

2015-16 Community Report for Elizabeth Sutherland



This has been a very exciting year at Elizabeth Sutherland, as we continue on our journey to find ways to help every student to achieve at new levels. We began this process four years ago when we looked closely at what we were doing well, and where we need to do more work to support our students in the best ways. At that time, we created goals that would guide us through the following five years. 2015-16 marks the end of year Four in the process, and we are seeing how the changes we have been making are having an impact on student achievement. The goals we set at the beginning have changed and developed as we learned more about our students and this past year has seen us working with a Literacy goal that states **students will self-monitor to gain deeper comprehension of text**, and a Math goal that states **students in all grades will be able to communicate their understanding of number sense**. These goals have formed the foundation for planning learning opportunities for both teacher and students.

In Literacy, we continued our focus on questioning, as we worked with students to dig deeper into their own understanding. Questioning also reinforces important self-monitoring strategies to help them challenge and support their ideas. A goal that looks closely at self-monitoring encourages each student to ask themselves questions as they read and to relate their learning to other things they already know, extending their abilities and showing them how skills build on each other. Teachers worked with 'big questions' to elicit critical thinking responses from students such as 'Why do you think that?' Students are using their 'inner voice' to stop and think about what they are reading. This highlights the strategies they are using and we see students making better use of those strategies. Teachers are having much more discussion with students prior to introducing a new text to engage them, activate prior knowledge, address new vocabulary, and get them thinking by posing questions. The work done to support our teachers through literacy coaches was invaluable. They were able to provide that in-the-moment support that allowed teachers to take new risks in their teaching and the benefits were seen at all levels. Reading is the foundation of learning and we are working in many different ways to ensure that our students are gaining those important skills and strategies every day. In our lower elementary classes, we began a program that targets specific literacy skills by grouping students by areas of strength and need. This expanded the work done in the classrooms within the new integrated curriculum and provided students with specific targeted instruction and important opportunities to practice those skills that were reinforced. This new way of deepening student understanding saw solid results and will be further developed in the next school year to support and encourage learners at all levels in Grades P-2. Students in P/1 also had an additional opportunity to develop their skills through the use of a centre-based learning space. This year saw the introduction of this space and it was well used by this group of students. They were able to consolidate their skills in both language and math through the use of carefully constructed hands-on activities. As they 'played' together, many areas of learning were addressed and teachers had opportunities to work with students and assess their learning in different and meaningful ways.

Questioning was an area of focus in Mathematics as well as Literacy. Teachers encouraged students to break down their mathematical learning, and to use manipulatives to help them to grasp challenging concepts. Students were encouraged to explain their thinking and to work through the process of learning more transparently. This resulted in a higher level of engagement. Our focus on Mathematics

was aided by the tools and training our P-9 teachers have received over the past few years in order to implement the new curriculum at each level. We also had the support of math coaches at the elementary and Junior High level in this subject area. These coaches worked very closely with teachers to help them to find better ways to approach learning with every child, and to reinforce the work they were doing in their classrooms. In our fourth year as a restorative school, the use of circles has expanded into instruction, allowing teachers to enhance their discussions by using the structures that allow them to create safe spaces for risk taking. The use of the circle format promotes opportunities for meaningful questioning and individual participation and is a familiar format for all of their students. We are excited to see the changes that we know will continue to occur as our students gain new levels of understanding and confidence in Mathematics.

This year saw the continuation of strategies that have proven to give our teachers the most support in working on student achievement. Teachers across grade levels have met regularly in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to discuss students learning and work together to find solutions to areas of concern. These collaborative learning groups for teachers who teach the same subject at Junior High or a similar grade in elementary have given significant levels of support for teachers as they work through concerns and look for solutions. These weekly meetings focused on supporting students, developing new teaching strategies and reviewing data collected to see what the next steps might be in moving students forward. Some of the data they discussed was from board wide assessments, but most was from the day to day work our students were doing. This allowed them to intervene more quickly and to make changes or offer different types of supports as they moved through the year. Teachers also engaged on personal learning journeys this year, with many taking Masters level coursed in their subject area, or attending conferences to look at new ideas, bringing them back to share with the group as a whole.

The work of the PLCs allowed teachers to share those new ideas in meaningful ways and supported them adapting the ways that they deliver the curriculum. Classes at all grade levels expanded their use of technology to allow students to learn at their own pace and receive specific instruction while doing so. Most of our Junior High teachers have now been part of the Board's technology training cohorts and have enthusiastically embraced Google Docs as a way to personalize learning for our students. Our elementary teachers used their time together to look at key math strategies that would aid students in their problem solving, such as the three read strategy, and many others. This collaboration offered a forum for improvement at all levels. Our school-based professional development for teachers dug deeper into questioning and the connections between effective and meaningful questions and relevant formative assessment. Elementary teachers refined their own techniques with strategies that would impact comprehension such as guided reading groups, mentor reading and one-on-one conferencing. Teachers took more time to break down reading into its components and looked at specific strategies to strengthen the steps for students. We know from current research that teacher practice is the foundation of classroom instruction, and have continued that important work this year to ensure that our teachers have received adequate support in strengthening their skills.

In the same way that our teachers were encouraged to work together and share their successes and challenges, our students were given more tools to do the same. The Caring School Communities program became more embedded in our whole school practice this year, as all elementary teachers received training early in the year and were supported by in-house teacher leaders throughout the learning and implementation processes. These important structures supported class meetings and conflict resolution strategies. Our Junior High teachers took restorative practice to a new level, as all teachers have received training and support, and are incorporating the principles to create and sustain a safe and productive learning environment for all. Through these approaches, students have learned

how important their own voice is in a discussion and have been given common language to express themselves in times of difficulty. It has been exciting and encouraging to see them advocate for themselves and help others to solve problems peacefully and restoratively. As their confidence grows, so does their engagement in their own learning.

Provincial Assessments		
	School (%) 2015-16	Board (%) 2015-16
<u>Literacy Assessments</u>		
Grade 3 Provincial		
Reading	83%	69%
Writing - Ideas	83%	76%
Writing - Organization	50%	62%
Writing - Language Use	33%	66%
Writing - Conventions	22%	52%
Grade 6 Provincial		
Reading	72%	76%
Writing - Ideas	88%	82%
Writing - Organization	72%	68%
Writing - Language Use	66%	72%
Writing - Conventions	81%	65%
Grade 8 Provincial		
Reading	68%	76%
Writing - Ideas	93%	91%
Writing - Organization	85%	80%
Writing - Language Use	85%	82%
Writing - Conventions	73%	70%
<u>Math Assessments</u>		
Grade 4 Provincial		
Mathematics	67%	78%
Grade 6 Provincial		
Mathematics	80%	72%
Grade 8 Provincial		
Mathematics	47%	63%

Our most recent provincial assessments offer a snapshot of student achievement in our building, and provide one piece of the assessment puzzle as we move our students forward. Our elementary results indicate some good results from the focus our goal has provided. Students are improving in several areas, and more confident in their reading and writing. Looking closely at their own work is a key piece of self-monitoring and the skills associated with risk taking are showing benefits as well. In lower elementary, students are struggling with conventions and language use in writing, but we see consistent gains as they move through the grades. Our Junior high students showed strength in this area, as did the Grade 6 students.

Our Math scores continue to highlight the need for a focus on the basics to enable students to be more confident in their abilities. Our elementary students are showing strength in mathematics, and the higher order thinking skills required in Junior High will continue to be a focus for us going forward. Also, additional supports will be continued for Junior High students to make sure that each student is being supported in the best way possible to move them forward.