

# Caledonia Junior High



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## School and Community Context

Caledonia has served the students of East Dartmouth since 1963 and draws elementary students from Admiral Westphal, Michael Wallace and Ian Forsyth Schools. We offer both English and French Immersion programming for grades 7 to 9, and currently have 356 students enrolled. As expected enrollment has followed recent trends and has declined this September from 376 to 357 students. Caledonia is a unique school that is marked by rich diversity. Whether in terms of race, ethnicity, or socio-economics, it is this diversity that helps foster a spirit of acceptance and understanding among staff and students. Flexibility, empathy and individual consideration are the hallmarks of our success, and key ingredients in helping our young people become better students, citizens and people.

The diversity of our school and student interests is reflected in the

many extra-curricular activities offered at Caledonia, including athletics, arts, and cultural awareness groups. It is encouraging that the number of students participating in these activities has increased over the past two years, for student achievement increases the more involved students are in school activities. Knowing this leads us to continually look for new initiatives to connect our students to their school.

All told, Caledonia reflects our community in every sense of the word. The school is an inviting, safe and compassionate place. Students are supported as they learn about becoming responsible, engaged and academically prepared young adults in our complex and diverse world. Caledonia is a school that clearly puts students first and has a vision that supports the idea that all schools can improve and all students can learn.



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## Family and Community Involvement

Our families feel increasingly welcome at Caledonia, and 85% of parents would agree that we have an “open-door policy”. We have an invaluable network of parent / community volunteers, and the School Advisory Council (SAC) consistently provides input around student engagement. However, stagnating attendance at curriculum night and parent/teacher interviews requires that we continue to reach out to the community to increase parental involvement.

## Safe and Orderly Environment

Caledonia has realized many successes the past few years in terms of academic and social learning, and we are clearly doing a number of things well. In general, our students enjoy coming to school. They feel a sense of belonging and see the school as a safe, engaging, and positive place to learn; believing our teachers are caring and attentive to their learning needs. These views are supported by student survey data that indicates

steady improvement in all these areas. Over the past three years we have realized an 80% decrease in office referrals and a 75% decline in the number of suspensions. In spite of these improvements, students indicate that learning is frequently interrupted for discipline reasons. As a result, we continue to develop classroom management and conflict resolution strategies.

## Provincial and Board Assessment Results

Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) students participated in provincial and board-wide assessments. The information gained through these assessments will help us determine our next steps in improving student achievement in literacy and mathematics. Please note that the percentages used throughout this report are rounded to the nearest whole number.

\* French Immersion students completed the assessment in French.

Literacy Assessments	School Results: Percentage of students meeting expectations	Board Results: Percentage of students meeting expectations
Grade 8 Board	Reading: 81%	Reading: 81%
Grade 9 Provincial	Reading: 84% Writing: 93%	Reading: 84% Writing: 96%
Math Assessments	School Results: Percentage of students meeting expectations	Board Results: Percentage of students meeting expectations
Grade 8 Board	Mathematics Concepts: 75%	Mathematics Concepts: 72%

We are pleased to report that our students have consistently performed well in both reading and writing on the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) and Department of Education (DOE) literacy assessments. While we are satisfied with our writing results, we believe the lower results on our school-wide literacy assessment is a truer reflection of how our students can perform on a rigorous writing assessment, so writing will continue as a main focus at Caledonia. The HRSB and DOE results also show that we are more challenged in the area of reading. While reading is not the center of our school-wide literacy goal, we will measure student reading comprehension on a regular basis throughout the year. A focus on writing cannot and will not mask the things we need to address in reading, for reading comprehension certainly comes before the skill of writing about what one has read.

We are also pleased by the results of the HRSB Grade 8 mathematics assessment. We were concerned, upon entering this assessment as it measured concept understanding months removed from when the students completed the related work; however, the students clearly retained much knowledge and understanding. We believe that our school math goal and its focus on problem solving and communication will result in even greater improvement on the board-wide math assessment, as every strand in math, whether it be number operations, algebra, geometry, to mention just a few, requires student skill in problem solving and communicating their understanding of key math concepts.

All told, Caledonia students are improving achievement in math, reading and writing, in the context of HRSB, DOE and school-wide assessments. Our staff is committed to improving the results upon each assessment, and the students have followed suit by becoming increasingly committed to doing as well as they can on these assessments.

## Classroom Assessment

### Focus on writing:

We began collecting student achievement data around literacy and writing in 2006, and we quickly determined that our students had significant challenges in the area of writing for purpose and to specific audiences. As a result, writing has been a key focus of our efforts the past two years and is clearly reflected in our Plan for Improvement. The focus is paying off: over 50% of students significantly improved their performance when we compare the June 2009 school-wide literacy assessment results to the data from November 2008! Our attention has been on generating and organizing ideas, along with conventions (grammar), and we have seen improvement in all three areas. Also, we have begun to close the gap between the performance level of our English and French Immersion students. The latter continue to improve and the former are catching up/approaching their level.

### Focus on Mathematics and Communication:

Although we have realized improvement, in terms of the percentage of students meeting math learning expectations as reflected in report card grades and in terms of student performance on board-wide math assessments, it is clear our students significantly struggle in the area of problem solving and communicating their understanding. As such, we have set problem solving and communication as our school-wide math goal, and have developed a problem solving and communication assessment tool which students will complete three times a year.



## Student Engagement

Literacy and mathematics assessment data and survey results indicate an increase in student engagement at Caledonia. Using the Positive Effective Behaviour Supports (PEBS) model to re-enforce positive behaviour has also helped to create a learning environment that helps our students grow as people and citizens. We plan to continue to use additional resources, such as student support teachers/workers and outside agencies, to support our students who continue to struggle academically or behaviourally.

## Time to Learn

Caledonia follows the Time to Learn requirements set by the Department of Education, and over the past two years has ensured that students are offered a range of opportunities extending to art, music, technology and the domestic sciences. We have also realized tremendous improvement in maximizing the time to learn during classes. Fewer interruptions to learning due to discipline and announcements has made the learning environment more focused. Late arrivals in the morning and the afternoon still cause frequent disruptions however, and we will be working with home and SAC to address this issue with a firmer policy.

## Professional Development

Caledonia is a school that has learning as the main goal, and not merely teaching. Teachers are life-long learners and we have a professional responsibility to learn the skills and strategies we need to ensure that the students receive a relevant and current education. Accordingly, all teachers have spent countless hours on professional development around writing, mathematical problem solving, and communication. This professional development has helped teachers to incorporate writing, problem solving and communication across the curriculum. The effort is now paying dividends as teachers are adopting a shared approach based on a common understanding of what the students need to learn and how it is best learned.

## Additional School Supports

At Caledonia Junior High we have a number of additional school supports to improve student achievement:

- community volunteers
- IMHOTEP mentors
- african percussion teacher
- behaviour specialist
- English as a Second Language teacher
- speech language pathologist
- junior high support teacher
- African Nova Scotian student support worker
- educational program assistants
- guidance counsellor
- literacy coach
- school psychologist
- secretary
- library support specialist
- literacy support teacher
- severe learning disabilities teacher
- african student learner support teacher
- alternative programming



# Planning for Improvement

Caledonia has had great success in many areas during the last few years, and our school is a better place to learn each day. However, we know we must stay focused on the ways we can continue to improve. As such, we have set a path for improved student achievement over the next few years based on data collected since 2006 that covered a wide range of student performance indicators. We have collected data relating to academic performance, assessment completion rates, discipline, and student engagement, and have discovered much about learning here.

The staff of Caledonia analyzed the results both as a group and in subject teams, and helped develop a plan for improved student achievement that was aimed at making the greatest possible impact on student learning, both for

the present and into the future. We set writing as our literacy goal, as the data showed that our students would benefit greatly from a focus on generating, organizing, and properly editing writing pieces. In math, we found that students would benefit most from a focus on problem solving skills and the development of ways to communicate their understanding of math concepts. The Peer Review Team from the school board approved our approach this year, and we are very proud to include in this report the plan for improved student learning that will carry us through the next few years. You will find details below of what the students and teachers will learn, and how teaching will change, as we move toward meeting our goals.

## School Goals

### Literacy Goal

Our students will demonstrate improvements in writing with a focus on ideas, organization and matters of correctness (conventions).

#### Strategies:

- Entrench literacy across the curriculum. Non-language arts teachers will develop and implement instructional strategies to support writing in their subject area.
- Develop, administer and use a specific writing assessment task for each grade level semi-annually.
- Curriculum mapping around writing.
- Create a transition writing portfolio for each student in grades 7 - 8. The pieces selected for this portfolio will be tied directly to the writing goal. The contents of the portfolio will focus on the curriculum outcomes that address ideas, organization, and matters of correctness writing samples will be scored in reference to a writing rubric that is specific to each grade level.

### Mathematics Goal

Our students will demonstrate improvements in problem solving and communication in mathematics.

#### Strategies:

- Math teachers will work collaboratively to explore and implement best practices around problem solving and communication. Students will learn strategies to help with problem solving, learn what good communication looks like and be able to solve problems using a variety of representations.
- Math teachers will create, implement and monitor semi-annually a math problem solving and communication assessment. Students will complete problem solving tasks that will be assessed on communication and problem solving to determine the needs of the students and school.
- Teachers will embed problem solving strategies across the curriculum in a variety of subject areas.

### Engagement Goal

Though not part of our “official” plan for improved student learning, we realize that successfully meeting our literacy and math goals depends on our ability to maintain a learning environment that is safe, orderly, respectful and engaging. Efforts to improve in areas of writing and math will be stalled if Caledonia shifts from being a place that is marked by peace, order and good government. This environment is the foundation upon which all other successes will be built and, as such, we will continue to address issues that interrupt and detract from student learning. If our students want to come to school, feel safe when they are here, can build positive relationships with their teachers, and are provided with opportunities that meet their needs and interests we know that improvement will occur at a greater rate.



**Every Student Can Learn. Every School Will Improve.**

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