



Good Schools
to
Great Schools



Superintendent's Annual Report to Parents and Guardians 2010

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am pleased to present you with this year's annual report. I believe it describes a set of ideas and a course of action to demonstrate our progress toward the goal of improved learning for all students.

Improvement means something very different at each of the 137 schools that are part of the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB). Each school is unique and needs to follow a plan for improvement that builds on its strengths and responds effectively to its challenges. The board's central office team and the governing Board continue to play important roles in

At its core, improvement is not just about supporting schools to move forward; it is demonstrating that each and every student is moving forward with deeper learning and greater success.



supporting schools to reach their particular goals for improvement. Collectively, we share a common focus on improved student learning and achievement.

As a system, I believe we are all moving in the right direction with incredible support from parents¹ and our school communities. As you will see in the following pages, we continue to demonstrate some positive results in student achievement and in attaining detailed knowledge of areas where students are struggling with their learning in mathematics and literacy. Each year we move closer to reaching our vision for 2013: to have a lasting impact on learning for *all* students in the HRSB. However, I believe we have one more bridge to cross together as a system. On one side of this bridge are students who are meeting or exceeding grade level expectations. On the other side are students struggling to meet expectations, often needing to feel more confident and excited about learning. Across the span are students at different

stages of developing the skills and knowledge they need to meet provincial curriculum outcomes and/or their individualized program plans (IPPs). In each classroom, students' journeys of learning are different. Yet the final destination remains the same: becoming confident and successful learners for the 21st century.

Our one and only goal is to ensure that all students receive the individual support they need to reach this destination. As students meet expectations and reach the far side of the bridge, we have to be there to raise the bar by supporting them to go even further. But our greatest challenge—one we share with school systems across Canada—is to meet and stay with any student who is struggling so they can move forward. Only then will we be able to bridge the gap between the number of students who are meeting expectations and those who are not.

Achieving excellence and equity in HRSB schools means that we are moving all students forward based on their unique learning strengths and needs. Every staff member within the HRSB must become a part of students' learning journeys, aware of what students need to know, and understand what they, as professionals, can do to contribute to the goal of improved student learning and achievement.

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 areas where we need to raise the bar and close the gap in student achievement.

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.

¹ Throughout this report, the term "parents" is meant to include both parents and guardians.

To find out literacy and math results, and what your child's school is doing to improve in these and other areas of learning, you can ask a teacher or administrator, or read the school's Annual Report to the Community. Schools send their community reports to parents each October. If you have not received a copy, you can find it on your school's website or on the HRSB website (under the school finder tab).

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. I also invite you to read a summary of results from the board's *Getting to Great* survey (found on page 10) and think about our plan of action for closing the achievement gap in the HRSB.

More than ever, the board's central office team has a clear understanding of each school's strengths and the types of support that will make the greatest difference for student and professional learning. This understanding has allowed us to target the right resources and support to each school.

Principals are telling us that this new model of support is working. The goal is to continue to fine tune ways to work more effectively and strategically by making decisions based on what we know about students' needs in each school.

How will we close the achievement gap in the HRSB?

Schools have an incredible amount of information about student achievement and a good understanding of how students feel about their school and experiences in their classrooms. This information guides schools as they set and monitor goals for improvement through the Planning for Improvement (PFI) process and helps teachers as they work together in professional teams to meet students' day-to-day learning needs.

As a board, we will stay the course with PFI. Improved student achievement remains the number one goal of the board, and until we are able to close the achievement gap, we will not be able to reach this goal. This is why we need to ensure that all schools develop a consistent focus on each and every student, especially those who are struggling to meet expectations.

A commitment to closing the achievement gap calls on all schools to know deeply those students who are at risk as learners: their interests, experiences, hopes, and fears, and their specific learning strengths and challenges.

We have to become very clear about the purpose of school improvement. It is about one—and only one—thing: supporting each and every student to become a confident and successful learner for the 21st century.

What do we need to know?

When I visit a school, it is my expectation that all principals will tell me about the school's approach to raising the bar for learning and closing the gap in achievement. In particular, I will be asking:

- Which students are struggling to meet expectations in their classes?
- What are they struggling with?
- What is the school doing to provide consistent support to students who are struggling?
- What evidence has the school to show that this support is making a difference, and if it is not, what do they plan to do differently?

I believe we also need to know much more about students who have been identified for special education support and are working toward individualized learning outcomes. Although students with Individual Program Plans do not participate in board or provincial assessments, it is very important that we know if these students are meeting individual outcomes and experiencing success in our school system. Therefore, we will work with the board's Program Department to ensure that we have a clear and inclusive picture of student achievement.

Last year, Dr. Enid Lee, an educator and international consultant, provided recommendations for improving the experiences and outcomes of African Nova Scotian learners in the province. Dr. Lee was clear that all boards, including Halifax, must do a better job in responding to the concerns that students from African Nova Scotian communities are less likely to experience success as learners.

We know that African Nova Scotian students and their families may face barriers in our schools. We need to ensure that we take seriously our need to build greater cultural competence among all staff so that we are providing appropriate interventions. To know if our work is making a difference in the learning experiences of all students, we also need a more complete picture of the students we serve each day. For this reason, schools will continue to encourage all parents to complete a student identification form at the beginning of each school year. Similar to other data we collect, this information will be used to target the right resources and supports to students and schools.

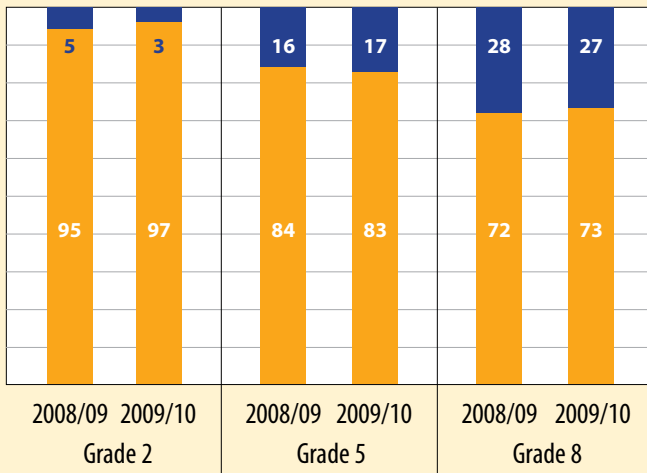
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What percentage of students in the HRSB are meeting expectations for mathematics?

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.

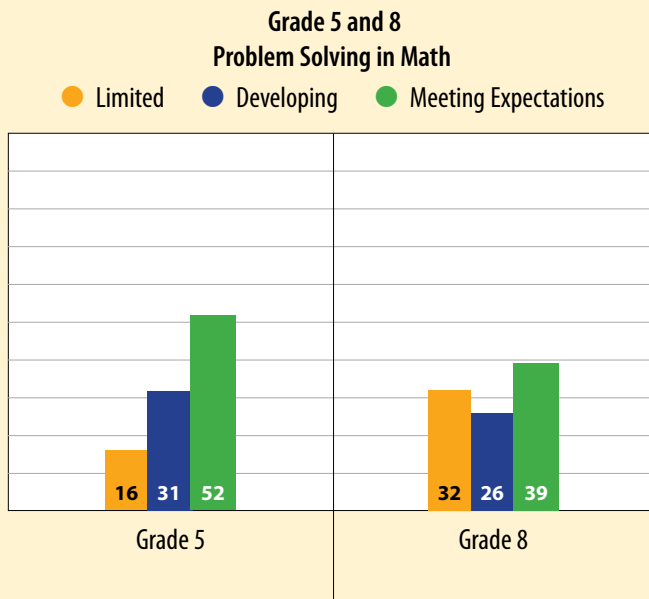
Note: No public expectations were set for Grade 5 mathematics.

“Achieving excellence and equity in HRSB schools means that we are moving all students forward based on their unique learning strengths and needs.”

Carole Olsen, Superintendent



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.



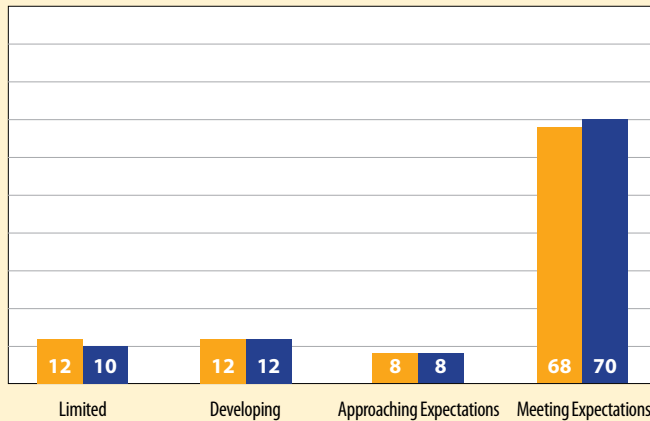
“Adopting new instructional strategies that invite students into 21st century learning requires time, new knowledge, and support for taking risks.”

Carole Olsen, Superintendent

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

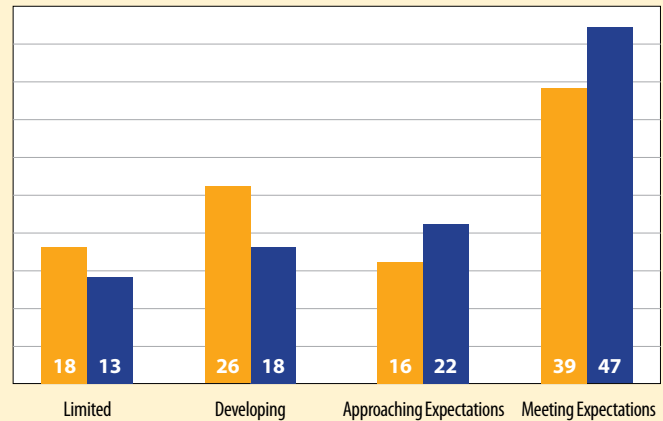
Grade 2 English Program Students Reading Accurately & Fluently

● 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.

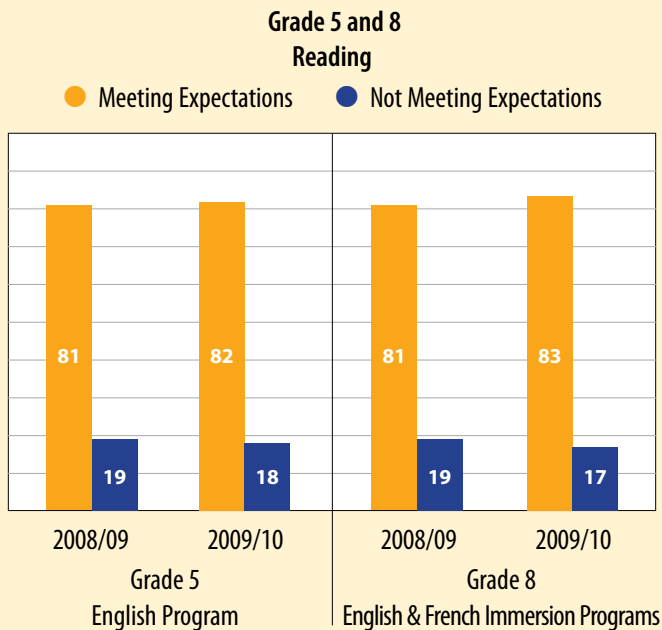
All Grade 2 students (n = 520) attending elementary schools that offer an early French Immersion program also participated in the HRSB's reading assessment last year.

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.

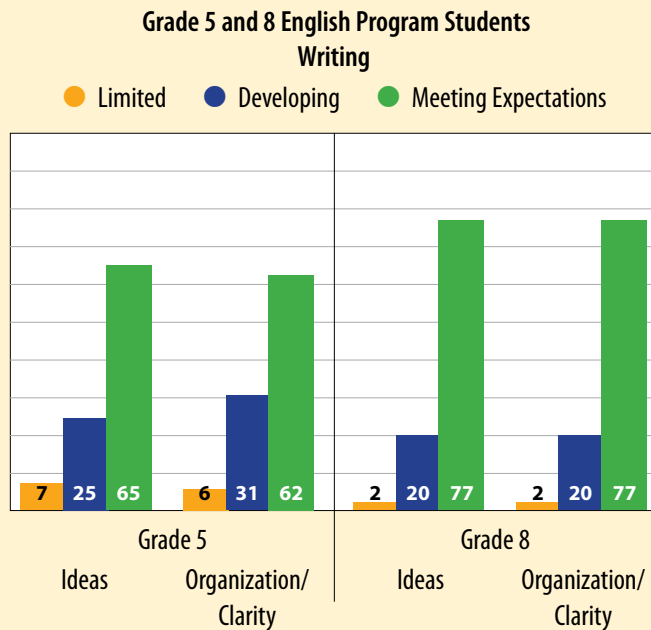
Comprehension Grade 2: More than 80% of students in the English Program (n = 2,796) are able to express opinions and ask questions about the stories they read. The majority is also able to form personal connections with what they are reading, but this is also an area where many students struggle—about 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.

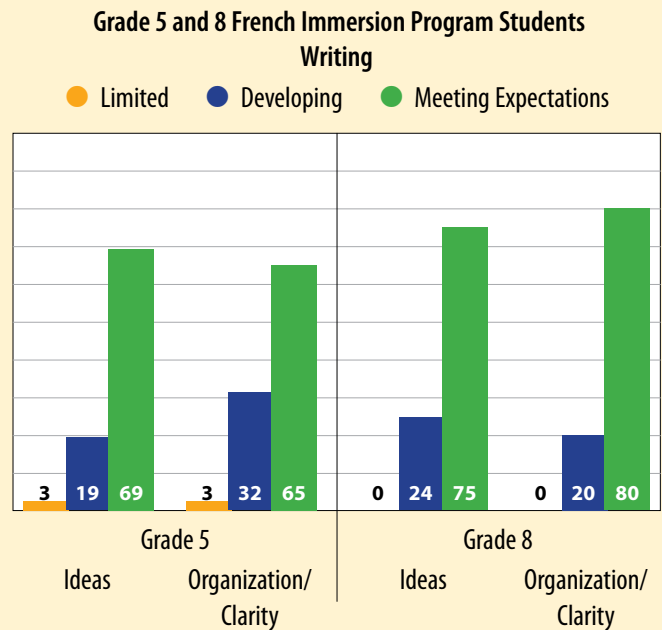


Note: Figures in this graph total 99% to account for assessments with insufficient information.

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.

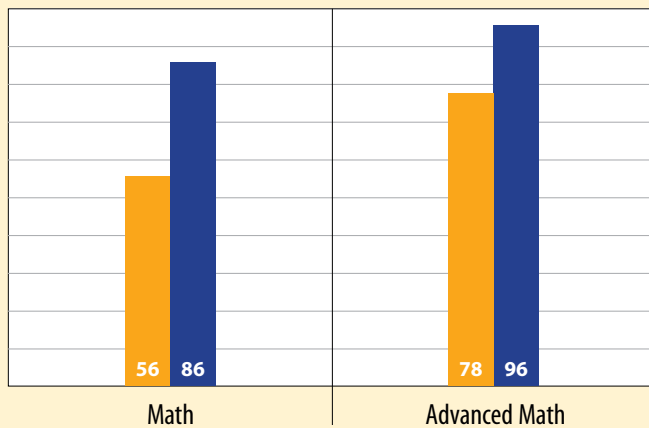
Students in the board's French Immersion Program demonstrated similar strengths as writers. Sixty-nine percent of Grade 5 (n = 416) and 75% of Grade 8 (n = 271) students met expectations for conveying their ideas in writing. Sixty-five percent of Grade 5 and 80% of Grade 8 students were able to do so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

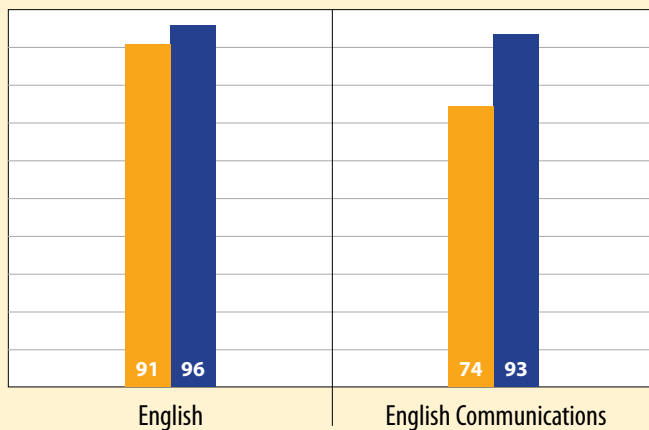
What percentage of students are meeting expectations in English 12, English Communications 12, Math 12, and Advanced Math 12 courses?

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.

How do students and parents feel about learning and schools in the HRSB?

Student Feedback Grade 4–12

My teacher usually or always wants me to try my best in school.	90%		
Most days, my teachers give me English language arts or math schoolwork that is “just right”.	Grade 7–12 Language Arts 72%	Grade 7–12 Math 59%	
My teacher really cares about me.	Grade 4–6 94%	Grade 7–9 62%	Grade 10–12 52%
I try my best in school because I like what I’m learning.	79%	53%	59%

Student Feedback Grade 7–12

My teachers let me know how to do better/improve my work (usually or always).	63%			
My learning gets interrupted a lot because of “friends talking to me when they shouldn’t”.	58%			
	Grade 7–9		Grade 10–12	
I feel confident about my ability to learn in my classes.	Language Arts 66%	Math 57%	Language Arts 69%	Math 53%

Parent Feedback Grade Primary–12

	Grade P–6	Grade 7–9	Grade 10–12
My child’s school has high academic standards.	89%	77%	80%
I have a good relationship with my child’s teacher.	93%	75%	67%
My child’s teacher contacts me regularly about my child’s progress (e.g., beyond parent-teacher night, report cards).	49%	40%	30%
My child’s school is a safe place.	97%	89%	89%
At school my child is challenged to work at her/his full potential (most or every day).	88%	72%	73%

What do we need to do?

We need to ensure that all resources provided to schools are focussed on student learning.

The board must also focus on providing teachers with a vital resource: time. All of our teachers and principals need time to learn, plan, and reflect on their own and in teams. We are asking all teachers to make significant changes to how they teach and assess student learning. Adopting new instructional strategies that invite students into 21st century learning requires time, new knowledge, and support for taking risks.

We know that successful learning is the result of teachers working effectively with students, but board staff also play a critical role. We must travel the bridge alongside students, teachers, and principals doing everything we can to align all systems and resources to support struggling students. Only in this way will we achieve our goals for closing the achievement gap and raising the bar of learning for all students.

What roles can parents play?

Students only journey through our school system once. If they are struggling with learning in one or more areas, our schools must be in a position to respond immediately and to follow their progress very closely to make sure support strategies are making a difference.

Parents know the students we teach every day in ways that staff in schools will never be able to know them. They also care deeply about their child's success at school.

It is our job to help you as parents feel confident about advocating on your child's behalf. We do this by making you feel welcome in our schools and creating a safe environment for you to ask questions and engage in conversations with teachers and principals, especially when you are concerned about your child's progress. You can be our strongest partner in making the right decisions about learning for your child.

When we all become part of students' learning journeys, and never waver in our commitment to closing the achievement gap, the road to transforming our schools from good to great will be complete.

Warm regards,



Carole Olsen
Superintendent
Halifax Regional School Board

You can help schools meet your child's learning needs by sharing your thoughts on a few important questions:

1. What can your child's school do to help them become a confident and successful learner?
2. What would your child do to improve their learning experiences if they could?
3. What would be most helpful to you in supporting your child's learning?

All parents are important partners in their child's education. This is especially true if your child encounters challenges in their learning. If your child is struggling:

1. Arrange to meet with their teacher(s).
2. Ask for detailed information about the challenges they are experiencing.
3. Find out the school's plan to support your child's progress. This involves knowing:
 - a. What are the next steps
 - b. Who will be responsible for them (e.g., teachers, my child, me, other staff at the school, and/or the central office)
 - c. When these next steps will happen
 - d. How you will know they are making a difference
 - e. What you can do to support your child during this process
 - f. When you can meet next to discuss progress

And finally, as all parents appreciate, students can be powerful advocates for themselves, both inside and outside of school. You can help your child develop confidence to advocate on their own behalf at school by asking them some simple questions:

1. Is learning for you too easy or too hard?
2. If you find something really hard, whom do you talk to?
3. Do you feel comfortable asking for help if you need it?
4. What helps you the most if you are struggling with something at school?
5. Do your teachers encourage you to try your best?
6. Are you interested in what you are learning?
7. If you have a great idea, do you share it with other students and your teacher(s)?
8. What kind of relationship do you want to have with teachers and other adults at your school?
9. If you could, what would you change about school?
10. What do you do to feel successful in class?



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Halifax Regional
School Board

Every Student Can Learn.
Every School Will Improve.

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