

**Eastern Consolidated School &
Sheet Harbour Consolidated School**

*Planning for Improvement
Spring 2009*

Question 1: What are we doing well?

Staff at Sheet Harbour Consolidated School and Eastern Consolidated School has worked hard over the past five years to become Professional Learning Communities. Teachers collaborate in a variety of ways to determine methods and strategies that best serve the learning of our students. This has included Literacy and Mathematics team meetings as well as grade-level meetings (on a weekly basis). Staff also participate in Family of Schools (Eastern Consolidated, Lakefront Consolidated and Sheet Harbour Consolidated) Professional Learning Communities on a monthly basis. Common assessments have been developed and implemented for both Mathematics and Literacy, and teachers use a common assessment rubric developed for our schools to score the assessments.

At SHC, staff engage in team teaching for grades one through six. An example of this is when the grade one and two teacher team up. The grade one teacher teaches the Math curriculum to the students in grade one and two while the grade two teacher teaches the Language Arts curriculum to grades one and two. Professional Learning Community time is spent discussing the challenges and strengths of students who are taught by both teachers. Staff also discuss and coordinate outcomes to complement their yearly plans. Specialist teachers discuss and develop ways to support their students (e.g. reading volunteers for both individual students and whole classes; literacy newsletter for parents; author presentations from the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia, etc.).

The school administration has supported the creation of formal Professional Learning Communities through the use of dedicated time each week for teachers to meet, reflect and share, as well as creating opportunities for the above-mentioned Professional Learning Community meetings on a monthly basis with colleagues from nearby schools.

Data-based evidence is collected in many ways, from the formal assessments administered by the Halifax Regional School Board (Grades 2, 4 and 5 CAT testing) and Nova Scotia Department of Education (Grade 3 Mathematics and Literacy, and Grade 6 Literacy testing), to common school assessment data collected throughout the year, to the formal and informal classroom assessment data (e.g. running records, reading samples, writing samples, etc.) collected on a daily basis.

One of the challenges that we've encountered in our data collection is the unique nature of the Eastern Consolidated School site. With only seventeen children enrolled at the school, data can sometimes be skewed (e.g. a result of 100%, in some cases, applies to a single child). We've factored these unique numbers in and noted cases in our data, when appropriate.

Students are supported in a wide variety of ways. Academically, students have access to support through dedicated school programming and staff, clubs, volunteers and extra staff support. Students are also given a choice of many extracurricular activities to support their personal development, ranging from sports to crafts, book clubs to music and drama. Surveys indicate that parents feel that our schools are positive learning environments and safe places to learn, work and visit.

Our collected evidence shows that our students are performing very well in some areas of Language Arts and Mathematics. Teachers have focused on these areas through PLCs, professional development, team teaching and previous PFI goals.

In Language Arts, data indicates that our students have many strengths. Reading and writing results for our grade 6 students indicate a high number (over 80%) of students who meet or exceed expectations, and 84% of our grade 2 students do well when making personal oral responses to text. Our schools developed a common assessment rubric to assess writing, and the results were similar to the formal assessment data. However, *organization* and *matters of correctness* were identified as areas where improvement would be beneficial, and more generally we feel that a goal towards the quality of writing across all grade levels would be appropriate.

In Mathematics, our students have shown much competency in various mathematical strands. Geometry has been a PFI focus for the past few years, and assessment data has shown clear improvement in this area. Survey results indicate that students enjoy math, and parents are satisfied with their child's learning in this area. Furthermore, teachers value math and are committed to identifying and supporting children in need of support. Generally, the strand of *operations* seems to be a weak point, and our staff feels that this would be an area to develop into a PFI goal moving forward.

According to survey results, parents and students express satisfaction with student learning in both Mathematics and Language Arts.

Question 2: What trends do you see in the data?

School surveys and assessment data were reviewed by small groups of teachers, and later by our school-based Mathematics and Literacy teams during the Planning for Improvement process. All teachers have been involved in the reflection on trends that we've identified in the various sources.

A common assessment for both Math and Literacy was developed by our staff, after serious and sometimes candid professional reflection on what we wanted to assess and what we felt were the best areas to focus on, as well as the creation of rubrics for each assessment. As part of our PFI reflection, we compared the formal assessment data from testing, to the common assessments used in our schools, and we identified trends in this data.

In Mathematics, our students showed marked improvement in Geometry (which was a previous PFI goal for our schools). Both formal and informal assessment data supported this strength. Data management was also an area of strength for our students. The data showed a gap in the area of estimation: lower elementary students showed strength, while upper elementary students found estimation challenging. Teacher observation and conferencing with students indicate that upper elementary students are so concerned with correctness that they believe that estimation is wrong. Their focus is finding the "right answer" as opposed to estimating.

Areas of weakness in Mathematics included operations (subtraction and multiplying/dividing at all grade levels; addition in upper elementary), and mathematical communication in writing. Teacher observation indicates a lack of focus on the part of the students (i.e. not paying attention to signs, a misunderstanding of math terminology). As we'll see in the Literacy trends, this final weakness coincides with areas of concern in writing based on Literacy data.

We were pleased to see consistently positive results in our Grade 6 Elementary Literacy Assessment (ELA) data. For the past three years our students have shown strength in both reading and writing, with over 80% of students meeting or exceeding expectations. With formal assessment data we found that the only other source we had to consider, across several years, was the Grade 2 Literacy assessment (CAT). This Grade 2 assessment does not include a writing component, but rather in the response sections it bases results on oral testing. Trends in the Grade 2 data included generally strong reading results when students read the book that they had identified as "just right", but results have been consistently low when students were asked to orally support their personal response to text using inferences and personal experiences.

Our common assessment data correlated with the assessment results positively when compared to upper elementary students, and negatively when compared to the Grade 4 CAT testing. The latter comparison showed an area of weakness in organization and matters of correctness in students below Grade 5. Coupled with the weakness of writing in Mathematics, we feel that a general writing goal would be beneficial for our students moving forward.

Question 3: What challenges do you need to address in order to make the greatest difference in student achievement?

Based on the strengths and trends identified in the previous questions, our Mathematics and Literacy teams discussed several challenges that they felt could be improved on to make the greatest impact on student achievement.

In the area of Mathematics, staff felt that the weakness students showed in expressing themselves using math language in writing, coupled with the need for students to show a better understanding of operations and when to use them, could be related. Staff questioned whether a part of the problem was a lack of understanding of math vocabulary, and thus a part of the operations weakness could possibly be traced back to students not knowing their math terminology. Teachers felt that students could continue to improve in their use of math language when working through problems in the *Operations* strand. Furthermore, problem solving – knowing how to approach a problem – was discussed as another area of focus, with the use of varied story structures and a three-part lesson structure to ensure consistency across grade levels. This would be supported with a common assessment and teacher PD and PLC meetings.

The Literacy team narrowed their focus on the area of writing, and specifically *Organization* and *Matters of Correctness*. Staff felt that it could be beneficial for some Professional Learning Community time to be based around subject area (e.g. Literacy teachers and Math teachers) since our schools utilize the team-teaching model, as opposed to simply meeting with close-grade colleagues. This would help build a consistent approach to writing across grades. Staff also felt that additional resources and a common pedagogical approach to writing (e.g. Writer's Workshop) would help students as they progressed through the grades. A Writer's Workshop model was decided on as the best tool to meet this objective. The length of time to access board PD (specifically the FAB program) were identified as areas of concern beyond our control, and our unique situation of being located a significant distance from the urban core (where most after-school PD is held) was also discussed.

For both teams (Literacy and Mathematics), a challenge has been finding the time to meet as whole-group teams to score the common assessments, and therefore be able to use the results to inform our teaching practice. On a go-forward basis, teachers will meet in smaller subject-based PLCs on a bi-weekly basis, and incorporate the common assessment marking into this time.

Questions 4: Based on the challenges you identified, what are your goals for student achievement?

Question 5: What strategies and data will you use to achieve each goal?

- Please see the two goals below for the response to questions four and five.

Goal 1:	Students will demonstrate improved achievement in writing, with a focus on <i>Ideas, Organization and Matters of Correctness</i> .	
Strategies to achieve this goal:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Teachers will develop a common understanding of writing development by examining the curriculum outcomes and supporting documents. • 2. Teachers shall utilize Writer’s Workshop on a daily basis, using a consistent model, including an explicit writing opportunity each day. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The model for Writer’s Workshop should be based on the models found in the following resources: Lucy Caulkins <i>Writer’s Workshop</i> series; <i>Notebook KnowHow</i> by Aimee Buckner; <i>Talking, Drawing, Writing</i> by Martha Horne and Mary Ellen Giacobbe (primary only); <i>Is That a Fact</i> by Tony Stead; <i>Non-Fiction Matters</i> by Stephanie Harvey; <i>Guided Readers and Writers (Grades 3-6)</i>, and other resources that follow the workshop model. ○ Mini-lesson sources may include <i>WriteTraits</i>; <i>What a Writer Needs</i> by Ralph Fletcher; <i>Passages</i> series; <i>National Geographic</i> kits; <i>Craft Lessons</i> by Fletcher and Portalupi; and other relevant resources. • 3. Teachers shall utilize the existing Common Literacy Assessment Rubric for two common writing assessments (in the first school term and the third school term). Teachers shall also use the common rubric in their classroom assessment throughout the school year on various literacy assignments, with links to Specific Curriculum Outcomes. • 4. Creating student-teacher negotiated writing portfolios that will be used for goal setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Goals, based on needs of individual students, will inform direction of learning/teaching. ○ Portfolios are used as communication tools (e.g. student-teacher and parent-teacher conferences). • 5. Teachers will continue to meet in PLCs on a regular basis, to share ideas, best practices and to collect and examine data (internal and external) to inform classroom practice. 		
Professional development to support achievement of the goal:		
<i>Staff will engage in the following learning activities...</i>	<i>Staff will learn the following from the professional learning activities (knowledge, skills and professional practices)...</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole-school PD session, facilitated by the school Literacy Coach on the Organizational Day in September, to ensure a common understanding and implementation of the Writer’s Workshop model and the specific writing strands as outlined in the goal above. • Professional Development on Goal Setting for students in writing. • Professional Development on Portfolios. • Site-based professional development facilitated by the school Literacy Coach, in consultation with HRSB personnel, focused on FAB pedagogy specifically concerning writing. • Site-based professional learning through study of curriculum documentation and current infused professional resources, lesson study and professional dialogue. • To assess currently available teachers learning resources, and as a team recommend purchase of appropriate resources for programming. • PLC Time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that all staff are following a consistent model for Writer’s Workshop. • To increase teacher knowledge and skills on helping students set goals. • To remain up-to-date on current board literacy pedagogy. • As a Literacy team, our collective knowledge of available resources can better direct purchase recommendations than individual teachers. • Support for new teachers for writing, and support for all teachers in achieving the goal. 	
Data Sources:		
<i>What data will you collect?</i>	<i>When will you collect the data?</i>	<i>Who will be responsible for collecting the data?</i>
Two common assessments from the first and third terms, to be included in Student-Teacher Writing Portfolios.	Between September and December, and again between April and June.	Classroom Teachers Literacy Team Students
HRSB Grade 2 Literacy Assessment	October	Literacy Coach
Grade 3 Early Elementary Literacy Assessment (ELLA)	October	Department of Education School Administration
Grade 4 CAT4 Literacy Assessment	April	Halifax Regional School Board School Administration
Grade 6 Elementary Literacy Assessment (ELA)	October	Department of Education School Administration
Classroom Assessment Samples & Rubrics	Systematic Collection	Classroom Teachers

Goal 2:	Students will show improved achievement in number operations.
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Strategies to achieve this goal:

1. Teachers will develop a common understanding of number operations across the grades by examining the curriculum documents and developing a curriculum map.
2. Teachers will help students develop a better understanding of math language in relation to number operations through the increased use of writing in math (e.g. math journals, daily class discussions).
3. Teachers will implement lessons that are focused on problem solving (using a variety of story structures), as well as ensuring that students may use various strategies to approach a problem and demonstrate learning.
4. Teachers will implement lessons using a three-part structure (before, during and after) so that a focus on problem solving and communication is consistent across the grade levels.
5. Our school-based math team will create a common assessment with a focus on level two and three questions and rubric to assess progress on the goal.
6. Teachers will continue to meet in PLCs on a regular basis, to share ideas, best practices and to collect and examine data (internal and external) to inform classroom practice.

Professional development to support achievement of the goal:

<i>Staff will engage in the following learning activities...</i>	<i>Staff will learn the following from the professional learning activities (knowledge, skills and professional practices).</i>
Teachers will learn through book study (e.g. the Van de Walle series), lesson sharing and professional dialogue, new ideas and strategies in number operations (with support from the HRSB Math support personnel).	Teachers will learn a variety of methods to support individual students in their growth of number operations.
Teachers will learn about and implement different story structures.	All teachers have a common understanding through grade levels. This will help students relate number operations to the real world. Teachers will ensure that all students have experience in all forms of story structures.
Teachers will learn about, and use daily, the three-part structure lesson plan.	Teachers will implement the best practices in mathematics instruction. Teachers will learn ways to support students in sharing and explaining their ideas using appropriate math language.
Teachers will participate in Math Professional Learning Communities.	Teachers will share ideas and strategies to support our goal. Teachers will be able to problem solve issues that arise in meeting our goal.

Data Sources:

<i>What data will you collect?</i>	<i>When will you collect the data?</i>	<i>Who will be responsible for collecting the data?</i>
Number operations common assessment.	If time exists in the spring of 2009 the test will be administered in the fall of 2009. Spring 2010.	Classroom Teachers
Early Elementary Mathematics Literacy Assessment	June	Department of Education School Administration
Grade 2 HRSB CAT 4 Assessment	October	Halifax Regional School Board School Administration
Grade 5 HRSB CAT 4 Assessment	October	Halifax Regional School Board School Administration
Classroom Assessment Samples & Rubrics	Systematic Collection	Classroom Teachers

Question 6: How will you involve the SAC, the parents, the students and the wider community?

The involvement of the wider community is an important element of any school improvement plan. Staff felt that the sharing of our goals and planning strategies was an important component to involving the SAC and parents.

Sharing of the goals, as well as the rubric for school common assessments, were discussed as positive measures to communicate to the wider community. These aspects could be posted to the school website and included in the monthly newsletters. Further, data supporting the progress towards the goals could be shared as well, when appropriate.

Staff discussed the importance of involving students in self assessment and goal setting, to help them in their journey of improvement and provide some ownership over the process. It was felt that this was a skill that could be explicitly taught, and students could see their progress as they achieved higher success.

Finally, seeking financial aid from school groups (e.g. PTA) to purchase additional resources, was discussed as another way to involve the wider community.