

# Ridgecliff Middle School

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"Home of the Rams"

WWW.RMS.EDNET.NS.CA

## School and Community Context

Ridgecliff Middle School (RMS) is a modern, technology-rich facility, which first opened its doors in 1999. The only school that feeds into RMS is Beechville-Lakeside-Timberlea School. RMS is one of two schools that feed into Sir John A. Macdonald High School.

RMS serves the communities of Beechville, Lakeside, and Timberlea (BLT). These communities, each with their own distinct history, serve as suburbs to the city of Halifax. Due to new residential developments, these communities are changing from their original demographic to a more ethnically and culturally diverse community. As a result of this growth, almost 95% of our students take the bus to school.

RMS offers three separate programs to students from grades 6 to 9: English, Late Immersion for grades 7 to 9, and Early Immersion Grade 6. Ridgecliff is well prepared to meet

the needs of our diverse student population.

At Ridgecliff, we provide a Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling program designed to assist the personal, social, educational, and career development of students. It is a total school program that requires a professionally qualified guidance counsellor for coordination and full implementation. RMS has the BLT Teen Health Centre which is unique at the middle school. Its focus is to increase access to information, resources, and services that promote healthy living for students.

Where the focus is on student success, members of our school community work hard to ensure a positive and welcoming school environment. We are dedicated to meeting the needs of our students and improving achievement.



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## Family and Community Involvement

We provide a variety of opportunities for family and community involvement during the school year. 80% of RMS parents and teachers feel that we have an inviting school community. As identified in the school improvement plan, we need more engagement of the external school community to create more collaborative and positive activities held within the school. The School Advisory Council (SAC) will provide leadership in these events. Parents have supported and participated in a number of school events.

## Safe and Orderly Environment

Survey results from 2005 to 2009 indicate that 4 out of 5 of our students feel that RMS provides a safe and inviting learning environment. We feel that this sense of security is due to the many programs in place that promote appropriate school behaviour, such as: Positive Effective Behaviour Supports (PEBS), anger management sessions, mediation, and leadership development opportunities. At RMS we are actively

addressing the issue that student learning is interrupted as a result of student behavior. Teachers will continue to engage in professional development on classroom management strategies and the implementation of the PEBS philosophy. Students are encouraged to follow the PEBS behaviour matrix to promote positive student behavior.

## 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 6 Provincial	Reading: 86% Writing: 90%	Reading: 88% Writing: 94%
Grade 8 Board	Reading: 83%	Reading: 81%
Grade 9 Provincial	Reading: 81% 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: 70%	Mathematics Concepts: 72%

We are pleased to report that students at Ridgecliff have performed well in literacy in both the reading and writing components of the assessment. The results at all grade levels are consistent with HRSB results and slightly exceed the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) data for Grade 8 literacy in reading. The Grade 8 mathematics results were aligned with the results of the HRSB. These results were lower than the literacy scores and had 70% of Ridgecliff students meeting expectations. Instructional strategies will continue to be implemented to improve results for problem solving and communication.

## Classroom Assessment

### Focus on Mathematics

As a math professional learning community (PLC), a common assessment rubric was developed for problem solving and communication. Initial results from the test, by all grade levels in November, 2008 indicate that for problem solving, 28% of students are at the proficient or excellent level. In communication, 35% are at these levels. After reviewing these results, math teachers collaborated on teaching strategies, instructional practices and resources to address the needs of our students. Results from our second assessment held in April 2009 showed a significant improvement in the areas of problem solving and communication. In problem solving, 46% of our students are performing at the proficient or excellent level and 44% in communication. Although we are extremely pleased with this recent improvement in achievement, we still aspire to do better. As a staff, we will continue to implement instructional practices and strategies involving teaching mathematics in a problem solving context. It is our hope that we will see even further success with continued commitment to our goal.

### Focus on Literacy

As a means of advancing student learning through assessment, specific reading strategies in literacy are being used to help students become more effective and fluent readers. Student success is being promoted by using quality assessments, which has in turn instilled confidence in the individual. This has helped students achieve new levels of proficiency. It has also helped teachers connect curriculum, instruction and assessment to their practice. Teachers received strategies for assessing the fluency of their students through oral reading records (ORR). The results from the initial assessments in December, 2008 indicate that 63% of our students are fluently reading at their grade level. Teachers focused on improving fluency levels through mini- lessons, reading workshops and reading practice; both silently and out loud, as well as explicit instruction time with individual students in the areas of need. We anticipate that results from future tests will show a growth in the number of fluent readers.



## Student Engagement

Student engagement is reflected in the way students are involved in their own learning and their participation in school activities. At Ridgecliff, 85% of students feel that they are engaged in their learning and are trying their best to improve academically. Extracurricular activities including athletics, the arts and clubs are popular. At RMS 44% of our students participate in extracurricular athletics, while 28% participate in some other form of extracurricular activity.

## Time to Learn

The Department of Education requires that all schools in the HRSB follow the requirements outlined in the Time to Learn document. Each subject offered has a required or recommended number of minutes for instruction. Teacher (84%) and student (60%) surveys indicate that student learning was interrupted by friends/classmates talking. A more concentrated effort of implementing the Positive Effective Behaviour Supports (PEBS) matrix with a focus on respect for learning should result in improvement in this area.

## Professional Development

Teachers at RMS are actively involved in professional development throughout the year. They attended school-based, HRSB and Department of Education in-services on assessment, oral reading records, and supporting student success. In addition, individual teachers received professional development on integrating technology into the curriculum, a common understanding of math strategies for problem solving and communication, and a geometry unit at the Grade 8 level. Other areas of professional development included sessions for resource/Learning Center staff, oral reading record assessments, and implementing strategies included in our school improvement plan. Language arts and math teachers were also supported by our literacy and math coaches who offered professional development, in-class support, and participated in our professional learning communities.

## Additional School Supports

- behavioral specialist
- educational program assistants
- English as a Second Language
- guidance counsellor
- library support specialist
- math and literacy coaches
- peer tutors
- teen health center coordinator
- student support teacher
- student support worker
- school psychologist
- school secretary
- Speech-Language pathologist
- RCMP liaison officer
- resource and learning center staff
- severe learning disability support staff
- literacy support plans
- individual program plans
- lunch monitors



# Planning for Improvement

As a school community, we have reviewed data and information about our school and have identified areas where we can improve. The school staff and community have been guided by the HRSB Planning for Improvement process to set goals. The goals established for the school improvement plan at Ridgecliff are in the areas of school climate, mathematics, and literacy.

As a school community, we believe that respect for self, others, learning and environment will create a safer, more positive school climate. The PEBS philosophy, as established by the Department of Education, will help us achieve this goal.

In mathematics, the school is focusing on improvement in problem solving and communication skills, based on

the use of a common rubric. Students are taught specific strategies and skills to improve their achievement in this area. Teachers work collaboratively in the math professional learning community to ensure that assessment is consistent across grade levels.

Interpretation of the student achievement data identified reading fluency as the area of literacy that required improvement. To address this issue, students learned specific comprehension strategies. They were encouraged to participate in a consistent reading program where they read for one hour a week. As well, all language arts teachers implemented a standard reading log for their classes at each grade level.

## School Goals

### School Climate Goal

Respect for self, others, learning and environment will improve to create a safer, more positive school climate.

#### Strategies:

1. Students, staff, and the school community will develop a common understanding of the behavioral expectations.

- engage the external school community in positive activities held within the school
- review PEBS matrix

2. Staff will implement a proactive approach in managing student behavior.

3. Staff will consistently reinforce positive behavior.

### Mathematics Goal

Results of assessments, will show improvement in problem solving skills and communication.

#### Strategies:

1. Math teachers will develop a common understanding of problem solving and mathematical communication.

- Teachers will introduce problem

solving as an instructional practice when teaching new concepts.

- Teachers will engage in reflective discussion about student work while experiencing common scoring sessions.

2. All math teachers will work collaboratively to develop grade level common assessment tools for problem solving and communication.

- Develop a bilingual bank of word problems for each grade level.

3. Students will develop an understanding of problem solving and communication strategies through a variety of experiences.

- develop a student-focused rubric
- explicit teaching of problem solving communication strategies
- regular classroom experience with level 3 word problems and using the CAT3 rubric to score work.

### Literacy Goal

The number of fluent, independent readers across the grade levels will increase.

#### Strategies:

1. Develop a common understanding of comprehension strategies for both students and staff.

- professional development of comprehension strategies through Language Arts PD and PLC
- teacher modeling and explicit instruction of strategies and readers' workshop to the class
- provide structured opportunities to demonstrate comprehension (written, oral, and other forms of representation).

2. Encourage students to participate in a consistent reading program.

- create a standard school-wide reading log.

3. To develop a common understanding for students and staff of the stages of reading development (early, transitional, and fluent).

- professional development on oral reading records and strategies of reading development
- modeling and explicit instruction of fluent reading.
- performing oral reading records and reflecting students' results.



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

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