



Good Schools
to
Great Schools



Superintendent's Annual Report to the Community 2010

Dear Members of the HRSB Community,

I am pleased to present you with my annual report for 2010. I believe it captures the progress the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) has made toward our vision for improved student achievement by 2013.

As a system, we are moving in the right direction with incredible support from parents, guardians, and our school communities. We continue to recognize that improvement means something very different at each of our 137 schools. Each school may have distinct goals, but along with central office staff and the governing Board, they share a common focus: improved student learning and achievement.

We take pride in inviting everyone—from individuals, groups, and community organizations to small and large businesses—to join us in our journey toward improvement.

As you will read in the following pages, we continue to demonstrate positive results in student achievement. We are also very clear about areas where students are struggling with their learning in mathematics and literacy.

Last year, I wrote my report to the HRSB community in the spirit of beginning a new dialogue about the importance—and incredible promise—of public schools in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). I was, therefore, very appreciative when the Halifax Chamber of Commerce invited me to present as part of its *Distinguished Speakers Series* in March 2010. I was delighted to have an opportunity to explain why community involvement with schools in the HRM is so important to the future growth of our region and the success of our young people. I am honoured to share a summary of our ideas here.

Learning for the 21st century

Last June, 3,908 students graduated from high school in the HRSB. The social, cultural, economic, technological, environmental, and political changes that surrounded their journey through our school system were unprecedented. The world is a much different place than it was 13 years ago when those students first set foot in our schools, and the rate of change shows no signs of slowing down. We have no way of knowing what the world will look like when the 3,474 students who began Grade Primary this September graduate in 2023.

And yet, we are charged with preparing our students for life in a world with local and global issues we cannot foresee; technology that we can't predict; and jobs that do not now exist.

Young Nova Scotians will be forced to face issues—

HRSB's Vision for Improvement

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

Every student can learn.
Every school will improve.



including an aging and declining population, labour shortages, increased health-care spending, and decreased civic participation—that our generation did not have to grapple with, at least not to the same degree. They will also experience the impact of global issues—such as climate change, water and food shortages, and economic instability—because now, more than ever, we are connected to and affected by international events. This new reality requires schools, families, and communities to support young people in developing a new set of competencies for learning and for life.

According to Tony Wagner, author of *The Global Achievement Gap*, the skills and abilities needed for a successful career, continuous learning, and active, informed citizenship have converged in seven essential competencies:

1. Critical thinking and problem-solving
2. Collaboration
3. Agility and adaptability
4. Initiative and entrepreneurialism
5. Effective oral and written communication
6. Accessing and analyzing information
7. Curiosity and imagination¹

¹ Tony Wagner (2008). *The Global Achievement Gap*. New York: Basic Books, p. 14. For a summary of the seven skills see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NS2PqTxFfc>

Numeracy and literacy will always remain the building blocks for learning, but today these fundamental skills, to which we would also add cultural competency, need to become powerful tools for new ways of learning. This is a momentous challenge when our educational systems and schools, our core beliefs about teaching and learning, and the policies that guide our decisions are not much different than they were at the turn of the 20th century.

In the past, it was not a requirement of the public education system to educate every child—or even most children—to the standard of “college-ready.” Until now. In the 21st century, all students, not just some, need to develop a core set of competencies that reflect skills required for success in the workplace and society.

The future of this region, this province, and this country depends on how well we prepare today’s students for their world, not ours. The responsibility for improvements that shift longstanding beliefs and practices about teaching, learning, and student achievement rests with the school system. But we cannot do it alone. Transforming learning into an experience that is more relevant and more rigorous for all students requires genuine collaboration among many individuals and organizations.

The school board’s role

Achieving excellence and equity in HRSB schools means that we are moving all students forward with contemporary skills and competencies based on their unique learning strengths and needs. This is the foundation of our commitment to improving student achievement by raising the bar and closing the gap in learning.

When students are able to demonstrate that they have met expectations, we have to support them to go even further with their learning. But our greatest challenge—one that we share with school systems across

“As a business person, I recognize the important role our public schools play in building our economy and enriching our society.”

Janet MacMillan, Principal, MT&L Public Relations

“Business should play an active role in supporting public education. In an increasingly competitive world, human capital—talent—is one of the key determinants of economic success.”

Paul A. Kent, President & CEO, Greater Halifax Partnership

Canada—is developing a stable network of support around students who are struggling to meet expectations. This will help to ensure that we are closing the achievement gap and bringing opportunities for deeper learning to all students.

How are students doing in mathematics and literacy?

This year, for the first time, I am reporting information from the board’s mathematics and literacy assessments in a way that allows you to clearly see those areas where we need to raise the bar and close the gap in student achievement. As you look through this information, you will notice the achievement gap is very small (3%) in some cases and very large (58%) in others. Whether small or large, however, we must always remember that these numbers represent real students who are struggling and require additional support to experience success.

Board assessment results allow us to target resources to schools where they are needed most and to plan effectively for professional development. Schools also use these results and information from ongoing classroom assessments to understand the learning strengths and needs of students and to set their goals for improvement.

More than ever, the board’s central office team has a clear understanding of each school’s strengths and the types of support needed to have the greatest impact on student and professional learning. This understanding has allowed us to target different resources and support to each school.

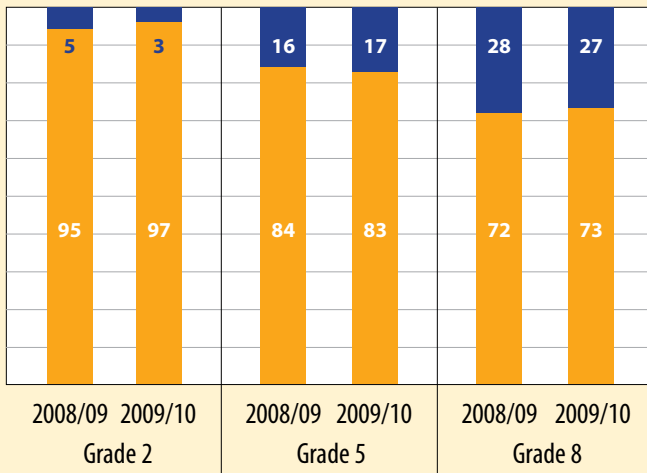
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What percentage of students in the HRSB are meeting expectations for mathematics?

Each school year approximately 10,000 students in Grade 2, 5, and 8 participate in the board's mathematics assessments. The results of these assessments provide schools with detailed information about students' progress in meeting expectations for learning in core areas of the mathematics curriculum. Three areas of the curriculum, math concepts, estimation, and number operations, are assessed. Here we report on math concepts—the big ideas of mathematics, which include number sense, patterns, measurement, geometry, data, and probability.

Grade 2, 5 and 8 English & French Immersion Program Students Math Concepts

● Meeting Expectations ● Not Meeting Expectations



The graph above shows that 97% of Grade 2 students (n = 3,256) are meeting expectations in math concepts. The 3% of early elementary students who are struggling with mathematics will require targeted support to ensure that they have a strong foundation as they progress to higher grades.

Are we meeting public expectations for Grade 2 mathematics?

Grade 2 students in the HRSB are exceeding all expectations for math concepts, estimation, and number operations set by the public in 2008.

The majority (83%) of Grade 5 students (n = 3,406) in the board are also meeting expectations in math concepts. However, the achievement gap is noticeably larger at this grade level: 17% of students did not meet expectations.

The board's Grade 8 mathematics assessment continues to indicate that these students (n = 3,484) encounter even greater challenges in learning the mathematics curriculum. In 2009–10, 27% did not meet expectations indicating that the achievement gap widens as students encounter increasingly complex ideas in this subject area.

Are we meeting public expectations for Grade 8 mathematics?

To date, students in the HRSB have not met public expectations set for Grade 8 mathematics concepts.

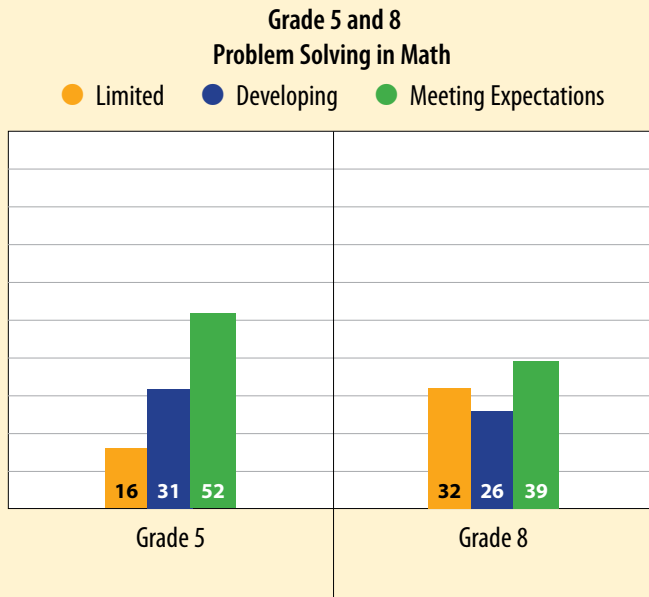
Note: No public expectations were set for Grade 5 mathematics.

“Education at all levels and of all types, P-12, trades, continuing education, literacy, and numeracy, is a vital building block to an engaged and productive workforce as well as an educated and informed electorate.”

Valerie Payn, President & CEO, Halifax Chamber of Commerce



Digging deeper: Are students in Grade 5 and 8 developing math competencies for the 21st century?



Note: Figures above do not add up to 100% because 1% of the Grade 5 assessment and 3% of the Grade 8 assessment had insufficient information to be included.

As 21st century learners, it is essential for students in the HRSB not just to *know* mathematics, but to be confident and competent in *thinking* mathematically. Last year, Grade 5 and 8 board assessments measured the extent to which students met expectations in problem solving and in communicating their thinking about math.

Although we only have one year of data to consider, it is clear that the achievement gap for these deeper level math competencies is significant at both grade levels:

- Among Grade 5 students (n = 3,295), 47% did not meet expectations for problem solving and 48% for communication (graph not shown). Of this group, 31% were able to demonstrate they are developing key skills in problem solving and 30% in communication. Meanwhile, 16% struggled with limited skills in problem solving and 18% in communication. Our goal in every Grade 5 classroom must be to have no students in the limited category and to provide consistent support for all students so that they can experience success in developing these competencies.
- Among Grade 8 students (n = 3,383), the achievement gap is 58% for problem solving and 60% for communication (graph not shown). For junior high schools, a challenge exists in providing targeted supports to approximately one-third of Grade 8 students who are struggling with limited skills in these areas as well as the 26% who are developing problem solving skills and 30% developing communication skills, but are not yet meeting expectations.



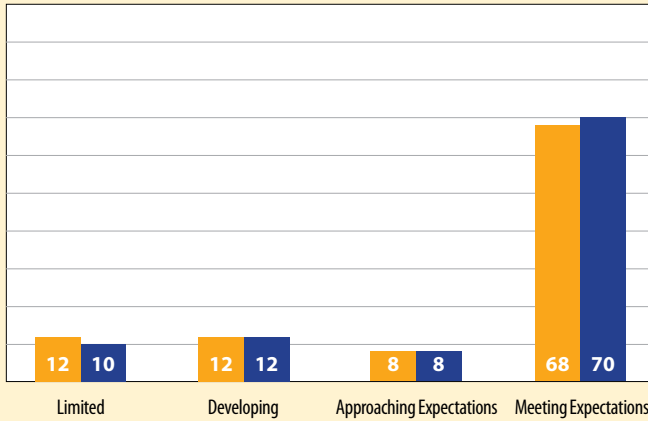
“Public education has to prepare kids for tomorrow’s world, not yesterday’s. We have to find ways to reach the kids who don’t fit inside a defined box.”

Stephen Lund, President & CEO, Nova Scotia Business Inc.

What percentage of students are meeting expectations for reading in the HRSB?

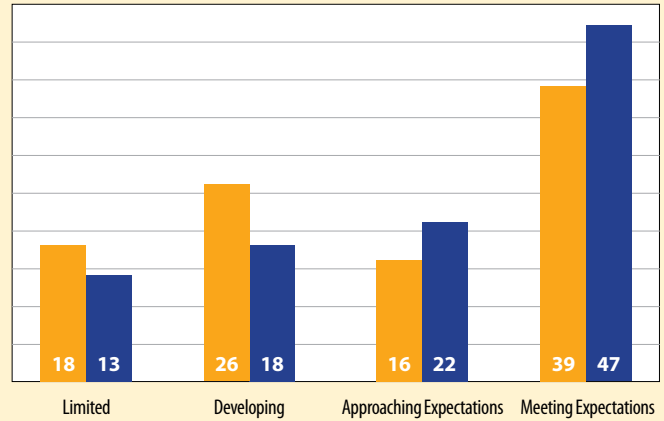
Grade 2 English Program Students Reading Accurately & Fluently

● 2008-2009 ● 2009-2010



Grade 2 French Immersion Program Students Reading Accurately & Fluently

● 2008-2009 ● 2009-2010



In 2009–10, 2,796 Grade 2 students participated in the board's 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).

The number of Grade 2 students meeting expectations for accuracy and fluency has increased steadily over the past seven years. In 2009–10, 70% met expectations, a small increase of 2% from the previous school year (2008-09) and an additional 8% were approaching expectations for their grade level.

To close the achievement gap in reading accuracy and fluency, schools—with support from the board—will need to target their support to the 10% who had limited progress in learning to read accurately and fluently, and the 12% who were developing these skills but not yet approaching expectations.

Are we meeting public expectations for Grade 2 reading?

Students are currently meeting public expectations for Grade 2 reading in two of the 10 areas that the public set targets for in 2008. In the past two years, results also show improvement toward public expectations in an additional six targeted areas with the greatest gains in the areas of reading comprehension.

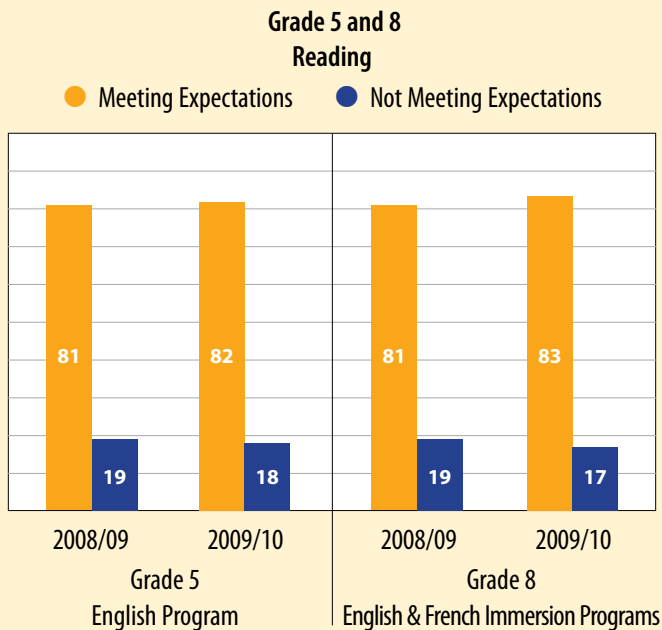
All Grade 2 students (n = 520) attending elementary schools that offer an early French Immersion program also participated in the HRSB's reading assessment last year.

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.

In the past two years alone, the number of students approaching or meeting expectations increased from 55% to 69%. This also means that the achievement gap in reading accurately and fluently among these students narrowed by 14%.

Our focus must still remain on providing additional supports to the 31% of students with limited or developing skills in learning to read accurately and fluently.

What percentage of students are meeting expectations for reading in the HRSB?



Grade 5 (n = 2,972) and Grade 8 (n = 3,519) students participated in the board's reading assessment for the second time in the 2009–10 school year.

Since these assessments were first administered, 81% of Grade 5 students and 83% of Grade 8 students met expectations. Similar to results in Grade 2 (see previous section), however, there were students who did not meet expectations. Both elementary and junior high schools need to ensure that the 17–18% of students who were unable to meet expectations continue to develop their ability to read for learning and for life.

Are we meeting public expectations for Grade 8 literacy?

In reading, we have met public expectations in the following areas: reading fiction stories, understanding main ideas, and locating information in text. We have also met public expectations in the content area (ideas) of writing.

Digging deeper: Are students developing literacies for the 21st Century?

In Grade 2, learning to read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension are critical areas of student's development. As students engage with more complex and different kinds of texts, comprehension is essential because it motivates young people to learn with deeper understanding.

The board assesses comprehension of texts that are appropriate for the Grade 2, 5, and 8 students who participate in reading assessments each year. The results from these assessments let us know if students are understanding and making personal connections to what they are reading.

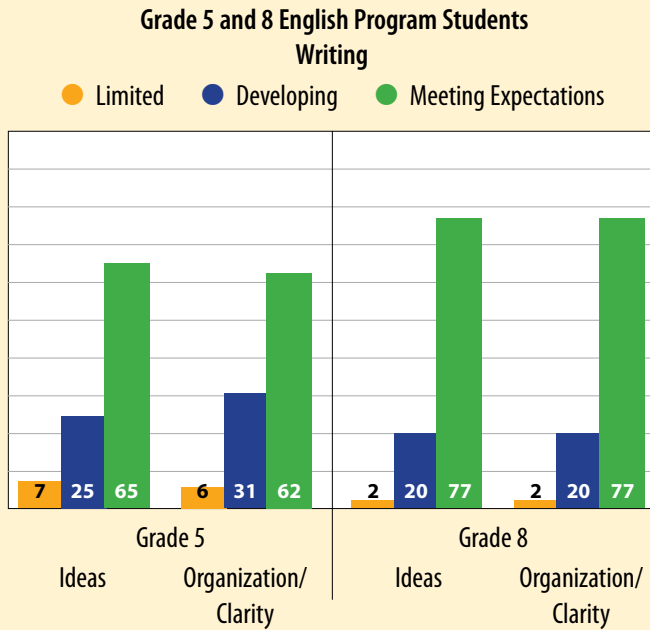
Comprehension Grade 2: More than 80% of students in the English Program (n = 2,796) are able to express opinions and ask questions about the stories they read. The majority is also able to form personal connections with what they are reading, but this is also an area where many students struggle—about 16% do not meet expectations in this important area, which affects students' engagement in reading to learn and learning to read.

The achievement gap in reading comprehension is significantly higher among Grade 2 French Immersion students (n = 520). A large majority (93%) is able to express an opinion about a story, but more than half of the students who participated in the assessment struggled to connect with the main ideas of a story in ways that allowed them to ask questions or to make personal connections. In the two years since the board began assessing reading comprehension, this gap has already begun to close, but schools—with support from the board—will need to continue making this area a priority and ensure that individual students who are not able to meet expectations are receiving the support they need.

Comprehension Grade 5 and 8: Reading comprehension in Grade 5 (n = 2,972) and 8 (n = 3,519) is assessed through students' responses to three types of texts: literary (e.g., a novel), informational (e.g., a factual book or article), and media (e.g., newspaper article or product label). Results from these assessments tell us that as texts become more complex and varied, the gap in student achievement increases: close to 30% of students in both Grade 5 and 8 struggle to understand media texts while 13% and 19% are not meeting expectations for comprehension with literary text.

What percentage of students are meeting expectations for writing in the HRSB?

In 2009–10, the board introduced a new assessment for Grade 5 and 8 students to understand their ongoing development as writers. The assessment measures students' ability to convey their ideas by writing with clarity.

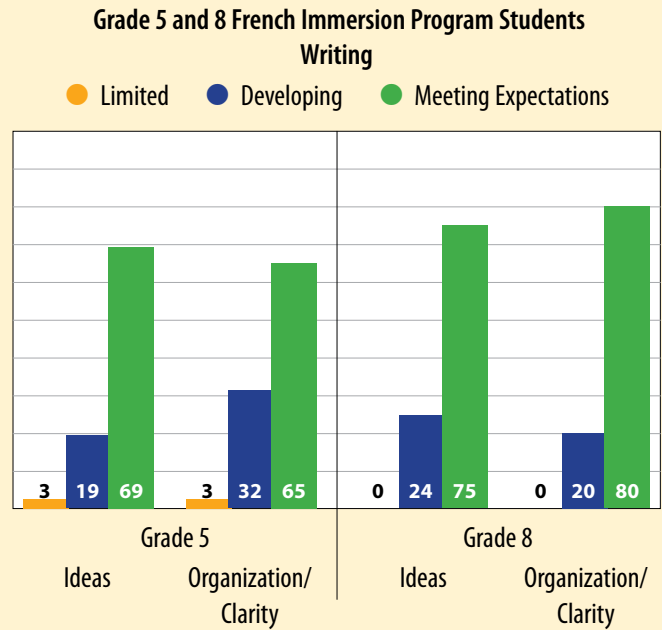


Note: Figures in this graph total 99% to account for assessments with insufficient information.

More than 60% of Grade 5 students (n = 2,897) met expectations on the writing assessment. Approximately 30% of students demonstrated that they are developing the skills to express their ideas clearly and in a well-organized way, while 7% struggled with limited skills.

Among Grade 8 students who participated in the assessment (n = 3,135), 77% met expectations, and an additional 20% demonstrated evidence of developing skills that reflect expectations for expressing ideas, good organization, and clarity in writing at their grade level.

To close the gap in writing achievement, schools—with support from the board—will need to provide targeted interventions for the 2–7% of students who are struggling, while also ensuring that students who are developing, but not yet meeting expectations, receive the support to become stronger writers.



Note: Figures in this graph total 99% to account for assessments with insufficient information.

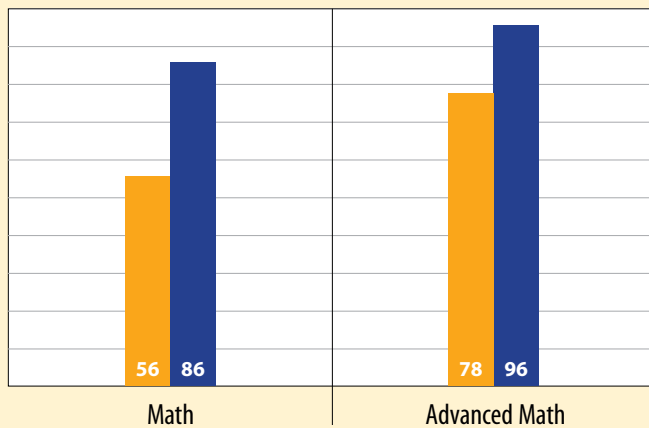
Students in the board's French Immersion Program demonstrated similar strengths as writers. Sixty-nine percent of Grade 5 (n = 416) and 75% of Grade 8 (n = 271) students met expectations for conveying their ideas in writing. Sixty-five percent of Grade 5 and 80% of Grade 8 students were able to do so with clarity and good organization.

Among students who did not meet expectations, all Grade 8 French Immersion students who wrote the assessment demonstrated that they are developing the skills that reflect grade level expectations. Among Grade 5 students, many are also developing these skills, but 3% require targeted support to gain additional skills and confidence as writers.

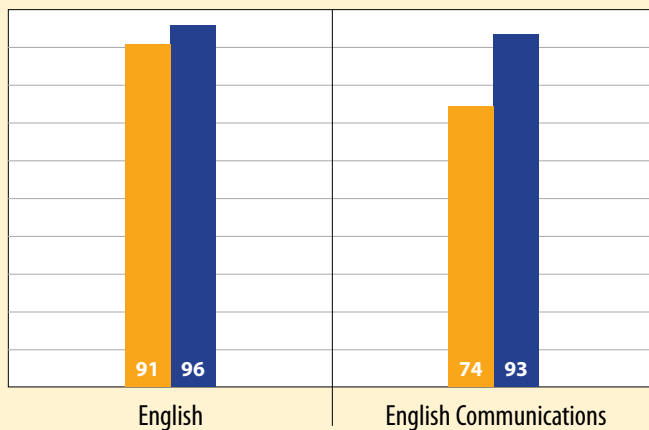
What percentage of students are meeting expectations in English 12, English Communications 12, Math 12, and Advanced Math 12 courses?

Each year students enrolled in English 12, English Communications 12, Math 12, and Advanced Math 12 courses write Nova Scotia Exams (NSEs). A student's final grade is a combination of their term mark (70%) and their exam mark (30%). The graphs below show the percentage of students who passed their NSE exam and the percentage of students who received a credit in their course by achieving a final grade of 50% or higher.

**Grade 12 Math
Exam & Final Course Mark**
● Exam ● Final Mark



**Grade 12 English
Exam & Final Course Mark**
● Exam ● Final Mark



How are high school students doing in advanced placement and international baccalaureate programs?

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB) is currently offered in five high schools (Cole Harbour, Charles P. Allen, Halifax West, Citadel, and Prince Andrew). The results for the board's second group of graduating students (June 2010) are very impressive. Eighty-nine percent of the HRSB students enrolled in the program received their IB diploma—18% higher than the North America pass rate and 11% higher than the international pass rate. Nova Scotia students outperformed the world's IB diploma students in 22 of 27 subjects.

Students at three high schools (Sir John A Macdonald, Millwood, and J.L. Ilsley) were enrolled in the Advanced Placement (AP) Program. The AP Program provides students with the opportunity to take college-level course work and exams while still in high school. In May 2010, 92% of the students enrolled in AP courses wrote exams in seven subject areas with 44% of the students meeting expectations for college level credit.

Are students in the HRSB benefitting from community-based learning opportunities?

In our ever-changing world, community-based learning supports the needs of students as they prepare to face challenging decisions when they leave our high schools. Last year alone, high school students in the HRSB earned more than 1,200 credits in the area of community-based learning. Students at 11 of our high schools earned 204 credits in Community-Based Learning 10. At 15 of our high schools, students at the Grade 11 and 12 levels accumulated in excess of 1,000 credits in cooperative education. With the support of hundreds of community partners and businesses, students are successful in making informed decisions about their future as they transition from school to work and/or further education.

What percentage of Grade 12 students graduated in June 2010?

In June 2010, 86% of Grade 12 students eligible to graduate (n = 4,541) received their Nova Scotia diplomas. Of the 14% of students who did not graduate in June, many returned this year to complete outstanding credits by registering as a full-time student at their local high school or enrolling at one of the board's Flexible Learning Education Centres (FLECs).

As Grade 12 students completed their final year, we asked them to tell us about their plans for post-secondary learning or work after high school. The majority of the 3,908 students (75%) planned to pursue post-secondary learning at university, community college, or other educational and training institutions. Close to 10% planned to transition directly into the workforce, and 15% were still undecided.

“Well-educated employees ensure the future for successful businesses and reflect positively on the economy. We live in a rapidly changing and very competitive world and businesses have to step in and invest time and commit resources to education so we can improve on the future workforce and maintain a competitive edge.”

Wadih M. Fares, President & CEO, W.M. Fares Group

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To provide a foundation for improvement in the HRSB, we will stay the course with *Planning for Improvement* as an effective model of evidence-based decision making in our schools, support principals as learning leaders, and continue to strengthen our work in closing the achievement gap. And because we are asking all teachers to make significant changes to how they teach and assess student learning, we will also continue to advocate for common planning and professional development time for teachers in each of our schools.

We must also take the challenges of transforming our school system seriously. We need to ensure that our community sees the value of investing in our young people. We need to capture the synergies that can be created among all of our educational institutions; ignite a dialogue about public education in our communities; and advocate for adequate and stable funding while always demonstrating that we are spending public dollars effectively and efficiently.

An invitation to the HRSB community

I would like to extend an open invitation to individuals, groups, and organizations in our school communities

to join me in creating a public education system with the direction and strength to thrive no matter what the future holds. I know that our schools are enriched every day by the generous support of parents, guardians, and a wide network of local and regional community partnerships. All of this support makes a huge difference in the lives of our students and the success of our schools.

There are many ways to get involved in helping to create a foundation for the future of our region and the young people who call the HRM home. You can connect with a student, a classroom, and/or a school to provide unique learning experiences; mentor a student; provide co-op, apprenticeship, or community-service learning opportunities; volunteer on your school advisory committee; or even just get to know what’s happening at your local school.

I would also like to challenge everyone to become an advocate for young people in our region and visionaries for schools and communities that reflect their needs in the 21st century. We can begin this process by considering three key questions:

1. What do the students of today need to thrive in tomorrow’s world?
2. What will give them the opportunity to live, work,

“Students need to be prepared not only for success in the workforce but also to become capable contributors to society. They need to be change-ready instead of change-adverse, empowered but not entitled, and they need to perceive a challenge that requires hard work as welcome and exciting as opposed to something to be avoided.”

Catherine J. Woodman, President & CEO, United Way of Halifax Region

and experience successful lives right here in Nova Scotia?

3. What resources, relationships, and energy can we bring to ensuring that all young Nova Scotians benefit equally from these opportunities?

I believe the HRM is small enough to come together to achieve excellence and equity in learning. We are also big enough to make a real difference in the lives of many young people. We have a group of highly skilled and dedicated staff working for the HRSB; members of the governing Board who are committed to the board's number one goal of improved student achievement; and a supportive network of parents, guardians, and other partners. By contributing your ideas and getting involved with schools—even in small ways—I believe we can collectively create a school system in the HRSB that is second to none!

Warm regards,



Carole Olsen
Superintendent
Halifax Regional School Board

“The business community should be the public education sector’s greatest ally. After all, public education molds the minds of the people who run our businesses, lead our organizations, and make the economic decisions that impact us all. Partnering with this cohort in a collaborative way is essential.”

**April Howe, Senior Consultant & Certified Career Coach,
Knightsbridge Robertson Surette**





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Halifax Regional
School Board

Every Student Can Learn.
Every School Will Improve.