



Good Schools
to
Great Schools



Superintendent's Annual Report to Staff 2010

Dear Staff,

I am pleased to present you with this year's annual report. Inside you will find board-wide assessment and survey results from the 2009-10 school year. I also describe the board's plan for achieving our vision by 2013.

Thanks to your unwavering commitment to student achievement, we have sustained a strong momentum for progress. In the following pages, you will see that we continue to demonstrate positive results and have a deeper understanding of those areas where students are struggling with their learning. Each year we move closer to reaching our vision for 2013, and I can say without reservation that credit for this progress goes to the skilled, knowledgeable, and committed staff who work in our schools and central office each day.

In the past, we have recognized that each school's journey toward improvement is unique. Each and every student's journey of learning is also unique. As we honour these important differences among schools and students, we must also recognize that we are heading toward the same destination: supporting all students to become confident and successful learners in the 21st century.

In the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB), we have one goal: to ensure that all students receive the individual support they need to reach this destination. This is the foundation of our commitment to raising the bar and closing the gap in student achievement. As students meet expectations, we have to be there to encourage them to go even further. But our greatest chal-

lenge—one that we share with school systems across Canada—is to identify and provide effective supports to students who are struggling so they are able to enjoy and experience success in learning.

To achieve both excellence and equity in the HRSB, everything we do must be informed by students' unique learning strengths and needs. Everyone—not just classroom teachers—shares responsibility for closing the achievement gap. In the coming years, it will be critical that we continue to strengthen our ability to work together as a cohesive team that takes its lead from students.

The board's vision for improvement calls upon all of us to learn new ways of thinking about what we do and how we do it. In a system as large as ours, I know this can be a challenge, but I believe we have everything we need to make it happen. When we harness the power of the HRSB's professional team in a collective focus and collaborative effort to meet the needs of the young people we serve each day, the sky will be the limit in our ability to really make a difference in the lives of all students.

How are students doing in mathematics and literacy?

This year, for the first time, I am reporting information from the board's math 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. 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.

These results reflect the data that schools are sharing in their annual community reports. This year new data is also presented allowing staff, parents¹, and our school communities to understand students' success in developing 21st century mathematics and literacy competencies. I encourage you to review these results and to consider how they contribute to new insights about the board's strengths and challenges.

Board-level assessment and survey results are a gauge of our progress and a guide for focusing our improvement efforts. They are not a judgment of schools, teachers, or students, but the foundation of our ability to create a consistent network of support around students, especially those who are struggling.

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.*



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



How will we close the achievement gap in the HRSB?

Students journey through our school system only once. If they are struggling with learning in one or many 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. We must constantly demonstrate that our schools are forging strong relationships with students for learning.

In August, I met with all principals in the HRSB and shared my goals and expectations for this school year. I told them that I would continue to regularly visit schools in the board and at each visit wanted principals to be able to tell me about the school's approach to raising the bar for learning and closing the gap in achievement. In particular, I want to know the answers to the following questions:

- Who is 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 they plan to do differently?

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 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 in the board to ensure 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 increase resources and supports to students and schools.

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

I also take seriously the role I play in furthering the board's progress through an appropriate balance

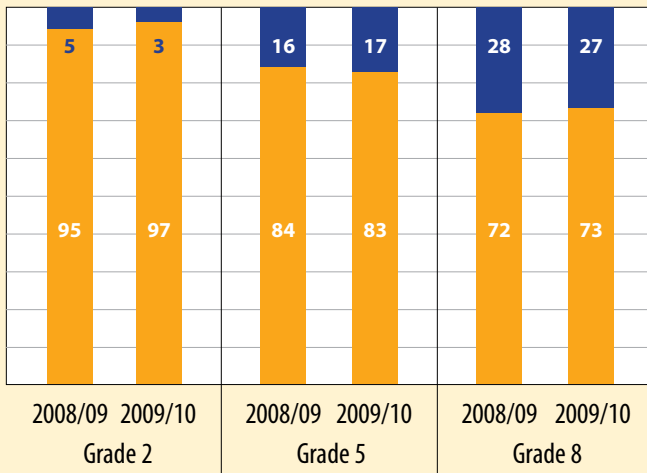
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What percentage of students in the HRSB are meeting expectations for mathematics?

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.

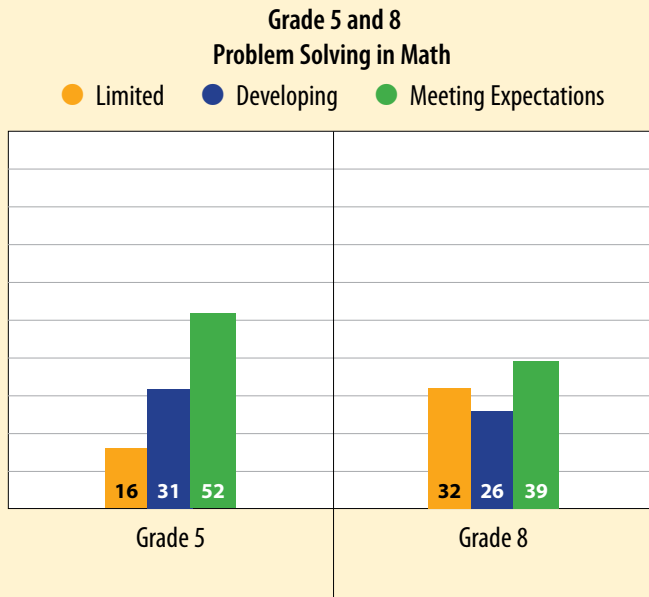
Note: No public expectations were set for Grade 5 mathematics.

“Our greatest challenge is to identify and provide effective supports to students who are struggling so they are able to enjoy and experience success in learning.”

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.



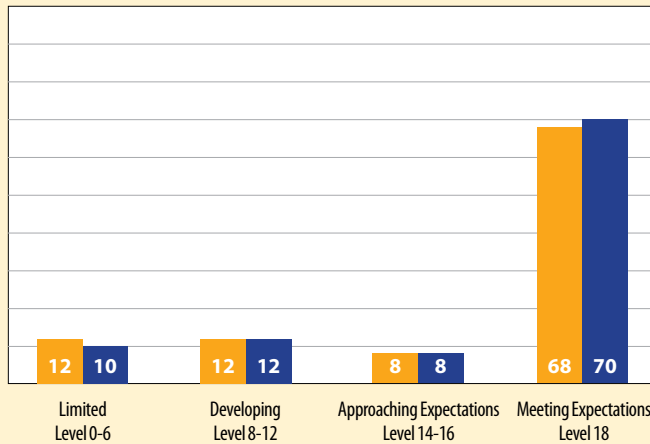
“The board’s vision for improvement calls upon all of us to learn new ways of thinking about what we do and how we do it.”

Carole Olsen, Superintendent

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

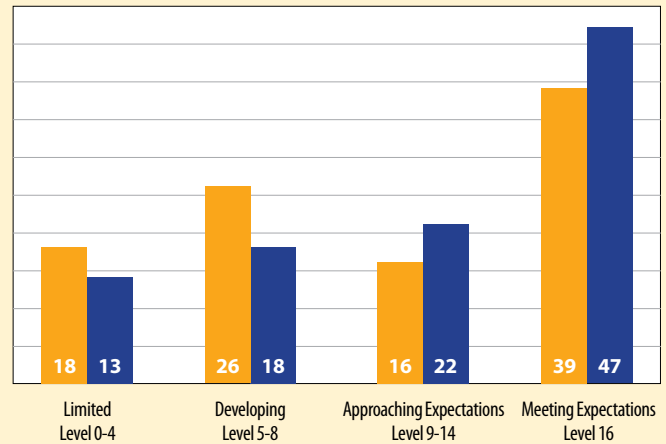
Grade 2 English Program Students Reading Accurately & Fluently

● 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.

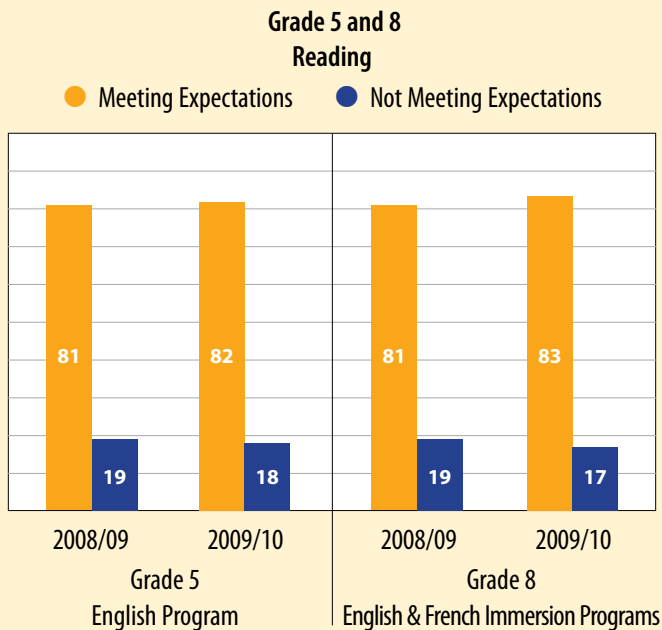
All Grade 2 students (n = 520) attending elementary schools that offer an early French Immersion program also participated in the HRSB's reading assessment last year.

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.

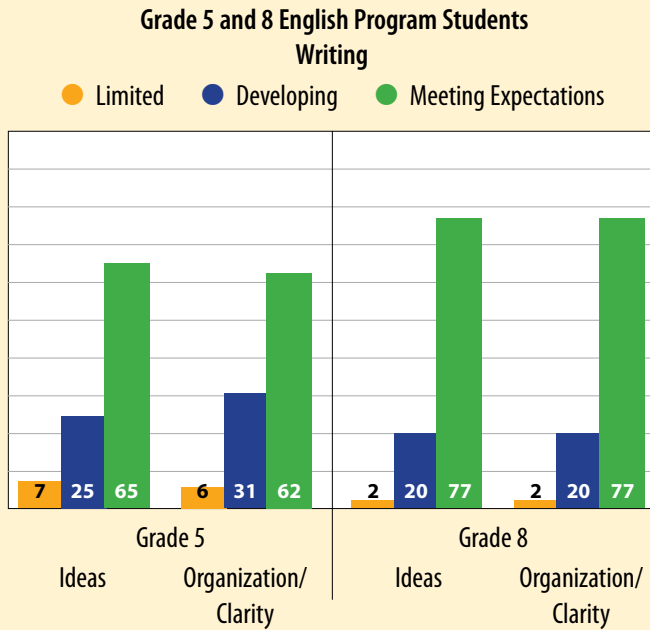
Comprehension Grade 2: More than 80% of students in the English Program (n = 2,796) are able to express opinions and ask questions about the stories they read. The majority is also able to form personal connections with what they are reading, but this is also an area where many students struggle—about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

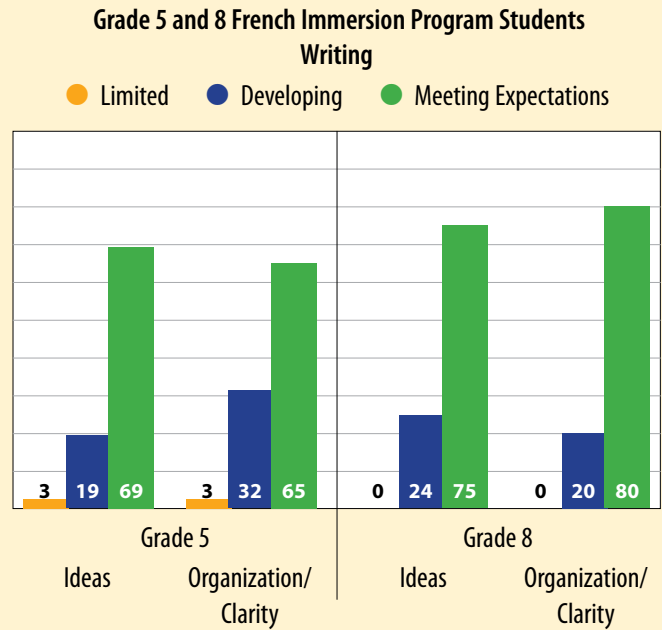


Note: Figures in this graph total 99% to account for assessments with insufficient information.

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.

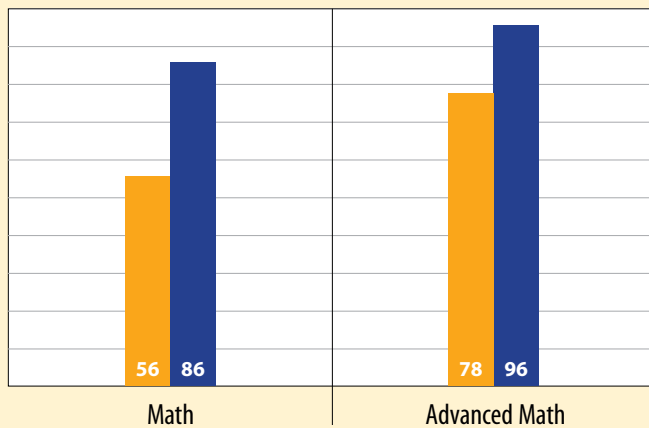
Students in the board's French Immersion Program demonstrated similar strengths as writers. Sixty-nine percent of Grade 5 (n = 416) and 75% of Grade 8 (n = 271) students met expectations for conveying their ideas in writing. Sixty-five percent of Grade 5 and 80% of Grade 8 students were able to do so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

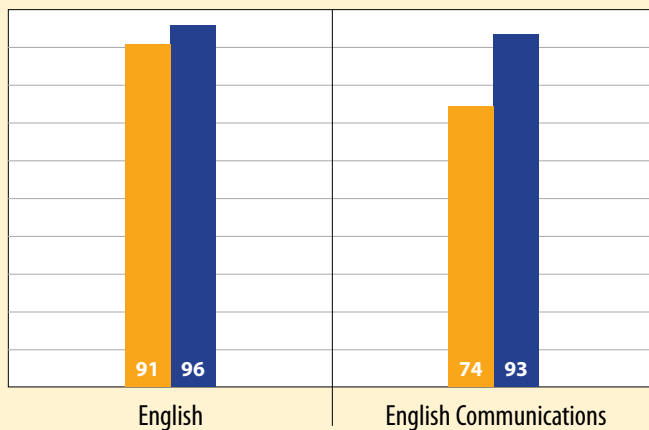
What percentage of students are meeting expectations in English 12, English Communications 12, Math 12, and Advanced Math 12 courses?

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 staff, students and parents feel about learning and schools in the HRSB?

Teacher Feedback Grade Primary–12

I am proud of the work I do.	95%
My school administrator(s) values the work that I do.	84%
My school administrator(s) sets high expectations for the quality of teaching in our school.	91%
I believe students can <i>always</i> learn successfully in my class.	55%
I <i>always</i> adjust my classroom practice to accommodate a range of student abilities and backgrounds.	67%
When students don't learn from my lesson, I <i>always</i> try another method of teaching.	63%
My school is a safe place.	89%

Student Feedback Grade 4–12

	Grade 4–6	Grade 7–9	Grade 10–12	
I try my best in school because I like what I'm learning.	79%	53%	59%	
My teachers let me know how to do better/improve my work (usually or always).	77%	67%	59%	
	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%
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%	

Parent Feedback

	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%

Number of teachers (P–12) who completed the Getting to Great survey 2009–10: 2,346.

Continued from page 3

of challenging and supporting schools. We know that this balance needs to be determined by the context that each school is working in, and therefore, we have developed a number of connected strategies to work with schools in raising the bar for learning and closing the achievement gap. We will:

Work Smarter and More Strategically with Schools:

Central office staff will have a clear sense of the strengths and needs of each of our 137 schools. With this knowledge in hand, we can direct resources and provide support that will make the greatest difference for student and professional learning in each school. Principals have told us that this new model is working well, and our goal is to continue to find ways to work strategically to maintain a consistent flow of support to schools.

Stay the Course: A system-wide change in a board as large as the HRSB is a long-term process. Schools and individuals need time to become clear about their direction and to engage in a continuous process of learning. To support this ongoing process, we will stay the course with *Planning for Improvement*.

Support Strong Instructional Leadership: Professional learning with a focus on effective instruction is a cornerstone of the board's action plan for closing the achievement gap. We need to develop frameworks to support teachers in furthering their professional learning and respond to what principals—as instructional leaders in our schools—need to know to both challenge and support teachers in their work.

Adopting new instructional strategies that respond effectively to the learning needs of all students requires time, new knowledge, and supportive environments for doing things differently than we have in the past. We are asking all teachers to make significant changes to how they teach, to demonstrate that these changes are having a positive impact on student achievement, and to respond right away if instructional strategies are not meeting students' learning needs.

The scale of change required will be hard to achieve unless teachers have regular time to learn together, share expertise, try new instructional approaches, and engage in ongoing conversations about the impact of these approaches on teaching and learning. Time is one of the most important resources we can provide to principals and teachers in our schools, and therefore, I will continue to be a strong advocate for securing common professional learning and planning time for all of our schools.

As a school community, we revisit two powerful questions on a regular basis: how are our students

doing and how do we know. Schools also ask, "What will we do if students are not learning?" I believe we at central office often ask ourselves, "What will we do if schools are not improving?" We need to keep coming back to these questions because they keep us grounded in making decisions based on evidence.

As we stay the course by addressing these core *Planning for Improvement* questions, I also invite staff to begin exploring new questions about their own professional learning and practice:

1. What do we need to know to ensure that our students are learning?
2. How do we, as professionals, learn best (e.g., PLCs, support from math and literacy coaches, professional reading, other networks, team teaching, and planning)?
3. How can we work together best as a professional team to support each other and our students?
4. Who are the students in our classes that are struggling to meet expectations?
5. What do they need to experience success?
6. What do we need to know or to do to be most effective in supporting them?
7. How can we involve parents, guardians, and the community when a student is struggling?
8. How will we evaluate if our efforts are making a difference for students, and what will we do differently if they are not?

In closing, I would like to bring everyone's attention to some data from the board's *Getting to Great Survey*, where 95% of the more than 2,000 teachers who completed a questionnaire last year told us that they are proud of the work they do. This sense of pride is well deserved and something that I hope is shared among all staff in the HRSB.

The work you do each day to make our schools the best they can be for students is deeply valued and appreciated. I look forward to the year ahead as we bring all of our unique skills and abilities together to move closer to our vision for improved student learning and achievement.

Warm regards,



Carole Olsen
Superintendent
Halifax Regional School Board



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Halifax Regional
School Board

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Every School Will Improve.