



Good Schools  
to  
Great Schools



## Superintendent's Annual Report to the Community 2009

Dear Members of the HRSB Community:

I am pleased to present you with an update on the Halifax Regional School Board's (HRSB) progress and an invitation to join us in achieving a bold vision for improvement.

Last year I described how the board's ongoing commitment to improved student learning and achievement was making a significant difference in schools and classrooms throughout our region.<sup>1</sup> I also acknowledged that we had not yet achieved our goal of ensuring high levels of success for every student.

Our schools, and our communities, will truly thrive only when we are able to make children and youth our number one priority. As Superintendent of the HRSB, I am accountable to the public—to you—for the performance of our school system, but I also know that community interest and engagement in our public schools are vital. Your involvement will enhance the board's ability to reach its goals for improvement and our collective vision for making the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) a vibrant place to learn, live, work, and play.

My vision for the next five years is to see *every* school in the HRSB become an improving school. As we look to the future, we must also remember that young people only journey through our school system once; each and every day we need to build a passion for learning that will last a lifetime. Students' learning and development today is critical to each of their tomorrows as well as to the social, political, and economic future of the HRM.

My goal is to see the HRM become a leader in education by demonstrating what can happen when an entire region steps forward. Together we will create a network of great schools—137 of them—in thriving communities that bring out the best in all of us. As a school board, we rely on hearing diverse perspectives to set the best course for improvement. Our connections with schools and parents and guardians are critical, but we also need to tap into the insights of a wide range of individuals as well as public, private, and not-for-profit organizations.

We can shape our future by ensuring today that our schools are the best they can be for each and every student. I am firmly committed to being open and transparent about our progress toward this goal, and I hope that this report will be the beginning of a new dialogue about the importance—and incredible promise—of our public schools.

By 2013, every school in the Halifax Regional School Board will demonstrate improvement in student learning.

Every student can learn.

Every school will improve.



### Student Achievement in the HRSB

Today we know more about student learning and achievement in the HRSB than we ever have in the past. The data we have collected over the past five years help us to understand that improvement means something very different for every school and every classroom. I remain firmly committed to measuring improvement within schools, not among them. Above all else, data help us make informed decisions about classroom instruction. Sharing this data also supports my commitment to being accountable to the public, to providing you with information that demonstrates how well schools are doing and how the board is making the most of its resources to support high-quality teaching and learning.

This year I am reporting in a summary fashion the progress of all of our 137 schools. The data are compiled from reports to the community that each school sent home in October. These results, and other data collected through surveys and school community reports, help us to understand the specific needs and strengths of individual schools as well as overall trends in the system. In turn, they provide a powerful tool for us to learn more about effective practices and target support to areas of learning and the students who need it the most.

<sup>1</sup> Halifax Regional School Board, *Good Schools to Great Schools. Superintendent's Annual Report*, May 2008. [http://www.hrsb.ns.ca/files/Downloads/pdf/reports/annual-reports/Superintendent\\_Report\\_08\\_Long.pdf](http://www.hrsb.ns.ca/files/Downloads/pdf/reports/annual-reports/Superintendent_Report_08_Long.pdf)

### The School Board's Role in Creating a Network of Great Schools

Assessment results presented on the following pages are one source of information about student learning and achievement in the HRSB. This fall each school published an annual report to the community. The data discussed here confirm something we've known for a long time: each school will begin its journey in becoming an improving school from a different place with unique strengths and challenges. A school's context and the diverse learning needs of the students it serves will lead to a range of goals for improvement and a need for different types of support along the way.

In the years ahead, the board will continue collecting and using a variety of information about student learning because it allows us to make effective judgments about our progress and good decisions about supporting improvement. Results from student assessments, surveys, and school community reports are a big step toward helping us to:

- Understand the specific needs of each school
- Enable schools to meet these needs with targeted resources and support
- Support schools to set long-term goals and short-term benchmarks for improvement
- Monitor progress
- Respond when schools are not demonstrating improvement over time
- Hold schools accountable for improvement

A focus on targeting support to where it is needed most is also reflected in the work of the elected school board. Board members are unanimously committed to a vision for student achievement and focused on supporting schools to make a lasting difference, especially for at-risk students. In setting the 2009-2010 budget, the elected board aligned their work with this vision and were unwavering in their focus on protecting resources for classrooms, professional development, and student achievement in math and literacy.

**Working together, we can develop  
well-thought-out ways to meet  
the needs of all students,  
especially those who are at risk.**

Halifax Regional School Board,  
*Good Schools to Great Schools.*  
*Superintendent's Annual Report, May 2008.*

**The responsibility for improvement rests  
with the school system. The possibility  
that we might create change that is  
strong enough to transform every school  
rests with all of us.**

*Superintendent's Annual Report to Parents and Guardians,  
November 2009*

### Connect with a School— Create a Foundation for the Future

Schools in the HRSB are strengthened every day by the generous support of parents, guardians, and a wide variety of community partnerships. I know school administrators will agree with me when I say that individuals and organizations, large and small, can—and do—make a huge difference in the lives of our students and the success of our schools.

To build a solid foundation for our future as a region, we must all take an interest in young people and their futures. We also have to stop and ask ourselves, "What was the last contribution—big or small—that we made to schools in our community?" I believe this question is especially pertinent to our business community, which contributes a great deal to schools' fundraising efforts but may be missing other important opportunities to make powerful connections with local schools.

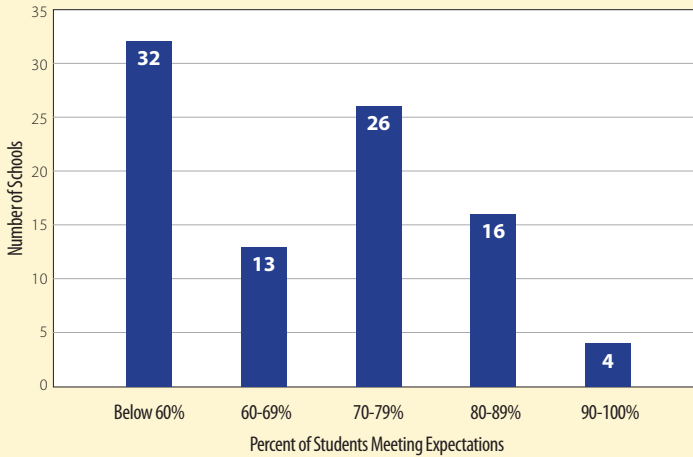
As an employer, do you know where your employees' children go to school? Are you aware of what parents and guardians need to support their children's learning? Are you able to provide parents and guardians with time to attend meetings and special events at their children's school? Are you able to provide your staff with time to volunteer in schools? Have you ever considered partnering with a local school to bring unique learning experiences to students? Do you have the capacity to create apprenticeships, co-op placements, summer jobs, or community service learning opportunities for teenagers? Have you ever considered creating a lasting legacy for learning through bursaries or scholarships?

### Join Us in Reaching a Bold Vision for Learning and Student Achievement

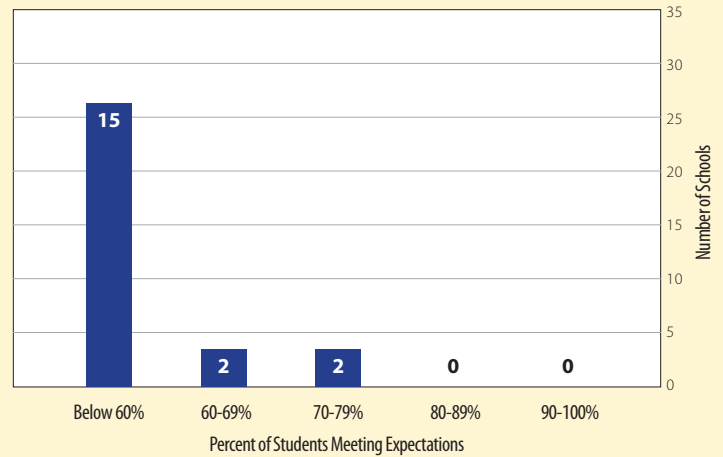
Imagine what we could accomplish if we all came together to find common ground in our vision for the HRM. Wherever we look, we would see the importance of public education to our continued growth and prosperity. Up until now, we have spent too little time facilitating deeper conversations about the purpose and place of education in our region.

## What Percentage of Students are Meeting Expectations for Reading in HRSB Schools?

**Grade 2 Reading—English Program**  
N = 91



**Grade 2 Reading—French Immersion Program**  
N = 19



All of our elementary schools participated in the board's Grade 2 reading assessment, which tells us if students are learning to read accurately (i.e., they are able to read words correctly) and fluently (i.e., they can make their reading sound like talking—with expression and meaningful phrases).

In the six years since the board first assessed student achievement in Grade 2 reading, the number of students meeting expectations for accuracy and fluency has increased steadily. And yet, some large differences remain among schools.

During the 2008-2009 school year, 20 schools had more than 80% of Grade 2 students achieving at or above expectations. In 32 schools, however, fewer than 60% of our students met expectations. Now each school has developed a plan to focus on improvement.

Community members, staff, and students came together in 2008 to set expectations for this assessment. The target set for the HRSB was that 77% of Grade 2 students would meet expectations. Currently, we have 25 schools who have met or exceeded this target.

All of our elementary schools that offer an early French Immersion program also participated in the HRSB's reading assessment last year. Students completed the assessment entirely in French.

In the three years since early French Immersion students first participated in the board's reading assessment, schools have made great strides in supporting early reading development.

During the 2008-09 school year, in 15 schools, fewer than 60% of Grade 2 students enrolled in an early French immersion program met expectations. This sends a clear message that the board must continue to target reading development in early elementary French Immersion classrooms.

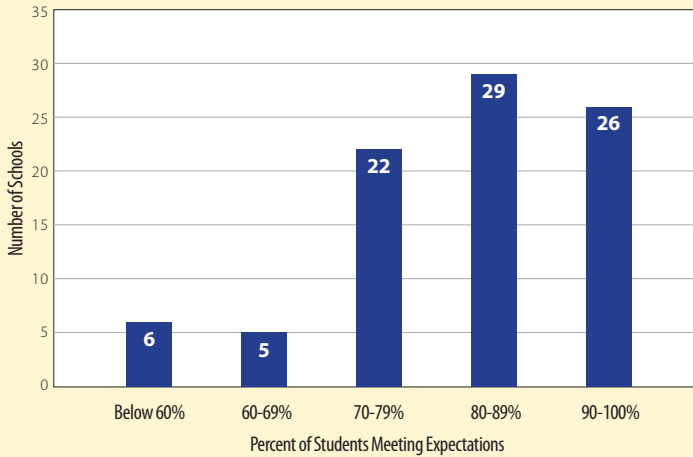
**Knowing how each school is doing is the first important step in making sure resources and support reach the schools—and the students—that need them the most.**



## What Percentage of Students are Meeting Expectations for Reading in HRSB Schools?

### Grade 5 Reading

N = 88



All elementary schools participated in the board's Grade 5 reading assessment for the first time in the 2008-2009 school year. Results from only 88 schools are reported here because three schools had fewer than six students participating in the assessment.\*

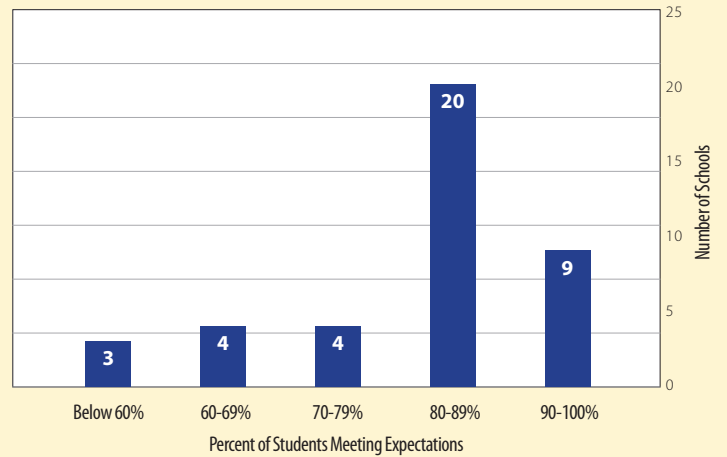
Compared to the results for Grade 2 reading, the number of schools where the majority of students are meeting expectations in Grade 5 is much higher. This tells us that classroom strategies are working to help students grow as readers from Primary to Grade 5.

During the 2008-2009 school year, in 55 schools, more than 80% of students met or exceeded the expectations for reading. In six schools, fewer than 60% met expectations.

\* To protect the privacy of individual students, schools with fewer than six students participating are not reported.

### Grade 8 Reading

N = 40



Since 2006 when the board introduced a new assessment of Grade 8 reading, HRSB students have been achieving above the Canadian norm.

Last year in 29 of the board's 40 junior high schools, more than 80% of students met or exceeded expectations for reading. In three schools, fewer than 60% met expectations.

The success of the HRSB's students compared to other students in Canada is worth celebrating. However, junior high schools—with ongoing support from the school board—need to ensure that no students get left behind in their ability to read for learning and for life.

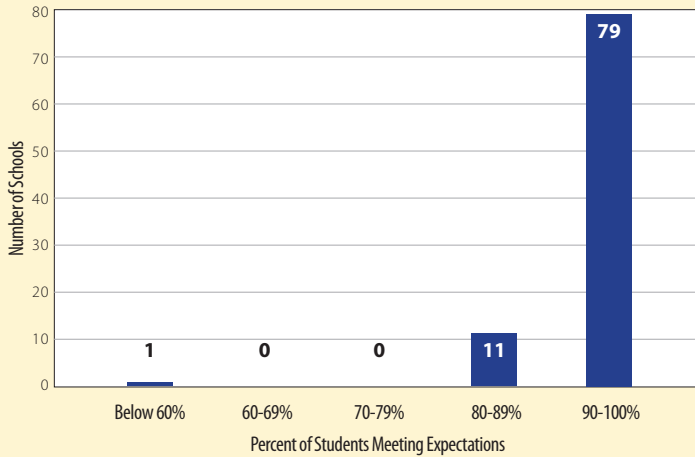


Last year in 29 of the board's 40 junior high schools, more than 80% of students met or exceeded expectations for reading.

## What Percentage of Students Are Meeting Expectations for Mathematics in HRSB Schools?

### Grade 2 Math

*N* = 91



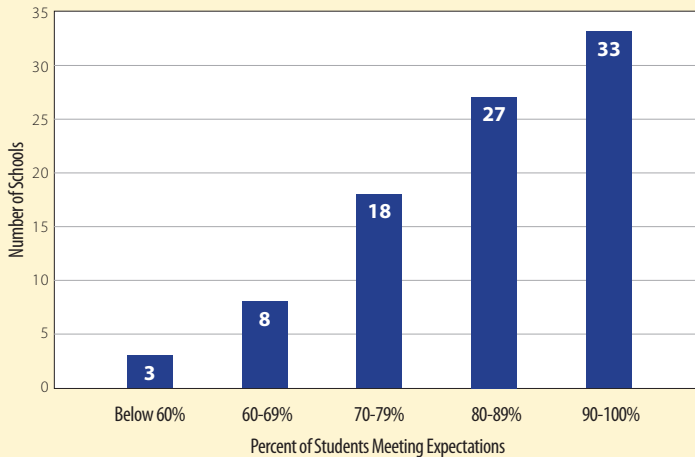
With very few exceptions, elementary schools in the HRSB are creating learning environments where students are mastering the early foundations of mathematics.

In 90 of our elementary schools, 80% or more of students met expectations on the Grade 2 mathematics assessment.

In the years ahead, we will focus on maintaining this level of achievement and ensuring that the good practices happening in so many of our schools reach all students.

### Grade 5 Math

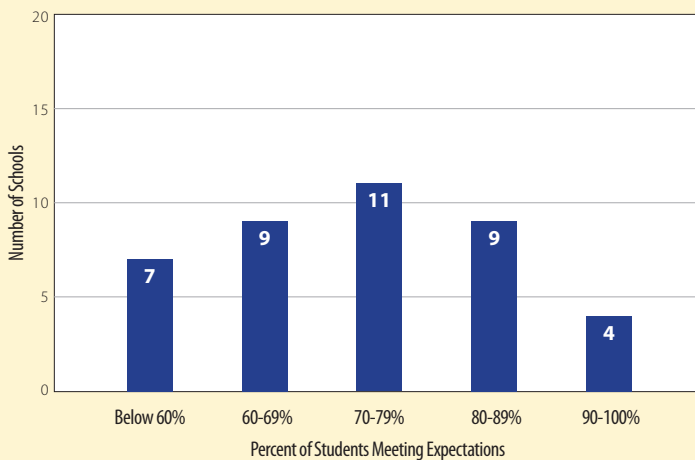
*N* = 89



In 60 of our elementary schools, more than 80% of students are meeting expectations. In three schools, fewer than 60% met expectations. The assessment tells us that measurement, operations with whole numbers (e.g., multiplication, division), problem-solving, and communication are challenging for many students and need to be a focus of school and board professional development in the years ahead.

### Grade 8 Math

*N* = 40



A fairly high number of Grade 8 students did not meet expectations in mathematics last year.

This helps us understand that junior high students encounter greater challenges in learning the math curriculum.

During the 2008-2009 school year, in 13 schools, at least 80% of Grade 8 students met or exceeded expectations. In seven schools, fewer than 60% met expectations.

The assessment results tell us that Grade 8 students continue to struggle with measurement, operations with whole numbers (e.g., multiplication, division), problem-solving, and communication.

**A community should be there when you need  
when you need to believe  
that you too will succeed  
— Whitley Williams**

*From Youth of Today Poetry Anthology,  
Auburn Drive High School, 2006.*

In closing, I would like to invite everyone reading this report to become an active partner in helping the HRSB reach its vision for improved learning and student achievement. I encourage you to watch and reflect on our progress over the next four years. I also want to extend an open call for everyone to think about the following questions and then to share their thoughts with a neighbour, colleague, school staff member, elected board, or me.

Warm regards,



**Carole Olsen**  
Superintendent, Halifax Regional School Board

1. What is the purpose of public education?
2. What place does it have in your vision for the HRM?
3. What does improvement mean to you?
4. What would you expect to see if all schools are improving schools?
5. How can we improve?
6. What are your expectations for our public school system?
7. How can the board be responsive to the community's expectations for public schools?
8. Are there things we should be thinking about or doing differently as we work toward our vision for improvement?
9. What does it mean and what will it take to make Halifax a learning-focused community?
10. What role will you play in helping the HRSB achieve its vision?

**Share your thoughts with us!**

**We'd love to hear from you.  
Send us an email at [goodtogreat@hrsb.ns.ca](mailto:goodtogreat@hrsb.ns.ca)**





### CONTACT INFORMATION

Halifax Regional School Board 90 Alderney Drive, Dartmouth, N.S. B2Y 4S8  
Tel: 902.464.2000 Website: [www.hrsb.ns.ca](http://www.hrsb.ns.ca)



Halifax Regional  
School Board

Every Student Can Learn.  
Every School Will Improve.