

Ridgecliff Middle School
Plan For Improvement

Ridgecliff Middle School
Planning for Improvement Initiative
Halifax Regional School Board

In September 2002, the Halifax Regional School Board set a new course to make learning and student achievement our number one goal. When Ridgecliff Middle School formed its Planning for Improvement Team in 2003, the team began to collect and analyze data throughout the 2003/04 academic year. The data was collected in a number of ways: Grade 9 students were assessed in Math and Literacy, Parent Surveys were sent home with each student, teachers and students completed surveys, our School Advisory Council was involved in our school self-assessment and focus groups were held in order to conduct a full school assessment.

This data is now being used to guide the Planning for Improvement Team and the school community in the formation of our School Improvement Plan. This ongoing process of design, implementation, reflection and revision will allow us to offer students an educational experience that will enable them to achieve academic success in a positive and healthy learning environment.

The data reviewed showed that Ridgecliff Middle School is a school possessing many strengths. The school is located in Beechville Estates, Beechville, Nova Scotia. The campus is large, and the building itself is an attractive, modern P-3 school built on an open concept that seems to “welcome” students, staff and visitors. This physical structure, with its school-wide infusion of modern technology, supports the implementation of a curriculum that is both student-centered and interactive. Our teachers are very aware of Provincial Department of Education Curriculum outcomes, with assessment tools and evaluation techniques aligned with these outcomes to reflect student progress and achievement. Strategies are in place to accommodate many different learning styles and individual needs. A very strong School Planning Team monitors the academic requirements of students and classroom teachers are often on sight after normal class hours to offer multilevel support for students. Where possible, teachers are teamed to provide extra continuity to the five core subjects of Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science and PDR. Administration and teachers provide the community with a very interactive curriculum overview during curriculum night each year. Many on our staff have accepted leadership responsibilities at both school and board levels, helping provide Professional Development opportunities to our own staff and to other schools as well. Teacher leaders in the areas of math, literacy, technology integration, equity, Active Young Readers and Writers and assessment give leadership.

We realize, though, that not all needs of adolescents are academic. With a full time Guidance Counselor, we are able to help students through what are often very difficult non-academic issues. Our Teen Health Center, staffed three days a week, has become a model for other Teen Health Centers throughout Eastern Canada. The Teen Health Center

in conjunction with the Comprehensive Guidance Program is able to provide opportunities for university and public health partnerships.

Ridgecliff Middle School is committed to helping the students achieve success and celebrate their successes. Whether academic, artistic, athletic or community related, these successes are achieved and demonstrated in a number of ways. Our Heritage Fair, Grade 9 Job Fair, Fine Arts, Music programs, intramural and interscholastic activities and many other co-curricular activities enjoy a high level of student participation. This involvement, combined with our commitment to academic success, has helped create an atmosphere where students attend school willingly in a safe, positive environment.

The Halifax Regional School Board has identified two initiatives for all schools. These two initiatives center on improving student ability in Literacy and Math. Over the past two years, Ridgecliff Middle School has been involved in inservicing and other professional development experiences on infusing literacy strategies in all programs. Student timetables enable students to be scheduled into 60 minute Language Arts classes each day, teachers have been committed to using literacy strategies in their programs, professional resources have been purchased for staff and there is an ongoing sharing of knowledge and material among staff. In addition to the Active Readers Support from the Department of Education, financial support for the purchasing of additional reading material of high interest for students of varying abilities is being provided for both English and French Language Arts classrooms.

To continue the Planning for Improvement of literacy at Ridgecliff Middle School, we will be implementing the literacy support plans for those students who have been identified as a result of the Department of Education Grade 6 literacy assessment in 2003-04. We will also implement appropriate/applicable strategies in all curriculum areas to improve students' reading habits and reading skills. The Halifax Regional School Board grade nine literacy assessment results showed that students at Ridgecliff need improvement in understanding concepts in non-fiction, understanding and using text features in the content areas, and in making personal and text connections to fiction. Teachers will be implementing in all of their programs strategies that will enable students to improve in these areas. It is with this commitment and the utilization of our literacy support personnel that students will internalize these strategies and experience more academic success. As has happened in the past year, through ongoing conversations with teachers, teacher's formative and summative assessment, professional development, teacher reflections and feedback to administration through various tracking means, a report on our progress in this initiative will be provided to our School Advisory Council, our parents and guardians.

In our math initiative, Ridgecliff Middle School is committed to a daily 60 minute math period for all students. In the past year, RMS math teachers have formed a support team. The objective of this team is to meet monthly to establish common curriculum goals at all grade levels and to regularly review the grade curriculum alignment from grade 6 to grade 9. During these meetings, teachers share PD experiences, teaching/assessment

strategies, professional and student resources and focus on the 3 levels of questioning in assessment.

Informal and formal math assessments conducted by teachers and the Halifax Regional School Board indicate students at Ridgecliff need improvement in a number of areas. As a math department we need to incorporate mental math strategies and practice into the daily math classroom. Students' understanding and use of decimals in mental math activities need to be a particular focus. Students also need to improve in the math areas of measurement, data management and in their ability to respond to level two and level three questioning.

All math teachers at Ridgecliff Middle School now implement the teaching of mental math strategies. Teachers will continue to encourage students to utilize these strategies on an ongoing basis. In measurement teachers will have students estimate, measure, compare and record measurements including time, length, capacity, mass, volume, perimeter and area. In data management, teachers will have students collect, organize and interpret data. They will construct, read, interpret, and analyze graphs and make inferences from them. Students will improve their ability to respond to level two questions where teachers will ask for explanations and estimates and level three questions which involve more than one idea and more than one step application of ideas. These skills are to be developed in the math classroom and to be transferred throughout the curriculum in other content areas. As with our literacy initiative, teachers through their engagement in ongoing professional development, curriculum conversations, classroom observations and course assessments and evaluation we should see improvement in student academic achievement. Students will be involved in focus groups to provide feedback to teachers on their confidence in dealing with math and this data will be shared with the School Advisory Council and the school community.

In addition to the literacy and math initiatives, Ridgecliff Middle School is also committed to the personal and social development of the students. Our objective is for our students to "see themselves" throughout the school as capable learners. Through the survey results, focus groups and school self assessments it has been determined that our focus in personal and social development should be in having students learn to respect those who are different, become independent learners and choose healthy lifestyles. This would be accomplished through the partnership with the Black Educators Association, our Multicultural Club, the development of a Racial Equity Policy, programs offered through our Teen Health Center and Comprehensive guidance Program and our motivational speakers. Through cross-curricular activities, teachers will incorporate in their subject areas resources that show cultural diversity. Students of all cultural backgrounds will be encouraged to take on leadership roles in the classroom and school. Through these programs it is hoped that students will become more responsible for their learning and in turn show an increase in academic success.

Ridgecliff Middle School in its short five year existence has been able to offer students a very welcoming school with an interactive learning environment. The curricular, extra-

curricular, and co-curricular programs provide engagement in a positive and healthy climate. Our staff, School Advisory Council, and community are committed to building on the successes of the previous five years with the ongoing implementation of our School Improvement Plan.