

Curriculum Corner



by Marc Breau
Curriculum Committee Chair

The last Curriculum Committee meeting of the year, held on May 1, was extremely informative with several Department of Education and Early Childhood Development directors and consultants presenting. This provided Curriculum Committee members with a wealth of information regarding the *Minister's Action Plan for Education, The 3Rs: Renew, Refocus, Rebuild*, including how its implementation will impact the curriculum as well as the teachers delivering it.

Monica Williams, Executive Director, Centre for Learning Excellence, reiterated that The 3Rs contains actions emanating from three sources: the input of 19,000 Nova Scotians, research and best practice. The Action Plan's overarching goals of increased student achievement in math and literacy and improved career readiness certainly reflects now-or-never report-style priorities. Williams was clear that the Action Plan is not stand-alone in its ideological beliefs, and counts as companion to the leanings of the *Ivany Report*.

The Action Plan is widely regarded as an ambitious plan, undertaking the reduction of learning outcomes and the focus on achievement in math and literacy. For September, a main focus will be on implementing the streamlined curriculum from Primary to Grade 3.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is working with teachers from all school boards throughout the province to provide professional development and direction in the facilitation and implementation of the streamlined curriculum. Additionally, math mentors have been assigned to support teachers with implementation of math programs through targeted funding. Department staff are developing direct links with teachers to work on curriculum development and to receive feedback on curriculum changes.

There are still concerns that, in practice, teachers may not feel adequately prepared for the changes they will be facing beginning in September. How this may impact teachers developing and planning for programming is of concern to the Curriculum Committee. Placing this within context of the 2014 CTF survey results that eighty-five per cent of Nova Scotia teachers surveyed believe stress related to work-life balance has increased over the last five years, Curriculum Committee members were mindful of these challenging times that teachers already work in.

The Provincial Code of Conduct Policy, as presented by Joanne Syms, the newly appointed Anti-bullying Coordinator, will provide much needed consistency between the Department, Boards, and schools and is predicated on "Establishing Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments." The Curriculum Committee was pleased that the safety of students and teachers was being addressed through this policy.

The Code of Conduct clearly outlines "Acceptable Standards of Behaviour" and "Unacceptable Standards of Behaviour" while advocating proactive and preventative approaches schools can use to help create and sustain such environments. Funding for the restorative schools pilot-project, led by Richard Derible, will continue through 2015-2016, and is based on this mandate.

Schools are responsible for recording and tracking incidents of unacceptable behaviour on Power School. This will assist in gathering information and data to identify areas requiring additional supports, according to the Code of Conduct Policy document. Professional development sessions are being delivered to principals in all boards prior to implementation of this policy.

Further to this Ministerial Policy on the Code of Conduct, there will also be Ministerial Policies released early fall on both attendance and homework.

As The Action Plan continues to roll out, we will likely see many changes that will impact teaching and learning in the classroom, such as how the Business-Education Council will influence curriculum content and teaching standards; how the Centre for Teaching Excellence will, basing itself on these teaching standards, regulate certification, pre-service (BEd) programs, and upgrading; and how will the teacher performance appraisal be linked to these standards?

As the actions outlined in The 3Rs are implemented at both the board and provincial level, communication between the EECD, boards, teachers, and the NSTU is imperative. The complexity of the implementation plan calls for cooperation, consultation and collaboration from all partners to best meet the needs of the students in our province and to have a positive impact on our education system.

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