SCHOOL SUPPORT SERVICES
LEARNING MATTERS

DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF NIAGARA

DSBN

Achieving Success Together

FEBRUARY 17, 2011

"Learning Matters", a monthly Kindergarten to Grade 12 newsletter to support DSBN administrators and schools.

FIRST LANGUAGE INFLUENCE

Do you know what language your students speak at home? Learning about your students' first language is the starting point for deciding how to differentiate your instruction. Here are some common scenarios that may explain certain behaviours from English Language Learners and how it is linked to their first language:

Holding a book backwards
Arabic, Urdu, Farsi (Persian), Pashto, and Hebrew read from right to left, so the first page of the book would be at 'the back' from the perspective of an English speaker.

Unable to 'sound out' letters
Chinese is an ideographic language. Each Chinese symbol represents a whole word or concept.

Does not write on the line
The Punjabi script hangs from a horizontal line, while other languages may write through the line rather than 'sit' letters on top of it.

Difficulty organizing ideas
With the Chinese culture, students are taught to state the facts and let the readers draw their own conclusions. It is considered bold or arrogant to state a thesis statement at the beginning of a piece of persuasive writing.

Not reading at grade level
Some oral languages do not have a written form, therefore a student may have no experience in reading or writing in their mother tongue. Other students may have gaps in their education. Students need time to catch up to their peers, and often find they are chasing a moving target. Developing English literacy skills is the main area of focus for these students.

Grammatical errors
Languages that do not use articles, such as 'a', 'an', or 'the': Vietnamese, Persian (Farsi or Dari), Korean, Hebrew, Gujarati, Urdu, Czech, Croatian/Serbian/Bosnian, Pashto, Romani, Russian/Ukrainian, Hindi, Punjabi, Tagalog
Languages that do not use any form of capitalization: Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Hindi, Punjabi, Hebrew, Gujarati, Mohawk, Ojibwe, Cree
Languages that do not use plurals: Vietnamese, Lao, Korean
Languages that do not use verb tenses: Vietnamese and Lao

**Please take this information into consideration when evaluating your student's grammar usage.

Other considerations:
Many languages do not have a form of cursive writing and ELLs have difficulty reading cursive. When using the black/white board, always print. Remember it takes two years for a student to develop proficiency orally and five to seven years to read and write proficiently in a second language.
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SETTLEMENT WORKERS IN SCHOOLS (SWIS)

Do you have a family that can not easily communicate with the principal or teacher? Who can help explain the difference between the applied and academic stream to an English Language Learner? Who can you call if one of your newcomer students does not have a winter coat, and his parents don't speak English?
Do newcomer parents understand what they are agreeing to when they sign their child's IEP?

DSBN's Settlement Workers in Schools program, is a federally funded program for newcomers through Citizenship and Immigration Canada. SWIS workers help to get newcomer families involved in their school communities, and are often the liaison between home and school for families who speak a language other than English. SWIS offers services such as:

- Interpreting from English to Arabic, Spanish, French, Chinese, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and Pashto
- Explaining the Ontario and DSBN school systems, including programming options, school and grade placement, report cards, applied and academic courses, and graduation requirements.
- Helping students and families adjust and overcome language barriers and cultural differences.
- Providing professional development to staff about newcomer orientation, diversity, and cultural sensitivity.
- Co-presenting a bilingual 'Parent Literacy Night' at your school.
- Connecting newcomer youth with supportive peers in the school.
- Informing students and families about community supports and recreation.

The SWIS service is available to all DSBN schools. To organize a meeting with a SWIS worker, contact Baria Nasser, SWIS Niagara Coordinator.
bnasser@ymcaofniagara.ca phone: 289-668-3197

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF THE LRT/SERT

The Essential Role of the Learning Resource Teacher (LRT) and Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT) during Mid-Year Assessment and EQAO Assessments

Over the past four years, there has been an increase in the number of DSBN special education students who are participating in the EQAO Assessment. There has also been a corresponding increase in overall achievement which is partially due to reducing the number of exemptions. Our goal is to continue this growth and have more students participate in the assessments. Our second goal is to ensure all special education students who have accommodations for their daily work, receive the same level of support through these larger scale assessments. With all DSBN schools completing the Mid-Year School Based Assessment, Grade 9 EQAO Practice Tests, and OSSLT preparations, the LRT/SERT is an essential team member supporting students and teachers.

- Review the Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions and Exemptions
- Through In School Team (IST), develop a plan for supporting the special education and at-risk students in your school
- All special education students are to receive the full spectrum of accommodations available to them.
- Through IST, review the assessment data you gather at the Mid-Year Practice Assessment and consider how to better support students writing the EQAO Assessment
- Access School Support Services staff: Literacy Support Teachers, Mathematics Resource Teachers, Literacy Resource Teachers, Special Education Resource Teachers for support with addressing class and student strengths and needs, accommodations, IEP updates and programming strategies as needed.

PATHSTONE MENTAL HEALTH

On January 26, 2011 Niagara Child and Youth Services (NCYS) officially changed its name to Pathstone Mental Health. The new name represents "guidance along a pathway to improved mental health" and it is hoped that with the name change will come a reduction in some of the barriers and discrimination that are typically associated with mental illness (stigma). The change is in name only and the organization will still continue to be accessed through CONTACT Niagara (1-800-933-3617 or 905-684-3407). Visit their new website: www.pathstonementalhealth.ca for full details on the services that Pathstone Mental Health provides, and for direct links to other community agencies offering supports and intervention to children and families in the Niagara Region.

ELEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This year the DSBN offered fourteen eLearning courses to our students and as a member of the Ontario eLearning Consortium (OeLC), our students had access to the eLearning courses offered by all of the twenty member Boards. Over the past two years, we have been able to provide hundreds of opportunities for DSBN students to successfully engage in online learning and membership in the OeLC has saved us approximately $30 000 as we rarely pay fees to other non-member Boards to access their courses. Chris Freure, our DeLC (District eLearning Coordinator) works with our Guidance counselors to help meet our student's needs.

Online learning might also provide solutions to schools, especially small schools, when timetabling. There are ways to share sections between schools, offering some courses through the online platform, taught by teachers trained to deliver online courses. Chris Freure and Shirley Scott are available to explore these possibilities with you.

WAYS TO USE ELEMENTARY EQAO MID-YEAR ASSESSMENT DATA

MATHEMATICS

1. Because you are selecting a topic that has been instructed, you may use the assessment results to confirm content understanding or to identify areas that may require additional experiences.
2. Once students have completed the assessment have them work in pairs or small groups to identify why the distracters were selected in the multiple choice sections.
   - If the response requires a two part solution, one of the responses may be the answer if only the first part is completed
   - One response may result if the numbers were subtracted when the correct solution required addition
   - If you only read part of the question or misinterpret the question that incorrect response is one of the distracters
   - One response may be the correct digits but out by a factor of 10

   If students better understand how multiple choice responses are created, they will be less likely to jump to an incorrect distracter.
3. Incorporate the questions from topics not used on the Mid-Year Assessment into your instructional units so that students become comfortable with the structure of the EQAO questions.
4. Use student responses to the open response questions as a platform to develop better representations of mathematical thinking.

LITERACY

1. Literacy coach/lead and grade 3 and 6 teachers look at the IIR for patterns and trends to develop strategies and next steps to address areas of need identified by the Mid-Year Assessment.
2. Teachers look at students responses to one specific open response question and, using the exemplars from the Scoring Guides, engage in moderated marking.
3. Students deconstruct their response to an open response question using requirements and criteria for evaluation identified by the class. Then students reconstruct their response.
4. Students create open responses to questions in partners or small groups. Responses could be posted around the room for a Gallery Walk and various responses could be discussed/ deconstructed.
5. Teachers deconstruct a question using shared practice where students help identify key words in the question using a strategy such as colour coding/circling/highlighting key words to teach vocabulary such as justify, explain, identify, etc.
6. Teachers model a "Think Aloud" of how to answer a multiple choice question to teach test-taking strategies such as:
   - what is a distractor?
   - what would the best answer be? Why?
   - have you answered what the question is asking?

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

NTIP

Excerpt from DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP IN SCHOOLS, by Mike Ribble and Gerald Bailey

When talking to people who understand technology, does it sometimes seem that they are speaking a different language? Do they talk about podcasting, blogs, and wikis? Do their discussions of viruses, worms, and phishing confound and confuse? In 2001, an influential article by Mark Prensky identified two distinctive groups of technology users, "digital natives" and "digital immigrants". Digital natives are young people who have grown up around digital technologies and seem to instinctively understand the technology. Digital immigrants (the rest of us), on the other hand, may be fascinated by and may have adopted many aspects of the new technologies, but because they have not grown up with these digital tools, they don't use them as instinctively as the natives.

Because students have grown up in a society surrounded by digital technology, many teachers see their students as digital natives who already know everything there is to know about technology. Worse, some teachers do not feel competent as digital immigrants. But the truth is, not all students are as technologically savvy as teachers might assume, and not all teachers are as incompetent as they fear. Even when students are comfortable using technology, they may not be using it appropriately. Likewise, educators of all skill levels may not understand how to use digital technology effectively. Both students and teachers need to find a common ground. They need to become members of a digital citizenry.

Over the years, users of technology have come together to interact with one another, creating, in effect, a digital society. This digital society has forged new opportunities for education, employment, and social interaction. A typical society would offer such advantages but also require that its citizens act in a certain way – with the rights of citizenship come responsibilities.

What are the appropriate behaviours in a digital society? How can an individual learn what is appropriate and what isn't? Information technology leaders can set the tone for technology use in their schools. Teachers and administrators – the so-called digital immigrants – can learn the norms of digital society. Parents can learn the appropriate use of technology at school and at home. Together, these groups can then help the children of this digital age to become principled digital citizens of character and integrity.

But more than a teaching solution, digital citizenship is a way of life. Which is to say that we – digital immigrants and natives alike – need to understand the digital technology we currently use and will likely be using in the future. We should explore the frontiers and respect the limits of these technologies, and we should recognize their possible effects on ourselves as well as others. And then, after we have used these technologies, we need to evaluate how we have used them. Students can be expected to make mistakes when using technology, but through modeling and direction students need not make the same mistake twice. To reach this outcome, the focus of technology education should not just be on the programs or on the technology itself, but also on the appropriate use of the technology. This is to say, technology education should promote digital citizenship.

Elementary
During the March session new teachers will be exploring issues related to guided instruction in literacy, integrating technology and using electronic library (e.g., Knowledge Ontario, Learn 360, Career Cruising) resourses to support student learning. In April, new teachers will be focusing on 'education for all' including topics related to inclusive education, supporting English language learners and students with special education needs. During each session a significant amount of time is dedicated to allowing the mentor teachers to directly support the new teachers with follow-up based on the morning session and questions about issues that are arising in their own teaching situations.

Secondary
During the March session new teachers will be exploring issues related to wellness and their own professional situation. In addition, they will learn about Career Cruising and resources related to student success and planning. In April, new teachers will be focusing on 'education for all' including topics related to inclusive education, supporting English language learners and students with special education needs. During each session a significant amount of time is dedicated to allowing the mentor teachers to directly support the new teachers with follow-up based on the morning session and questions about issues that are arising in their own teaching situations.