	Who will be responsible for collecting the data?
Common assessment of rich tasks in all Math courses	A minimum of 3 times per semester	Math Teachers
NSE Math results	End of each semester as available	Math Department Head
Student Focus Groups (anecdotal data)	Twice a semester	Math/Literacy coaches
“Getting to Great” PFI Survey results	Spring of each year as available	PFI Core Team
Staff Survey – How are teachers incorporating this goal and what success are they seeing?	End of each semester	PFI Core Team

How will you involve the SAC, parents, students and the wider community?

DHS has worked very hard over the years to improve our communication with our SAC, parent community and our students. We will continue to use tools such as: the DHS web site, individual teacher web sites, Visual Attendance, the school messenger system, school newsletters and our Thistle Street information board to communicate our progress in the achievement of our goals.

As we move through the implementation of our PFI plan, we will use our two curriculum nights (one per semester), grade 9 orientation sessions as well as our regularly scheduled SAC meetings to keep our school community informed of our progress.

Proposed Budget

We plan to use the majority of PFI funds to buy substitute days to enable teachers, and other appropriate staff, to work in PLC's to assist in the implementation of our plan.