



## RENEWED FOCUS ON LITERACY

SEPTEMBER 2016

Nominated by:

**Horizon School Division #205**

for the

**2016 Premier's Board of Education Award for Innovation and Excellence in Education**

Horizon School Division Board Chair: Jim Hack

Director of Education: Kevin Garinger



## Background & Goals

Horizon School Division #205 is guided by three foundational goals set out by our Board of Education. These goals are:

### Literacy

- Ensure 100% of Pre-K students are ready for reading by Grade 1
- Ensure 100% of Grade 1-8 students are reading at grade level
- Ensure 100% of Grade 9-12 students graduate with a level of literacy commensurate with success in the workforce or post-secondary education

### Safe & Caring

- Provide safe & caring learning environments for all students and staff

### Assessment

- Ensure effective assessment practices are in place across all schools



By focusing efforts on these three principles for effective learning, Horizon School Division's work has helped students from all backgrounds achieve significant gains in their reading levels and allowed for our educators to measure those levels consistently and accurately. Beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, a renewed focus has been placed on literacy instruction using quality assessment practices and ethical use of data.

**A number of key initiatives have been undertaken, with the guidance and support of Horizon's Board of Education, to achieve our *Literacy* objectives:**

This journey began by selecting and implementing quality assessment tools that provided relevant, reliable and valid data with respect to student reading levels. Careful selection and implementation has ensured that we have quality assessment tools at all levels:

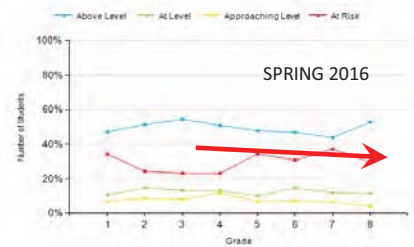
1. Early years – we have implemented a system-wide Pre-K screening tool that we use to identify developmental needs as early as 3 and 4 years old.
2. Early Years Evaluation (EYE), which provides us with data around early literacy skills and informed early intervention practice.
3. The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark assessment for Grades 1-8, which provides teachers with specific data around where students are struggling with reading and literacy.
4. The Ontario Comprehension Assessment (OCA), which provides high school teachers with specific data and strategies for support across disciplines with respect to students who still struggle; but also students who may need support in specific areas to become more proficient and have better tools to access content-specific literacy.

The careful training, implementation and ongoing support (including validation protocols) for these tools has ensured that teachers are equipped with the diagnostic tools and the support to be able to analyze and respond to the data through responsive, research-based instruction to support students. Our classrooms are the primary place for quality intervention and initial instruction.

Along with having reliable and valid data, Horizon has created a Literacy Support Team whose primary function is to build the capacity of teachers to align practice with research in promising/best practice and pedagogy. This is done by building the instructional leadership capacity of school administrators. The literacy team, under the vision of the Board and Director, and the supervision of the Superintendent of Student Services, consists of a Literacy Supervisor and four instructional literacy support coaches. The support model is very innovative – the team goes into a school and consults with the administrator regarding current practice and needs in the school. They will provide professional development to teams of teachers as well as whole school PD. They will then support individual teachers and teacher teams in their classroom implementation and next-steps in improving classroom instruction and supporting student success. The principal is key to the process, as the principal participates with the teacher teams, coaches and individual supports as well as daily debriefs with the team. The principal steps in once the team has completed their work. The literacy team also provides regular PD sessions through various delivery modes (on-site, online webinars, pre-recorded webinars, staff meetings and face-to-face PD at central locations). Ongoing refreshers and updates are given for all levels of instructional support to respond to system-wide, school-based, collaborative team and individual needs within the division.

The system functions in data response. Through identifying system-wide trends and needs as well as individual needs at the school and the classroom level, the entire system experienced significant growth.

One example of a system-wide response occurred this past year where, in addition to the work of the Literacy Support Team in schools, Horizon partnered with an author for our Writer-In-Residence initiative. This was innovative whereby an author was seconded to address the concern over middle years disengagement with literacy. The mandate was to raise the profile and increase the engagement with our middle years students in response to our data, which indicated that the number of students below grade level versus above grade level crossed between grades 4 and 5. We noted that we had more students below grade level than at or above grade level starting at that age.



Through the work of the literacy team, schools, administrators and the concerted efforts of the Writer-In-Residence, within a year, that issue disappeared and the levels of students at or above grade level remained higher than the number of students below grade level.

Other systemic responses include system-wide professional development, collaborative structures built into school time tables and system calendars, and an effective school feedback protocol for providing input from community, parent, student and staff stakeholders. These have contributed to high levels of success within the first year of implementation for Horizon School Division. The three goals of Literacy, Assessment and Safe & Caring work simultaneously within this model of effectiveness, under the guidance of our Board of Education.

## Selection Criteria

### **Evidence of direct Board influence and participation in the innovation:**

The Horizon School Division Board of Education has facilitated this work in literacy by narrowing the focus from over eighteen goals to three. Resources are targeted to support these three goals that are inseparably connected. The Board is kept informed of the progress through regular monthly reports at Board meetings and in-depth reports provided after the fall and spring assessment windows. Other presentations such as our Writer-In-Residence, have also kept our Board informed and involved at all levels. Data is disaggregated and provided to the board, both on current states/growth and data around what is happening in schools and classrooms on a daily basis.

*“Although I’m very excited about this opportunity, this is way more than me being delighted and honoured to be the Writer-In-Residence. I think it sends a great message to the community that the school board, communities and teachers are focused on literacy as a way to help our children achieve great things. This is a unique project and kudos to Horizon for using this as a way to reach children, along with all the other resources teachers use in the classroom.” - Sigmund Brouwer*

### **Innovative nature of the program or project:**

Building capacity within each school using an innovative model of support has been a strong contributor to the success of the project.

Horizon’s literacy initiative, including Literacy Symposiums and our Literacy Team’s work with educators, builds on current research related to instructional promising practice to increase literacy outcomes for students in all schools across our system.

Our Writer-In-Residence program is similar to the artist or author residencies that have existed in individual schools, but Horizon’s program is unique in Saskatchewan for its scale, providing systemic support and opportunities for students in each of the many schools of our geographically vast system.

Our support model for roll-out and training of benchmark assessments is also innovative and unique. When we do the Pre-K screening, we bring a whole team (consisting of Literacy Support Team members, the Occupational Therapist, the Speech/Language Pathologist, the administrator and the Learning Support Teacher from the school) and support the screening in a single day “blitz” that includes the parent/caregiver in the process and provides data directly from the teacher to the parent. The literacy team then supports the teacher in response to the data within the classroom and beyond, where appropriate.

With the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment system, one of our LEAN initiatives entailed providing a response resource for teachers to go to for support, in addition to the residency coaching and other supports made available to teachers to support their practice. Support work from literacy coaches is focused on the information provided by the benchmark data and ongoing formative assessments that continually inform the practice of teachers in the classroom.

The OCA roll-out is new this year and has been a deliberate process whereby an entire staff goes through the overview, scoring and response to the data session with the literacy team (3 hours of

training and then follow-up coaching support). Analyzing, interpreting and responding to the data is new for high school teachers, with disciplinary literacy and collective response across disciplines as a whole school initiative being the primary innovation for high school teachers.

### **Sustainability of the innovation within the present system or school:**

The innovations of Horizon's renewed focus on literacy outcomes are sustainable across our school division. Our Literacy Team, now in its second year, has grown from two full-time Literacy Coaches to four, in order to meet the demand for their support and input in schools. Our Writer-In-Residence was so well-received by students and staff that Mr. Brouwer's services were secured for another year of that program.

The Literacy Team has worked to build Horizon's capacity for in-house professional development opportunities for teachers and school administrators, cutting down on the need for costly external training. And the inclusion of the administrator in the process guarantees that the work which begins with classroom teachers is sustained and continued. In addition, the systemic and school-based collaborative structures ensure that teachers are engaged in the process of reflecting on and implementing promising practice across the system.

### **Cost of the innovation related to benefits achieved:**

Cost analysis would say that the focus and allocation of resources (including consistent benchmark assessment tools, human resources, professional capacity-building, our Writer-In-Residence, ongoing professional development and support systemically, our summer reading initiative whereby we provided all students with Sigmund Brouwer books for summer reading, training beginning teachers and teachers new to the system, parent engagement and other initiatives, and other reallocation of resources to support this work) spread over a system of 41 schools, over 700 teachers and 6,400 students would definitely be a value-added analysis. It is difficult to quantify the cost, as resources are not only added but also trimmed and redistributed with greater accountability, but the benefit is easily measured in the results across the system.

The benefit of these results far outweigh any cost associated with supporting their achievement, as success in literacy is the foundation of all future learning. All financial costs incurred are in support of the Education Sector Strategic Plan's goals for provincial literacy outcomes and in support of student learning. We haven't been given any additional funds but have, with high accountability and transparency to our Board and public, allocated funds with a specified goal and purpose.

### **Client support for innovation:**

Horizon's renewed focus on literacy outcomes, under the guidance of our Board and through the above-stated initiatives, has received extremely positive feedback from our stakeholders both within the division and our surrounding communities.

Horizon has begun a Review of School Effectiveness (ROSE) process for stakeholder feedback, based on the work of Dr. Larry LeZotte on the Seven Correlates of Effective Schools. Through this process, students, school staffs, School Community Councils, community members and stakeholders as well as parents/caregivers are invited to provide feedback and input into the effective current and future practices of the schools in Horizon. This is an innovative practice that provides a conduit for ongoing



input and consultation from all of our School and community stakeholders. Through this process, in addition to the careful analysis of data (literacy data, My School Survey, Following their Voices, etc.), schools and Horizon are able to respond and support students through a continuous reflective improvement planning and implementation process. We know that what we are doing is working because of the hard and soft data we collect around student success.

*“We are accountable to our results in the school setting; therefore, I believe we rise to the occasion.” – Deb Schwandt-Kelln, Principal, William Derby School*

*“Thank you Sigmund! You taught me to use emotions when I’m writing and have talked a lot about emotional rollercoasters. You’ve made me laugh, you’ve made me cry, and now I want to read more! I loved the Baracuda video and enjoyed making it with you in class. The Clan is such an amazing story so far that has so many emotions that I hope to achieve in my own writing. I hope to see you again next year and can’t wait for some new books to come out! Thank you for sharing your love to read and write with me!” – Grade 3 student, Muenster School*



*Thank-you card made for Mr. Brouwer by Muenster School Grade 3 “Story Ninjas”*

### **Partnerships in Support of the Innovation:**

**First Nation Chiefs and Councils:** We are beginning to forge strong partnerships with our First Nations community partners. We have been invited to present our FNMI literacy data to First Nations Chiefs and Councils and begin the process of collective response in partnership with the school, families and community. We have been invited to support community-based Pre-K headstarts and daycares in assisting them with prescreening sessions and supporting daycare workers and headstart educators in pre-literacy strategies and supports for early-years development. We continue to work with family/school liaison and outreach workers with respect to Family Literacy initiatives and partnerships between parents, community representatives and schools.

**Following Their Voices:** We are in the second year of this initiative and are providing valuable data to the Ministry, our schools and communities. This data helps us better meet the needs of our self-declared Indigenous students.

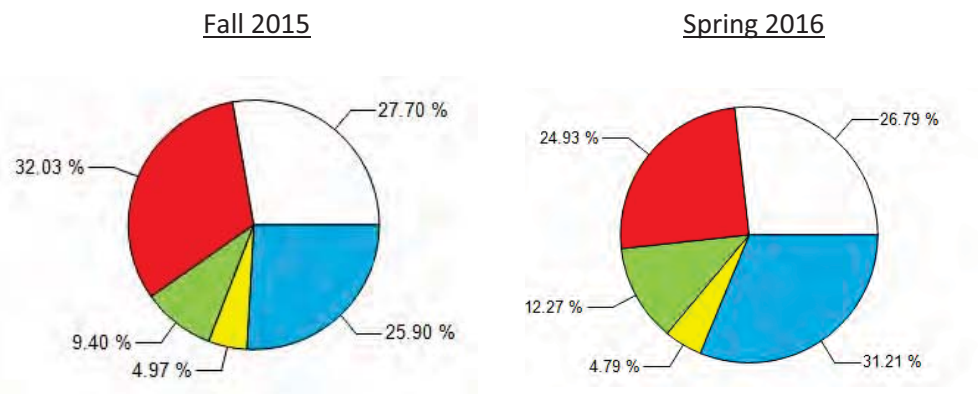
**Writer-In-Residence partnership:** Sigmund Brouwer is the bestselling author of nearly thirty novels, including the Justine McKeen series and Timberwolf series of children’s books and the Orca Sports series for young adults. He has received several awards for his work, including the Arthur Ellis Best Y/A Mystery

2015 Award for his novel, *Dead Man's Switch*, and the Book of the Year Christy Award 2015 for *Thief of Glory*. Many of these texts are low vocabulary/high interest which engage our struggling readers. In addition to his in-person visits and presentations to schools, Mr. Brouwer delivers bi-weekly video messages to schools across Horizon, fielding student questions and much more. Beginning in 2016-2017, Mr. Brouwer will be expanding his focus to include work on writing, beginning with Horizon's Grade 3 students.

**Summit 14 and other PD providers:** Horizon has partnered with the organizers of *Summit 14: When Struggling Readers Thrive, Dreams Come True*, to bring the well-regarded literacy summit to Saskatchewan for the first time for the benefit of educators and students across our province. We have also been entertaining possibilities with Kyleene Beers, Cris Tovanni and other experts in the field in support of our teachers and teachers throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

**Evidence of improved student achievement:**

Clear evidence of improved student achievement can be found in Horizon's reading level results for the 2015-2016 school year:



- 7% fewer at risk (RED)
- 8% more at or above grade level(GREEN/BLUE)
- 5.3% more above grade level (BLUE)



Across Horizon, we saw an increase of nearly 8% in Grade 1-8 students reading at or above grade level.



Between the fall 2015 and spring 2016 assessments, the number of Grade 3 students reading at or above grade level (reported to the province and included in the provincial data) in Horizon School Division rose by 20%. Fall data showed 43% of our students below grade level and 57% at or above. By spring, we had 23% below and 77% above, giving us nearly 100 students no longer at risk or below grade level across the division. This means that we were only 3% short of the Education Sector Strategic Plan's goal of 80% for Grade 3 students in Saskatchewan – a target the sector hopes to reach provincially by the year 2020. Our FNMI Grade 3 data showed even better results moving from 76% at risk or below to 48% and from 24% at or above level to 52% - gains of 28% for our Grade 3 FNMI students!

In the fall of 2015, we had only 6 schools with less than 20% of their students falling more than a full grade level behind (at risk.) By spring of 2016, we had 16 schools of less than 20% and 3 having less than 10% of their students at risk. In the fall, we had 16 schools with more than 30% of their students at risk and by fall, that number was reduced to 9.

With respect to our self-declared FNMI students, we now have 5% fewer at risk and 7% more at or above grade level since the fall of 2015.

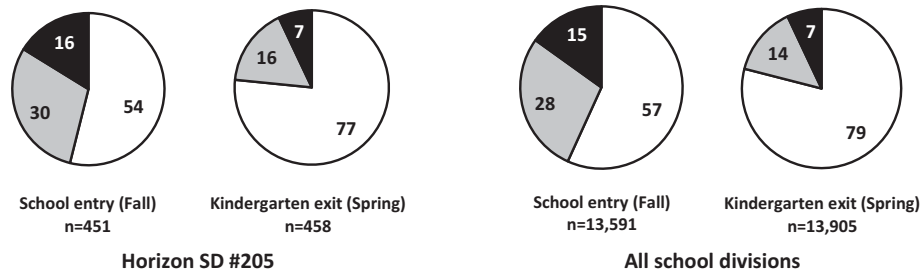
In our middle years, we saw gains of 9% fewer below grade level (an increase of 9% more at or above grade level.) Our self-declared FNMI middle year students saw a 10% gain (10% fewer below grade level and 10% more at or above grade level).

**Ministry** results for EYE data (next page). This data shows that Horizon students were below the Provincial average entering kindergarten in 2015 but above the Provincial average exiting kindergarten in the same year, compared to the previous year where Horizon students exiting kindergarten fell below the Provincial average.

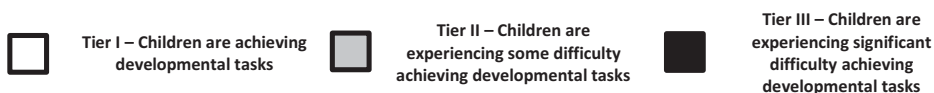
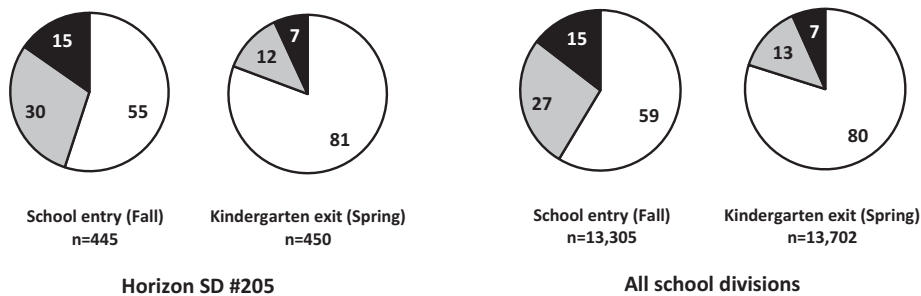


**Ready to Learn: Early Years Evaluation – Teacher Assessment (EYE-TA) RTI  
(responsive, tiered instruction) results (%) at school entry & Kindergarten exit,  
2014-15 (baseline) & 2015-16**

**2014-15 (baseline) collection**



**2015-16 collection**



Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

**Conclusion**

Horizon School Division’s renewed focus on improving literacy results for students has already produced remarkable gains in the first year of the above-stated innovations. As we continue work towards our Board’s goal to have 100% of Horizon students reading at or above grade-level, these continuing initiatives put us in an excellent position for sustained growth. Only through the direct guidance and support of our Board of Education has Horizon been able to improve instructional practice and engage our students’ love of reading in every school and classroom across our vast system. We are beginning the process of including writing and developing numeracy as part of our literacy focus in anticipation of the upcoming Provincial Priority implementation deadlines for writing and numeracy.