



**LIGHT OF CHRIST**  
*Catholic Schools*

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*Relationships, Relevance and Rigor:  
The Journey to Higher Graduation Rates for All  
Students*

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**Nominated by: Light of Christ Roman Catholic Separate School Division**

**For the 2014 Premier's Board of Education Award**

**For innovation and Excellence in Education**

Board Chairperson: Glen Gantefoer

Director of Education: Cory Rideout

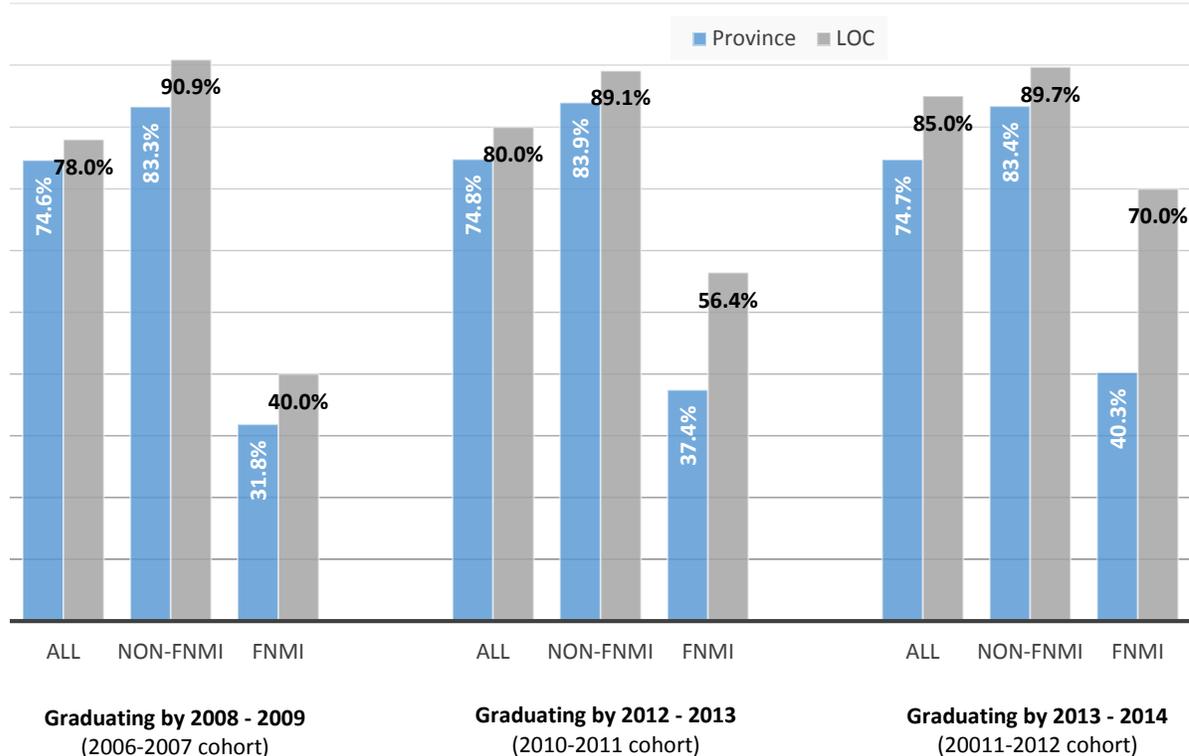
September 2014

During the past seven years Light of Christ Catholic Schools (LOCCS) have been on a journey to establish a foundational learning environment to facilitate the graduation of all students. The structural and pedagogical changes have resulted in continual increases in student achievement and graduation rates for all students. The most notable growth has been in the FNM graduation rate where the 3 year on-time rate has grown to 70 % in 2014. Currently, 26% of the students in Light of Christ are FNM. The focus of this application will be to highlight our journey to this point and discuss our future plans.

*“During the initial stages of this School Improvement strategy, the Board of Education was very concerned about the sustainability of the proposed changes. Due to limited financial and human resources, the Board registered their reluctance to enter into changes that were "trendy" or "short term fads" as had sometimes occurred in the past. However, support for the strategy was quickly procured from the Board by the thoroughness of the plan that was developed. Currently, the Board is extremely proud of its strategic plan that it feels has benefited all the students in our school division.”* **Adrienne Welter – Board Vice Chair**

### On-time Graduation Rates, Province and LOC

(Students Completing Grade 12 Within 3 Years of 'starting' Grade 10)



### Innovation

LOCCS believes that the focus for student achievement must be on instructional *systems*, not just on disconnected programs. The “Opportunities to Learn” (OTL) 2006-2012 data from the Provincial AFL Assessment indicated the huge gaps in the understanding and use of effective learning strategies being utilized by our classroom teachers and by our students. Adopting a system wide approach to enhancing instruction meant improving instruction in all classrooms.



LOCCS saw classroom instruction as an activity that can be improved by making expert knowledge and essential resources available to all teachers. Although the majority of our teachers were very competent, few could be deemed to be expert in all areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment relevant to the classes they taught. The very nature of teaching and the relentless demands of the job left little time and opportunity to develop deep expertise.

LOCCS needed to build a much deeper understanding and awareness of the most effective practices and resources but more importantly how to implement them in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century classroom. After an examination of research, LOCCS elected to use the conclusions outlined in Michael Fullan’s book – Breakthrough. The following ten conclusions formed the basis of our plan for effective educational change.

1. *“The vast majority of teachers are motivated by moral purpose when ideas for activating it are evident.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** Education and graduation rates will enable students to live better and healthier lives. Our moral purpose comes from the belief that we must support all students. According to Build Bethlehem Everywhere: A Statement on Catholic Education (2011), as a Catholic school system, we do “not just deal with the materially poor. It also deals with the intellectually poor who need schools to find an education that can break the cycle of despair. As a school system we have a fundamental option for the lost... We often assume that the worst of all possible scenarios is to be lost. We know, in fact that this is not true. The worst of all possible scenarios is to be lost and to realize that no one is looking for you (p. 45).” The fundamental moral purpose of LOCCS is to ensure that no matter how lost our youth may have become, we will never stop looking for them.

2. *“People begin to change their behaviors before they change their beliefs. New positive experiences are the motivator, especially when they relate to fulfilling moral purpose.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** By adding classroom mentors, we offered consistent implementation for all teachers for all schools. LOCCS is a small school division, this affords us the ability to fully implement new interventions and strategies for all teachers instead of a limited pilot project. This allows the message to be consistent and links the personalization of the innovation, the precision of the goal and the system professional learning. All of this allows the system to work in a consistent and collaborative setting within each school, the school division and the province.

3. *“Shared vision and ownership are less a precondition for success than they are an outcome of a quality process. Successful systems build vision and ownership through the quality of their learning processes and corresponding results.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** the term pilot project has no relevance during the implementation process. In LOCCS, all teachers and all students are involved in the innovation so that all stakeholders benefit from effective practice. We are limited in our resources, so any initiative must be implemented with precision in order to maximize our return on investment. Through mentoring and coaching, effective classroom instruction was supported.



4. *“Learning in context is key. Even the best professional-development workshops represent only input for success. Actual success occurs in the context of daily learning.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** The development of collaborative partnerships amongst all LOCCS staff allowed professional development to reach its full potential in the classroom. Through the use of a coaching/mentoring approach in classroom settings individual student’s needs could be met by building capacity within teachers. Research has shown that accountability must be more than the submission of test scores and lists of completed outcomes. Increased student achievement will only take place when teachers use the data collected to direct their decision making regarding the effective use of instructional strategies.

5. *“Professional learning communities at the school level are crucial in establishing cultures in which teachers learn from each other and school leaders and teachers collaborate for continuous improvement.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** Early on in the process, there was a huge realization that to facilitate student learning, there was a need for high levels of support and collaboration. Teachers working together as opposed to working in isolation allowed for learning to take place regarding differentiation of instruction to better meet the needs of individual students. Teachers do the best they can with the knowledge and resources they have at hand. PLCs provided an effective method for the exchange of new ideas and practices to improve student learning.

6. *“Professional learning communities will not be sustained unless the district and other levels of the system actively foster and maintain their development.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** Beginning 2011, School Learning Improvement Plans mirrored division learning goals and targets. This enabled the board and division office to provide professional development that was targeted and aligned with school, division, and ministry plans. Teacher professional growth plans were also aligned to the school, division, and provincial goals for education.

7. *“School divisions must integrate pressure and support so that everyone within the system seriously engages in capacity building with a focus on results. Capacity building is what most policymakers neglect. Capacity building involves the use of strategies that increase the collective effectiveness of all levels of the system in developing and mobilizing knowledge, resources, and motivation, all of which are needed to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning across the system.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** In 2009-2010 LOCCS implemented Charlotte Danielson’s, “Enhancing Professional Practice, a Framework for Teaching” throughout the system as the standard for best instructional practice in all classrooms. From 2009 to present, there were 273 teacher evaluations conducted highlighting individual professional growth and dialogue between individual teachers/in-school administration and central office personnel. These efforts ensured accountability, sustainability, and consistency of implementation of best practice.



8. *“Lateral capacity building is crucial for spreading knowledge and increasing commitment. Lateral capacity building consists of strategies that enable schools to learn from each other – districts, states, and even countries learn from each other, too.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** Coordinators, and most recently coaches, enabled us to support classroom instruction. Collaboration was achieved through the development of grade-alike groupings who were brought together to plan, co-score and develop rubrics. A consistent understanding of student grade level achievement was obtained amongst all.

9. *“Leadership is the turnkey to system transformation. This means leaders working with a Breakthrough focus and doing so through the development of other leaders as they go.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** System leaders provided support for in-school administration through administrative appraisals and ongoing professional development to build instructional capacity. Instructional leadership, as opposed to managerial duties, was identified as the primary focus for in-school administration. This is a huge undertaking as traditionally, principals and vice-principals had been more comfortable with a managerial role. Through a wide variety of professional development opportunities such as working through achievement data and interventions with staff, administrators developed an understanding of what instructional leadership looked like.

10. *“It doesn’t matter where the change starts as long as it is systemic thereafter. And systemic means a focus on establishing expert instructional systems that serve the needs of all levels.”*

**LOCCS STRATEGY:** LOCCS focused on effective and systemic change that required communication at all levels with all stakeholders. Prior to 2007 the implementation of quick-fix strategies did not sustain academic growth and long-term results. The achievement of higher reading, writing, and numeracy results took several years and success occurred in each of our schools. The ultimate result was improved graduation rates at John Paul II Collegiate.

## Sustainability

Research has shown that sustainability for improving classroom instruction comes from the connection between professional development and its embedded classroom support. Targeted professional development was provided to all teachers as opposed to invitational professional development sessions. The strategies and ideas were carried through and supported in classrooms by division office staff. LOCCS supported this professional development plan by offering planning days and additional supports.

Graduation rates are a system goal not just something that only high school teachers deal with. Kindergarten teachers, for example, have an important role to play for future graduates. In order for high graduation rates to be sustainable they must be a consideration at all grade levels for all teachers. It is a goal that needs to be continually monitored and revisited in order to be proactive as opposed to reactive.

Our future plans include helping students understand that they are not simply in a grade, but are part of a graduating class of the future (Grade 2 student would be graduating class of 2025). This strategy provides a belief for both teachers and students that all students will be future graduates. This gives the opportunity for each teacher to transcend time and touch the future of the students in our classrooms.



## Cost Benefit

**Resources:** LOCCS Board purchased Interactive whiteboard technology and personal computing devices for all teachers. A variety of reading resources and assessments were purchased to monitor student learning and provide differentiation. Math manipulatives were purchased for all classrooms as well as other resources for experiential learning.

**Personnel:** LOCCS Board supported a staffing plan for Central Office that provided supports for classroom teachers to become skilled at differentiating instruction and assessments in diverse classroom settings. A coaching model was used support the follow through of professional development and sustain professional learning communities.

.5FTE Differentiated Instruction Mentor	.5FTE EAL Coordinator
.5FTE Mathematics Coach	.5FTE Early Learning Coordinator
.5 FTE Instructional Technology Coordinator	2.5 FTE Learning Coaches

**Professional Learning:** A wide variety of professional development opportunities were provided for LOCCS staff

First Steps in Math Training (2.5 days per teacher & admin)	Restructuring of teacher supervision, evaluation & mentorship
First Steps in Literacy training (2 days per teachers)	Restructuring administrator supervision, evaluation, & mentorship
Middle Years ELA support (4 days per teacher 8 & 9)	Support to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment with PD opportunities with Damian Cooper, Rick Wormeli, Sandra Herbst, and partnerships with other school divisions
“Build Bethlehem Everywhere” – importance of relationships with students and reaching out to all those in need so they feel a sense of belonging and relevance which in turn enables them to succeed with the academic rigor	

## Client support for Innovation

LOCCS values the importance of relationships with our students, parents, staff, and other stakeholders. Regular communication is the key to successfully making changes and improvements. Throughout this implementation a variety of on-site learning opportunities were provided to allow parents to experience the lessons and outcomes that their children would be engaged in. Parent meetings focused on instruction and assessment and how parents could support their children. Teachers and students were also included in meetings and their feedback was used to make necessary changes to meet the needs of all.

Surveys were regularly sent to educational stakeholders to allow for feedback, necessary for system improvement. Over the course of time, evidence showed that our continuous focus on relationships, rigor and relevance was creating positive change and system-wide improvement.



Below are some of the comments received:

### Teacher Quotes

*"I appreciated the opportunity to work with my colleagues. It gave me a better sense as to what I can expect from my students. The sharing of ideas as to how I could teach the format was invaluable. Thank you for this practical PD."*

*"I would like to see Common Writing continued. It was a great opportunity for us to share and grow. I really appreciated and valued the sharing of thoughts and ideas. It was great to have administrators participate. Overall, I commend teachers and leaders for their time, work and effort on behalf of the students as they are our primary focus. Lastly, the highlight of the whole experience was reading the student writing."*

### Student Quotes

*"The teachers are very aware of our achievements and how we are doing in school. They give us direct feedback and show us the areas we may need improving in."*

*"I think the teachers here in JP11 are doing a great job teaching us the important things in life and after we graduate from high-school we know we have the skills."*

*"I like that there is people who help you or push you to do better or even to help you with the small problems. They want to see you succeed and will do almost anything to help you out in any subject or problem."*

## Partnerships and Support

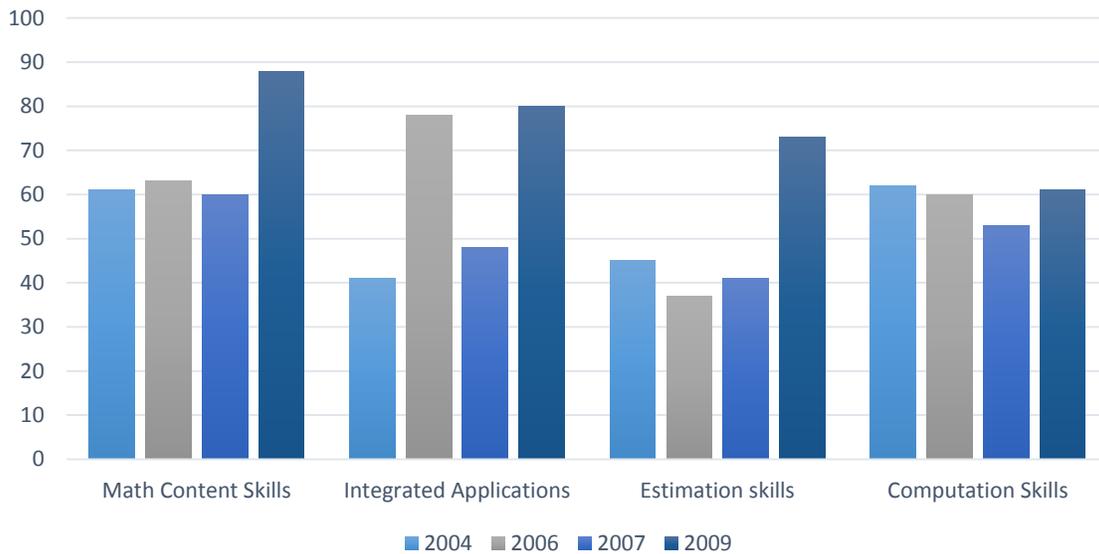
A variety of partnerships were established to create a network of support in our community not only for LOCCS students but for all students. Our partners included: City of North Battleford, Living Sky School Division, Treaty Six Education Council, Battlefords First Nations Joint Board of Education, MLAs, parishes, HUB, Provincial School Divisions, Battlefords Chamber of Commerce, Kids First, SPDU and North Battleford Youth Center. These partnerships focus on creating trusting relationships that support the well-being of all students in our region.

## Improved Student Achievement

At LOCCS we have come to understand that it is the foundational learning data from a multitude of data sources that are the vital signs of a healthy learning environment. Initially, the provincial system data (AFL) provided us with solid mathematical, reading, writing and student perceptual data. Indicators also came from classroom data (F&P) that informed our system about the areas for celebration in student achievement. The Opportunities to Learn (OTL) data also provided us with the coinciding data to demonstrate the correlation between instruction and student achievement. The OTL also highlighted areas for the celebration of professional growth and learning in LOCCS.

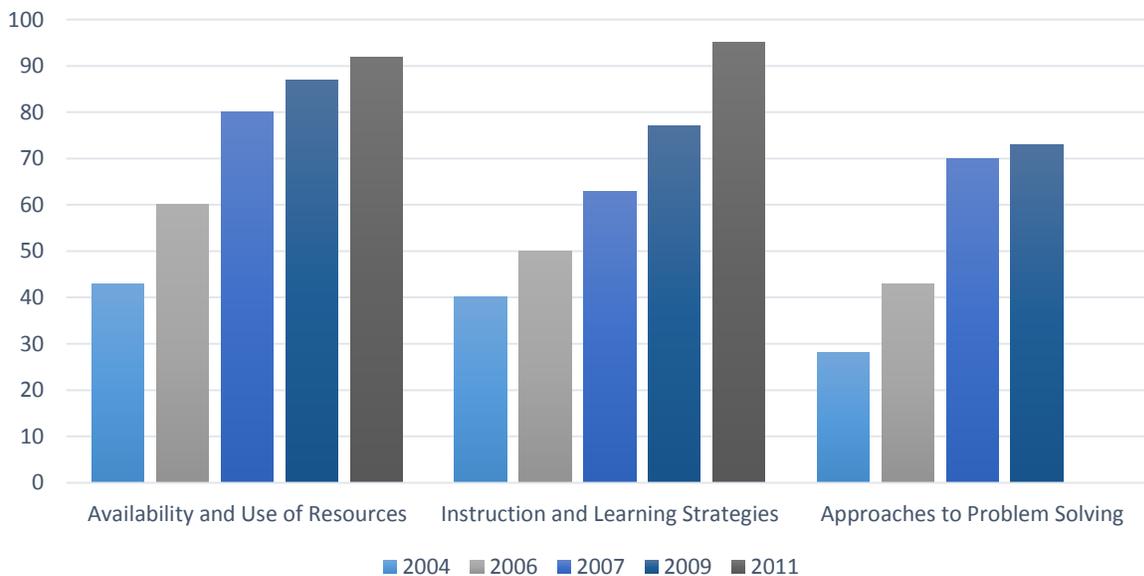


### LOCCS AFL Math Results 2004-2011



In 2004 when we first looked at our data our students scored meaningfully behind the province in all categories. In 2006 we paid a little more attention to getting our students ready to write the Assessment for Learning Math Assessments and it resulted in a small bump up in achievement levels for our students, only to return to the lower achievement scores in 2007. By 2009, the depth of the understandings teachers had of best practices in mathematics instruction became more embedded in the practices of all teachers and as a result significant increases in student achievement resulted.

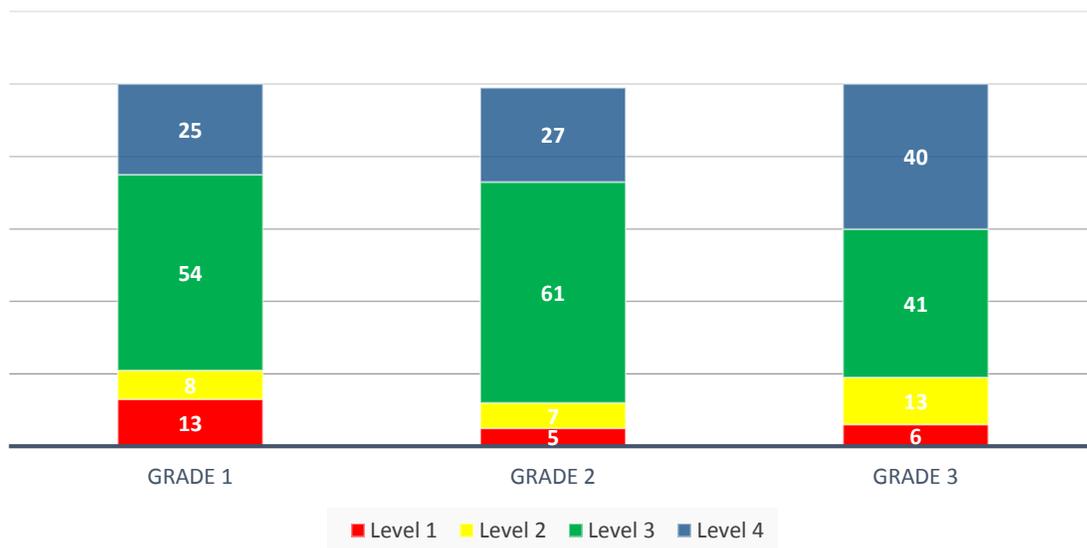
### LOCCS Gr. 5 Math Opportunities to Learn Data



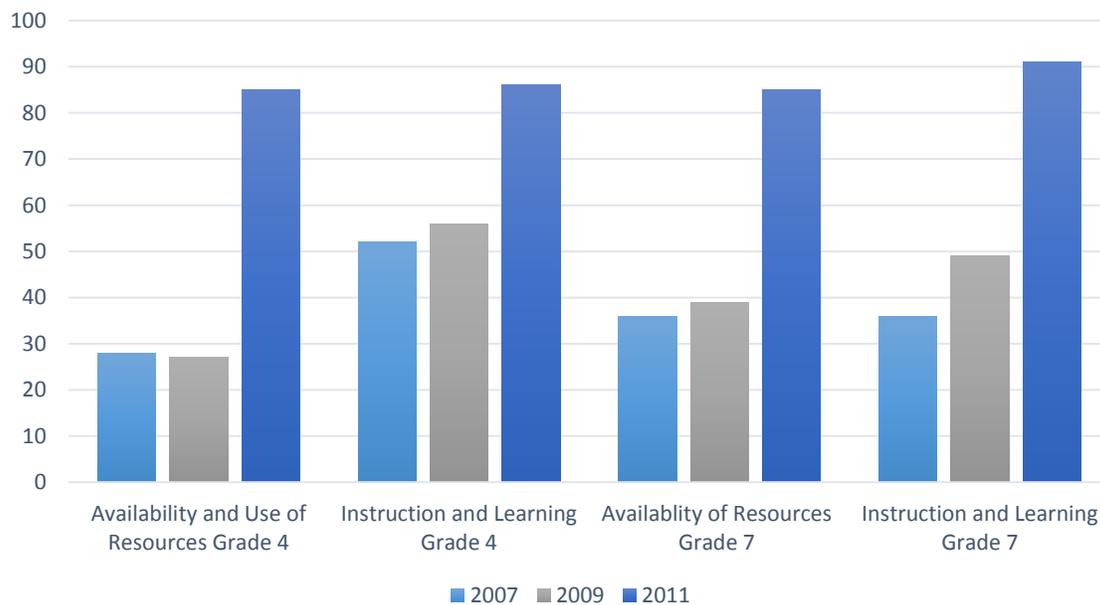
In 2011, when comparing the analysis of teacher use of classroom resources, the use of effective instructional and learning strategies and the use of effective problem solving skills we also saw a corresponding increase in student achievement, not only in our AFL results but also our Canadian Achievement Tests.

In 2009 when we saw the correlation between Opportunities to Learn (OTL) data and the corresponding growth in Mathematics achievement for our students, we replicated the instructional enhancement plan to support reading and writing achievement.

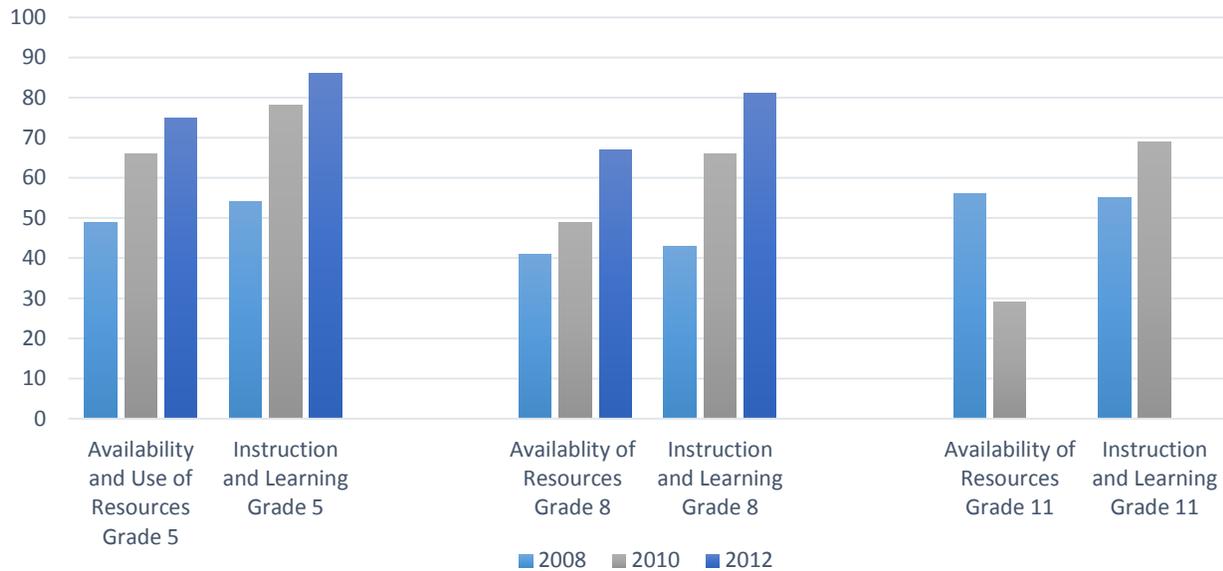
## Light of Christ Fountas and Pinnel June 2014



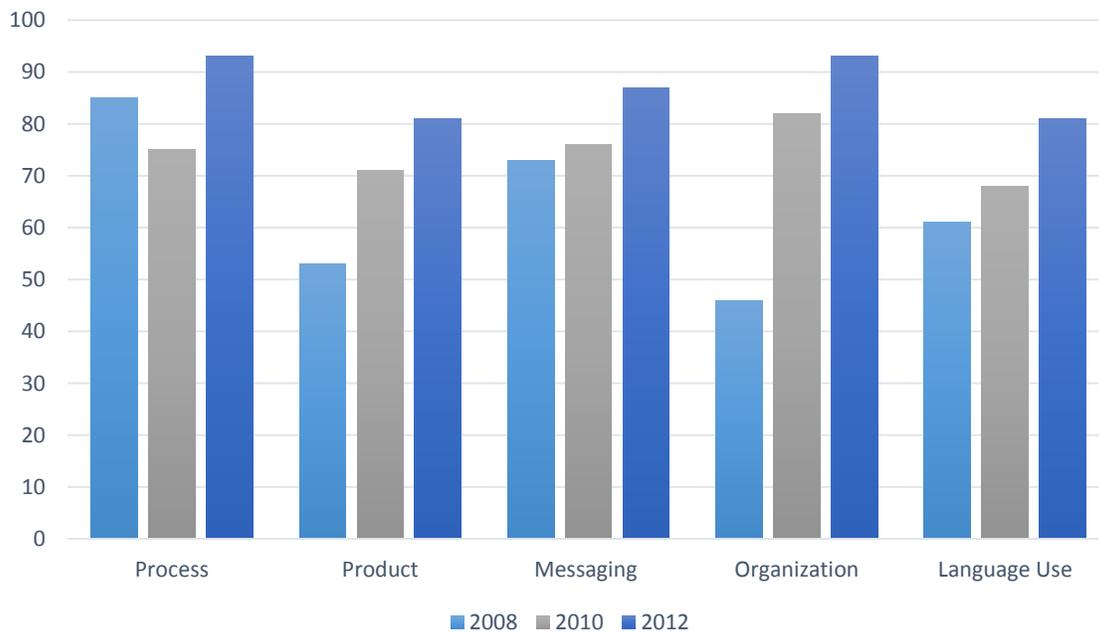
## LOCCS Reading Opportunities to Learn Data



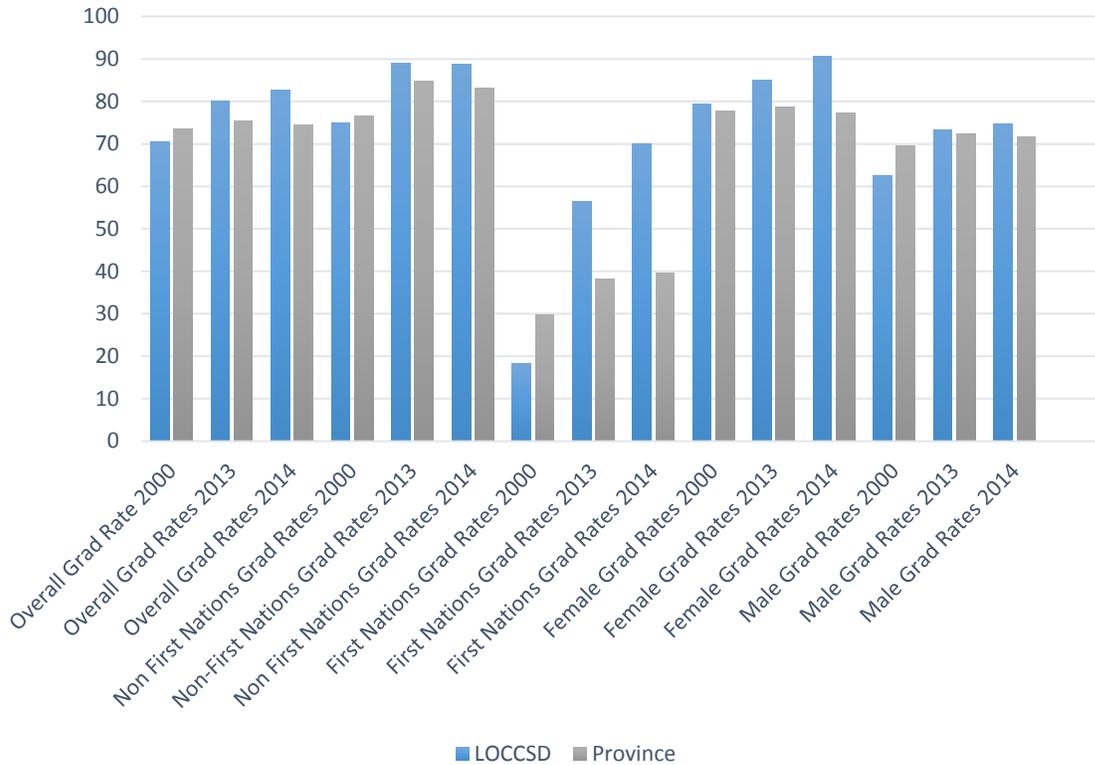
### LOCCS Writing Opportunities to Learn Data



### LOCCS AFL Writing Data 2008-2012



## On-time Graduation Rates 2000-2013-2014 LOCCSD/Province of Saskatchewan



Graduating Class of 2027

## Conclusion

Throughout our journey, we have learned that there is no silver bullet, no one shot deal or no magic pill school systems can utilize to improve the instructional strategies of teachers, achievement rates of students, or overall graduation rates. It takes a focused, consistent and sustained system-wide approach based on solid research and best practice in order to affect real changes in these areas.

We also learned considerable time must be spent in the early stages; researching, setting direction and defining the culture and expectations of the school division. School divisions must develop professional development plans and allocate an appropriate amount of resources towards these areas. There must be a system wide acceptance of the plan and a commitment to its purpose, otherwise success be not be achieved.

Building relationships with staff and an organizational culture where continuous learning occurs and change is accepted, and not feared is key to success in the process. Data must be collected and utilized to direct our effort and decisions but it should also be celebrated, as it validates the good work done by the people working for our students. This was not an easy journey, but it was certainly necessary for the success we have experienced thus far.

The framework outlined in the preceding pages allowed us to bring research into practice. We did the background work, developed an approach and worked with our staff to successfully deploy the plan. The real value in this approach was the work done with our teachers. Teachers affect the most influence on our students and this student-teacher relationship has a major role to play on achieving results as a system. Research has shown that students are more successful when they have a strong relationship with their teachers. We placed considerable resources into the professional development of our teachers in an effort to increase their competency regarding instructional strategies and worked with them to recognize the value of building strong relationships with their students. Our professional development effort also supported the idea of providing the appropriate amount to rigor for individual students. The importance of differentiated instruction and striving to meet the needs of each and every student was a major focus of our professional development efforts in this area. Finally, we focused on how to keep our students in school and engaged. We worked with our teachers to create lesson plans and learning activities to which students can relate. If what is being taught in our schools is highly relevant to our students, the higher probability that they will be highly engaged. Engaged students stay in school and students who stay in school, graduate.

Relationships, rigor and relevance is a mantra we use in our school division as a result of this framework. Our teachers align their classroom practices based on it and understand its significance. As mentioned earlier, the sustainability of this framework rests with in the hands of our teachers. We have made a commitment to provide on-going professional development in an effort to assist our teachers in continuing to grow and further develop their instructional tool box. Armed with a more robust arsenal of instructional strategies, our teachers can moving forward in their practice and commitment to building strong relationships with their students, providing an appropriate amount of rigor and teaching using materials and methods that are highly relevant. With these ingredients, placed within the framework we have developed at Light of Christ, our students will continue to grow and achieve and graduate at a high level.



## References

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