

Halifax Regional School Board
Creating Conditions to Support Student Success in our
Priority Schools November 2016

Purpose

To provide the Governing Board with an update on how the Halifax Regional School Board is providing support to improve student achievement in the priority schools.

Background

In June 2014, shortly following the presentation of provincial assessment results to the Governing Board, *Focus on Learning: Grade 3 and 6 Provincial Literacy Assessment Report #14-05-1470*, a comprehensive analysis of the past five years of provincial assessment results in literacy 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 bring about improvement at these schools.

Content

The following report outlines updates on the actions that have been put in place to create conditions to support student success since October 2015, Report #2015-10-38, *Creating the Conditions to Support Student Success in our Priority Schools*.

Funding Details

Within existing budget

Timeline

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

Appendices

Appendix A: *Creating Conditions to Support Student Success in our Priority Schools November 2016*

Recommendations

That the Governing Board receive this report for information..

Communications

Report published on the Halifax Regional School Board website on November 30, 2016.

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Creating Conditions to Support Student Success in our Priority Schools

November 2016



Background

In June 2014, after elementary provincial literacy and math assessment results were shared with the Governing Board, *Focus on Learning: Grade 3 and 6 Provincial Literacy Assessment Report #14-05-1470*, 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.

Update

In October 2015, a report was presented to the Governing Board (Report #2015-10-38) on the work to support student success at priority schools. The current report provides an update on the **actions** identified in October 2015 as a focus to support ongoing improvement in student achievement at these elementary schools.

Action: *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 priority schools.*

- Leadership of each priority school support team continues to be assigned to the School Administration supervisor. Membership includes the Human Resources manager, the Student Services facilitator, Program math and literacy facilitators/ consultants, the school principal and vice principal. School Administration supervisors began meeting with priority school support teams early in the fall to establish the ongoing model of support. Teams discussed the importance of teacher voice at planning meetings. As a result, teams have added teachers to meetings to discuss ongoing supports that influence student achievement in the classroom.

- 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/ consultants, the safe schools consultant, program planning and behavioral specialists, and Human Resources managers to guide improvement in classrooms with teacher instructional practice and student achievement.
- In June 2016, a meeting was held with members of the priority school support teams to review the progress made during the 2015-16 school year. Feedback was collected on possible data sources to assist with improving student achievement. This information was collated and embedded in the *Priority Schools Support Team Framework*. Although there are some similarities, data sources do not look the same at each site but are individualized to the needs of the school, students, and teachers.
- The School Nutritionist planned and facilitated a food literacy professional development session for 15 priority schools in partnership with *Nourish Nova Scotia* and *Public Health*. The session focused on how school-based food literacy initiatives can support health and education outcomes. Schools who attended received funding to support a school-wide approach for an innovative and sustainable food literacy initiative. These initiatives included activities such as food preparation clubs connected to breakfast programs, curriculum integration through cooking in the classroom, connecting food literacy to Caring School Communities through a series of cooking activities for learning buddies and hosting school-based family dinners as a place for communities to come together to share a common healthy meal.
- Human Resources managers meet individually with priority school principals to review staffing, investigate personnel concerns and ensure necessary supports are provided.
- The Human Resources team meets on a regular basis to ensure they are using all available NSTU contract provisions to provide greater continuity and fewer turnovers of staff in the priority schools.
- Vice principal relief positions were first allocated to priority schools before being distributed among other schools. This allowed principals to hire term teachers they knew and who had a successful working relationship with the vice principal.
- Human Resources managers continued efforts to decrease staff turnover in priority schools. Where possible, teachers in priority schools were given first consideration when issuing permanent and employment equity contracts.

- Principals in priority schools attended a professional development session on *Hiring Best Practices* to assist them in selecting the best candidates for available positions. Changes to the term teacher posting process allowed priority schools to have early access to candidates who applied for positions.
- Human Resources managers are working with principals to ensure practices and policies to support teacher performance are being implemented and supported to ensure high quality teaching.
- Operations staff continues to provide support to priority schools. This has included the installation of additional information technology devices and increased interior upgrades such as painting. Staff has assisted with the development of grounds and site improvement plans and has been responsive to communication with principals and caretakers at priority schools. There is heightened monitoring of operational issues and more frequent visits by supervisory personnel.

Action: *Dedicated math and literacy leads and coaches on each priority school team.*

- As of September 2015, every priority school support team has a math and literacy lead member.
- As of September 2016, Reading Recovery support is in all priority schools. A decision was made to pair Reading Recovery with the Early Literacy Support allocations so one teacher could serve in both roles to maximize the instructional expertise developed through Reading Recovery training. This decision allowed priority schools to have classroom teachers remain full time in the classroom, creating consistency in instruction for students, rather than being released to deliver Early Literacy Support and backfilled by another teacher.
- Math support teacher allocations have increased from 8.5 to 11.5 positions for the 2016-2017 school year. These teachers support grade 2 and 3 students through focused small group work and work collaboratively with classroom teachers. In addition to the 11.5 elementary allocations, junior high math support has been provided to students in grade 7 at two priority schools who have P-9 configurations. This increased allocation allows more students to benefit from math support in priority schools.

- Staffing and enrolment numbers were reviewed in the spring and fall at priority schools and if feasible, additional staff resources were assigned to address class size and student needs with a specific focus on math and literacy instruction.

Action: *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.*

- Following the release of all provincial achievement results, the school improvement leadership team reviews the data and analyzes the progress of each of the priority schools to establish ongoing supports, consideration for new supports, and to determine the direction of ongoing work to support schools in making improvements with student achievement. The priority school support team, led by the school supervisor, uses this data to inform actions at the school and classroom level.

Action: *A closer look at classroom assessment data and how to effectively use the data to inform instruction to help students meet with success.*

- Program staff worked closely with school administration supervisors in October to analyze student achievement data. Data from the grade one Observation Survey from 2015-16 school year and the fall of 2016, has been collated and shared with supervisors for each of the priority schools. This has assisted the supervisor with helping principals understand and use the data in ways that will meet the needs of the school to ensure continued improvement in student achievement.
- Priority school support teams created opportunities for additional dedicated time for professional learning communities in some priority schools. Coaches and priority school team members model and facilitate conversations around effective assessment practices and actions to improve teaching and learning. This approach creates effective conditions for shared problem solving around student learning.

Action: *Provincial assessment preparation to assist students with putting their best effort forward and feeling comfortable with the assessment format.*

- A plan is in place to ensure that principals work closely with their teachers prior to each provincial assessment to ensure students experience a positive environment to support success with large-scale assessments. In particular, teachers are using the *Lessons Learned* documents created by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to support student preparation for assessment events.

Action: *Walkthrough training with principals to effectively change teacher practice and improve student achievement.*

- School Administration supervisors are working together to build skills and knowledge about effective walkthrough strategies to assist principals with monitoring and influencing instruction in support of improved student achievement. Supervisors are using their knowledge to model and engage in professional conversations with principals about the role walkthroughs play in effective instructional leadership.

Action: *A closer examination of the School Planning Team and effective practices to support student programming and success to meet every student's needs.*

- Program Planning specialists provided ongoing direct support to School Planning Teams (SPT) in priority schools, especially with respect to effective practices related to the purpose and operation of the SPT. Program planning processes were clarified and refined to support improved student learning.

Action: *Continued sharing of success stories to inform the Governing Board and build capacity for improvement across the schools.*

- At the June 22, 2016 Regular Board meeting, an information report was shared that highlighted the work of two priority schools to improve student achievement in literacy and mathematics. Data from provincial and school-based assessments showed improved results for students. The report also shared that almost half of the priority schools improved in their math and/or literacy 2015-2016 provincial assessment results.

Action: *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy professional development for all teachers working in priority schools, and continued learning in this area for all school-based administrators and Board staff.*

- The Diversity team provided leadership to teachers in the priority schools around understanding the theoretical and practical aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy. These sessions provided support to learning opportunities to equip teachers to challenge belief systems, develop high expectations for all students, understand students' learning styles and create culturally relevant lesson plans with authentic assessments.
- The Diversity team provided principals of priority schools with professional development to support their ability to lead from within a culturally relevant framework. All principals attended a two-day professional development session in April 2016.

- Questionnaires were completed by staff at priority schools to identify the current needs and interests as related to culturally relevant pedagogy. Subsequent professional development sessions were developed around belief systems, high expectations, authentic assessment and lesson planning as a result of the review of participants' answers. This data will continue to be used to address the unique pedagogical needs of teachers and learners.
- Two Culturally Relevant Specialists were added to the Diversity team through the budget planning process to strategically support school staff in building professional teaching practices that are responsive to students and their learning styles.

Looking Forward

The model continues to evolve as we learn from the experience. Feedback has been 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. The HRSB Business Plan Priorities for 2016-2017 includes as a focus the improvement and adjustment of supports for the priority school model. Quarterly updates on progress will be part of the regular reporting on business plan priorities to the Governing Board.