

Halifax West High



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School and Community Context

The newly constructed Halifax West High school opened January 2003. It is a bright, clean, technology-rich high school nestled in the parklands of Clayton Park West.

At Halifax West High School we offer programming to over 1500 students in Grades 10-12 from four feeder schools: Brookside, Clayton Park, Fairview and Park West Junior High Schools.

We provide a wide variety of courses at various levels including academic, open and advanced, as well as French Immersion and International Baccalaureate Diploma programs. Along with traditional subjects, our students also have the opportunity to participate in enhanced arts, technology, physical education, co-op and instrumental music courses.

Our teaching spaces are all equipped with a computer and audio-visual equipment connected

to a ceiling LCD projector. We are able to offer video broadcasts to all classrooms in the school, a feature which allows guest speakers to interact with an intimate audience in one classroom, while the student body throughout the building can watch the same presentation.

Halifax West is a large, culturally diverse and vibrant high school with an abundance of activities to suit all our students' interests. We have high expectations for our students in all facets of student life with an emphasis placed on academics, improving student achievement, extracurricular involvement and community service. In addition to many sport teams, clubs and artistic groups, Halifax West High School provides students with opportunities to engage in a variety of challenging and meaningful activities.



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Family and Community Involvement

In 2008-09 when parents were asked if they felt welcomed at Halifax West, 92% responded yes. Eighty-three percent felt we were open to involving our community in their child's education. We have worked especially hard to ensure our newcomers feel comfortable. Early in the year we hold an ice cream social and later in the fall we hold a newcomers welcoming gala. Our annual multicultural event is always well attended. We teach all students about various religious events and the significance of these days.

Safe and Orderly Environment

We are very pleased to report that for the past five years our students, staff and parents feel Halifax West High School is a safe and comfortable place to learn, work and visit.

94% of our parents who responded to the 08-09 survey agree Halifax West is a safe school. Our students say their teachers care about them and our teachers agree that students are generally very respectful. We believe this is because we spend a lot of

time working with school staff and students to promote positive behaviours. Staff participate in professional development to equip them with strategies to encourage positive behaviors. At the beginning of each school year the Halifax West School Code of Conduct is reviewed and we celebrate positive behaviours (PEBS) through our Warrior of the Week program.

Provincial Assessment Results

Nova Scotia examinations (NSE) in Mathematics 12, Advanced Mathematics 12, English 12 and English/Communications 12 are designed and administered by the Nova Scotia Department of Education. These examinations are administered at the end of each semester in January and June. As with all provincial examinations, the pass mark is 50 percent. The examination counts as 30 percent of the students' final course mark. Classroom assessment makes up the other 70 percent. Please note that the percentages used throughout this report are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Assessment	School Results: Percentage of students who had an exam mark of 50% or above	Board Results: Percentage of students who had an exam mark of 50% or above	School Results: Percentage of students who had a course mark of 50% or above	Board Results: Percentage of students who had a course mark of 50% or above
Grade 12 DOE Nova Scotia Exam: Mathematics	62%	45%	92%	83%
Grade 12 DOE Nova Scotia Exam: Advanced Mathematics	72%	62%	83%	93%
Grade 12 DOE Nova Scotia Exam: English	96%	94%	96%	97%
Grade 12 DOE Nova Scotia Exam: English Communications	96%	88%	96%	95%

International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme
Percentage of students enrolled in IB programme that achieved IB diploma. 89%

Classroom Assessment

Data indicates that final marks in Math 11 and Math 12 are on an upward trend, although not as quickly as anticipated. From 2005 to January 2009 the Math pass rate increased from 83% to 94% and the course average increased from 59.7 to 68.9. The Math 12 final exam results improved from 46% in 2005-2006 to 63% in 2007-2008, but the results of January/June 2009 decreased to 56%. It is important to note that results province wide were low on this exam, perhaps due in part to a change in format. The pass rate on the exam climbed significantly from 47% in 2005 to 73% in 2007-2008, but decreased to 62% in 2009.

With such a variety of courses from which to choose, students and parents/guardians need good information on which to base conversations and decisions. The math course recommendation letter is in its second year of use and changes are planned to improve the process for next year, given that Math 10 is only offered as a semestered course.

To improve communication with our feeder schools and support Grade 9 teachers with the task of making appropriate math recommendations for their students, we invited all Grade 9 math teachers from our four feeder schools to an information sharing session. It was a rewarding and productive meeting. Ideas for further collaborations were discussed.

The math help room has become rejuvenated and for second semester, due to the increased demand, two teachers were scheduled in each lunch hour (Monday to Thursday). Sheets are posted so that students can sign indicating their attendance. Further effort is needed to implement the use of cumulative assessment and to increase the use of higher level questions in Math 10, 11 and 12 to better prepare students for the provincial examination.

Our ESL population has increased and community services have been reduced. We have made efforts to purchase new and more effective materials for ESL Resource, the ESL10 and ESL11 courses. We need to increase the variety of resources necessary to address the needs of those students who have little or no proficiency in the English language so that they are able to function in the English language and achieve the degree of success in the courses that we all would like.

Our future goal is going to be centered on our ESL students. We will be examining which courses we should be offering to ensure better results for our non English-speaking or lower language-skilled ESL students.

In previous years, many members of our staff have had substantial ESL experience and/or ESL credentials. It is imperative that professional development be made available to all new and current staff to help them understand the educational, social, cultural and political backgrounds and life experiences of our ESL students and the communities from which they come.



Student Engagement

Our students feel confident about their abilities in most subject areas particularly those courses that incorporate a “hands on” approach such as science, technology, art and physical education. Students reported that they were very comfortable in English and social studies, but that they struggled in math and French. We do offer a wide range of courses to address the specific needs of our students, but not all students choose courses recommended to them. We would like to do a better job helping students choose courses to meet their learning needs.

Time to Learn

Guidelines for the time spent on learning are laid out by the Department of Education. Our school’s timetable, teacher assignments and efforts to minimize disruptions contribute to maximizing instructional time. We are doing much better at keeping our classroom disruptions to a minimum because we have found other ways to communicate information to students, staff and parents/guardians. We use the School Messenger system to leave messages at home and we post a monthly newsletter on our website. Information can also be accessed through “George”, teacher websites, announcements, video broadcasting, posters and the school website.

Professional Development

Our staff is committed to improving student achievement and therefore engage in ongoing professional learning opportunities. Our professional development (PD) days have been dedicated to the Planning for Improvement (PFI) goals, in particular, developing strategies to address specific areas of concern in math, literacy and communication. We have staff who are members of curriculum writing teams, NS exam writing and marking teams, in Masters of Education cohorts, Leadership Development groups, and professional development teams. International Baccalaureate (IB) teachers participated in extensive training. In addition to the Department of Education (DOE) and school-based PD days, staff also meet during common prep periods in their schedule to participate in developing common course outlines, marking schemes, assignments, tests and quizzes. Teachers also use this time to share new ideas and resources in their areas of expertise.

Additional School Supports

Halifax West is the most culturally diverse school in Atlantic Canada. Our student body consists of students from over 50 countries. We offer students support in every way possible: sometimes that means providing extra help, supporting them during transition or maybe even providing food and clothing.

We have a number of additional supports available to all students:

- English as a Second Language teachers
- Learning Centre teachers
- ed program assistants (EPAs)
- resource teachers
- fine arts consultant
- guidance counsellors
- math coach
- literacy support teacher
- teen health nurse
- HR police school liaison
- teacher librarian
- library support specialist
- IB coordinator
- school registrar

Graduation Rates

School Year	Rate
2008-2009	88.1%

The data indicates that 81% of our graduates pursue post-secondary studies. Forty-two students earned the International Baccalaureate Program Diploma, which is double the average of schools world wide.

Destination after high school	Rate
Community College	18%
University	59%
Other education or training	4%
Join work force	13%
Unknown	5%

Planning for Improvement

For the past several years we have been collecting data that helps us determine what we need to do to improve student achievement. Within the guidelines of the Halifax Regional School Board and the Planning for Improvement process, every school is expected to focus two of their three goals on literacy and math. The third goal can be any other area of concern.

In math, we found too many students were making below 70% in math courses even though their past history in math was much better. Improving the Math marks was identified as one of our numeracy goals.

In literacy, our Grade 11 and 12 English Communications students were achieving low grades and in other areas of their curriculum they became disengaged if they

were not reading something they could choose to read themselves.

In looking at the data collected, we found there were times when we were not effective in getting important information to students, staff and parents. Our communication goal will focus on this area.

Throughout the Planning for Improvement process, staff is advised that working towards these three goals should not prevent us from working on other areas of concern; however, we believe that achieving these three goals will have a tremendous effect on improving student learning at Halifax West High School.

School Goals

Math Goal

To raise the percentage of students achieving 70% or above by 5% each year for the next four years in Math 11 and Math 12.

Strategies:

- establish "Course Recommendation" forms. This will identify and advise students about appropriate placement
- ensure that teachers effectively use the comments section on these forms to communicate about concerns
- research how to adjust the sequencing of topics in Math 11 and Math 12 to maintain a consistent level of difficulty throughout the courses
- develop and incorporate higher level questions in grade 10, and 11 Math courses to prepare students for the Grade 12 Math curriculum
- schedule common prep periods and develop common assessments

English Goal

To raise the percentage of students achieving 60% or above by 5% each

year for the next four years in ECM 11 and ECM12.

Strategies:

- use the (33%) Literacy Coordinator to address literacy in all classrooms
- provide PD for 10 Plus and ECM 11 teachers in the "Literacy for Success 11" program DOE
- encourage English teacher to participate on the provincial planning team for Literacy Success 12
- purchase high interest resources for ECM11 and ECM12
- assign common preparation periods in the schedules of teachers who teach the same grade levels and/or the same courses
- share resources among ECM teachers

Communication Goal

To develop communication systems to ensure effective communication among students, staff, parents and the community.

Strategies:

- use technology to improve the

ways we communicate student attendance, school events, report cards, course expectations and concerns through George, the website and school messenger

- develop an effective event for Academic Recognition Night - recognizing students who make the Principal's List or Honour Roll
- generate an extended absence form and discourage students from leaving during instructional time.

In Math, results improved from 2005 to 2008 but declined sharply in January 2009. The format of the exams changed and marks across the province were lower; therefore, results should be examined when the June 2009 results are available.

In English, we have found high interest reading material is key to involving the non-engaged struggling reader.

In communicating, we need to continue to find ways to inform members of our school community of the great things we are doing.



Every Student Can Learn. Every School Will Improve.

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