HALIFAX REGIONAL SCHOOL BOARD
Creating Conditions to Support Student Success in our Priority Schools

PURPOSE:

To provide the Governing Board with information outlining how the Halifax Regional School Board is providing support to improve student achievement in elementary schools whose achievement results in literacy and math over the past five years of provincial achievement indicate additional support is required.

BACKGROUND:

In May 2014, shortly following the presentation of provincial assessment results to the Governing Board, Report #14-05-1470, *Focus on Learning; Grade 3 and 6 Provincial Literacy Assessment Data*, a comprehensive analysis of the past five years of provincial assessment results in literacy and math was completed to answer the superintendent's question: *Which of our schools have gained traction with their school improvement efforts, and which schools have not?* Staff identified elementary schools trending below the provincial average. The Board's school improvement leadership team provided direction to all department staff that it was their priority to support the work to strengthen improvement at these schools.

CONTENT:

The following report outlines the supports that have been put in place to create conditions to support student success since 2014 at elementary schools whose achievement results in literacy and math have been consistently below the provincial average. The focus of the work of the Board's school improvement leadership team and the priority school support teams has been to support the Board's goals;

- Goal 1: To improve student achievement
- Goal 2: To strengthen safe and inclusive school environments
- Goal 3: To achieve equitable learning opportunities for all students
- Goal 4: To build engagement, support and confidence in HRSB

COST:

Within existing budget

FUNDING:

N/A

TIMELINE:

Actions began in the 2014-15 school year and are ongoing.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A

RECOMMENDATIONS: That the Governing Board accept this report for information.

COMMUNICATIONS:

AUDIENCE	RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE
Governing Board	Susan Tomie Director, School Administration	October 28, 2015

From: *Susan Tomie, Director, School Administration, stomie@hrsb.ca, (902) 464-2000 Ext 2275*

To: Senior Staff   October 13, 2015
            Governing Board   October 28, 2015

Creating Conditions to Support Student Success in our Priority Schools
October 2015

1. **Making the achievement of students in our lowest performing elementary schools a priority**

In May 2014, after elementary provincial literacy assessment results where shared with the Governing Board, Report #14-05-1470, *Focus on Learning: Grade 3 and 6 Provincial Literacy Assessment Data,* a comprehensive analysis of the last five years of provincial results was completed to answer the superintendent's question: *Which of our schools have gained traction with their school improvement efforts and which schools have not?* In particular, the analysis determined whose data is trending consistently at or above provincial average and whose data is below average indicating the need for additional support.

Staff identified elementary schools whose performance on provincial standardized assessments was consistently below the average. These schools became the priority for **all** departments with the goal to provide supports that would improve student achievement.

2. **Creating a model of support for the priority schools**

The Board's school improvement leadership team, under the direction of the superintendent, developed a model of support to work with identified elementary schools to improve student achievement. The first action was to establish **priority school support teams**. Leadership of each team was assigned to the School Administration Supervisor. Membership includes the Human Resources Manager, the Student Services Facilitator, Program facilitators or coordinators, the school principal and vice principal.

The superintendent met with priority school support team members in the fall of 2014. At this meeting, he gave a clear message- the academic achievement results of these schools was his priority, the priority of each department, and was to be each team's priority as well. Throughout the year, the superintendent and members of the Board's school improvement leadership team met with team members to monitor progress and to hear suggestions about interventions and supports that were positively influencing student achievement.

This is a model to address changes in our system, a model to create the conditions within which priority schools can thrive. It is a model of collaboration between staff of Program, School Administration, Human Resources and school-based administrators. Teams meet regularly to review data, plan strategies and actions to create change in classroom teaching and student learning. School-based administrators play a key role in assisting the team in understanding the unique context of their school. They work closely with supports such as math and literacy coaches and consultants, the safe schools consultant, program planning team and behavioral

specialists, and Human Resources managers to guide improvement in classrooms with teacher instructional practice and student achievement.

3. Focus of the support model

The key focus of the priority school support teams is to be responsive to the needs of the school. Support and intervention does not look the same at each site. Schools are working closely with Board staff to identify perceived barriers that affect student success and establish plans to assist with moving forward.

The model continues to evolve as we learn from the experience. Principals provided feedback after the first year. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Principals have expressed appreciation for the support and the opportunity to work within a team environment to improve student learning, embrace new strategies and problem solve around perceived barriers to improvement.

In the second year of support, changes have been made to the make-up of the teams reflective of feedback from year one. Each priority school support team has a designated *math and literacy lead* from the Program department to ensure strong leadership in key areas of learning. Connected to the math and literacy lead are *designated math and literacy coaches* who work directly in classrooms to support teacher practice. This change in team make-up allows priority school support teams to focus discussions on assessment data in literacy and math and make informed decisions about strategies and interventions to support progress with school improvement goals in a responsive and timely manner.

4. Professional development for principals

Principals in the priority schools have participated in professional development sessions to support their growth as instructional leaders. During the 2014-2015 school year, they were grouped as a cohort in a four day instructional leadership program developed by School Administration and Program staff. This program used current research on school leadership practices to improve teaching and student achievement to guide the learning of principals.

Principals participated in additional professional development sessions on topics such as effective use of coaches, response to intervention models and culturally responsive pedagogy.

The priority schools principals formed collaborative learning groups that met five times during the year for half-day sessions on strategies to support improved student achievement.

5. The strategic allocation of resources

At the start of the initiative, the Board's school improvement leadership team made the decision to prioritize the allocation of *math and literacy coaches* to the priority schools. This ensured a concentrated effort to support the instructional practices of teachers whose learners most needed support- a data-driven decision.

In year one, the superintendent was able to provide *financial support* to each of the priority schools ($20,000) to assist with the purchase of resources (or technology) for math and literacy learning and to provide books and other materials that reflected the diversity of the students.

Reading Recovery was re-introduced in the 2014-2015 school year to a small number of schools in Nova Scotia by the *Department of Education and Early Childhood Development*. When deciding where to allocate this intervention, priority schools were given first consideration. In 2015-2016, provincial funding for eight additional Reading Recovery sites was provided to the Halifax board. All were allocated to priority schools.

A new math intervention was developed and piloted in several priority schools in the 2014-2015 school year. This *math support teacher* provides direct support to individuals or small groups of students who are not progressing as expected in mathematics. Gaps in mathematical understanding are identified and focused instruction is provided to accelerate students to grade level. Student assessment data indicated that this intervention was having a positive effect on student learning. As a result, the number of math support teachers for the 2015-2016 was increased so that all priority schools will receive the benefit of this intervention.

Staffing and enrolment numbers are reviewed at priority schools and if feasible, *additional staff resources* are considered to address class size and student needs with a specific focus on math and literacy instruction.

6. A focus on culturally responsive pedagogy

During the 2014-2015 school year all principals, vice principals, and priority school support team members attended professional development sessions that focused learning and discussion on culturally responsive pedagogy and, in particular, supporting the achievement of African Nova Scotian students. Sessions were designed by a team from School Administration and Program in collaboration with the superintendent and the Board's school improvement leadership team. Sessions were led by Board staff, community members, and *Dr. Kimberley McLeod*, from Houston, Texas, an expert in the area of culturally responsive instruction and leadership. Professional development sessions focused on culturally responsive pedagogy, the historical context of our African Nova Scotian community and leadership practices that help examine belief systems and systemic racism.

Additional work on developing culturally responsive pedagogy was a highlighted focus in six priority schools. In collaboration with School Administration supervisors, direct support was provided to support school-based administrators and teachers. Principals and vice principals attended professional learning sessions on leadership to support and monitor culturally responsive instruction at their sites. Teachers received professional development on understanding their students' learning styles to create lessons that were culturally responsive, clarifying understanding of provincial outcomes, and how to use assessment data to improve student achievement.

In addition to this work, professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy was provided to School Administration supervisors, Program staff, speech language pathologists, psychologists and guidance counsellors.

Culturally responsive pedagogy sessions were developed for Family of School meetings for both principals and vice principals. Sessions built on previous learning and helped school-based administrators broaden their understanding of instructional leadership to support improved student achievement and culturally responsive teaching.

This November the learning will expand to include all teachers working in the priority schools. On November's Bus Cluster professional development days, the teaching staff at priority schools will work with Dr. Kimberley McLeod. As mentioned above, Dr. McLeod has been providing professional development for school-based administrators and board staff over the past year. Her work in November with teachers will ensure continuity in messaging on culturally responsive teaching.

7. **Role of data**

Priority school support teams have been using a variety of data sources, along with the school's plan for improvement, to assist with gaining a greater understanding of student achievement at each of the priority schools. They are using data sources from provincial, school and board-based assessments in both math and literacy to determine interventions and supports to move students along in their learning. Strategies in each school's plan for improvement have guided interventions and helped to identify teachers' learning needs.

Priority school support teams are able to work closely with school staff to analyze data as it relates to self-identification information, cohorts and individual students. Assessment data is assisting teams to monitor progress and to determine stories of success. The sharing of these stories helps all priority school support teams build capacity for improvement; learning from each other strengthens the collaborative approach to improvement across the system.

8. Human Resources

The Human Resources managers met with the school-based administrators at each of the priority schools to review staffing, discuss strategies and investigate concerns. These meetings resulted in the emergence of themes across many schools that have the potential to improve student achievement results in priority schools. Of particular concern to principals, was the frequent change in staff each year.

Article 10.04 of the local *Nova Scotia Teachers Union* (NSTU) agreement allows the Board to fill up to 38 permanent positions by way of merit (as opposed to seniority) for the specific purpose of addressing: (a) high needs schools, (b) schools that are historically hard to staff, (c) rural schools and (d) diversity. Teachers placed in positions according to Article 10.04 accept the position for a three year commitment. The priority schools were given first priority for use of all such positions for the 2015-2016 school year. If any of the 38 positions are not filled with a permanent teacher, Human Resources has the ability to use 14 of those vacancies to recall term teachers who have taught at the school in the previous year in an effort to increase continuity. All 14 vacancies were used in the priority schools.

The NSTU contract allows for 26 vice principal relief positions to be filled by a term teacher selected by the principal. This allows schools to hire term teachers with whom they know and are comfortable that the working relationship between the vice principal and term teacher will be successful. For 2015-16, the positions were first allocated to priority schools before being distributed among other schools.

Human Resources managers are working closely with principals to ensure practices and policies to support teacher performance are being implemented and supported to ensure high quality teaching in each classroom every day.

9. Operations Services

Operations Services has committed to ensuring appropriate support for property service concerns at priority schools. Some strategies have included; attention to building appearance including increased interior painting, priority ranking for response to work order requests for maintenance, installation of additional technology devices and infrastructure (LCDs, and computers), frequent site visits by supervisory team to work with custodial staff and principals to monitor and improve cleaning standards, and increased communication with the school principals and vice principals to support operation needs as they arise.

Looking forward

Key areas that will be a focus for the work of priority school support teams this year include:

- ***Dedicated math and literacy leads and coaches*** on each priority school support team;
- ***Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*** professional development for all teachers working in priority schools, and continued learning in this area for all school-based administrators and Board staff;
- A closer look at ***classroom assessment data*** and how to effectively use the data to inform instruction to help students meet with success;
- ***Provincial assessment preparation*** to assist students with putting their best effort forward and feeling comfortable with the assessment format;
- A closer examination of the ***School Planning Team*** and effective practices to support student programming and success to meet every student's needs;
- ***Walkthrough training*** with principals to effectively change teacher practice and improve student achievement;
- Support for priority schools continues as a focus and expectation for ***all departments***. As new or additional resources become available, such as through the implementation of the *Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Action Plan*, priority will be given to the identified schools;
- The Board's school improvement leadership team will continue to monitor and analyze student achievement data to determine which schools require additional support to ensure student success;
- Continued sharing of **success stories** to inform the Governing Board and build capacity for improvement across the schools.

    This is the work of our system; to create the conditions to ensure student success.