

Larchwood Public School

RAINBOW DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Student population: 118; Grades: JK–8; Principal: Susan Cousineau

Larchwood Public School is located in Dowling, just north of Sudbury. It serves middle- to upper-middle-income families and has a small First Nation population. About 10% of its students have special-education needs. All students are bused, and there is no current English language learner population. Ordinarily, the school's population would be considered stable; however, the community is closely tied to the mining industry, and the student population has shrunk from 136 to 118 in the past three years due to a downturn the industry. The Dowling area is among Canada's most beautiful regions, and residents tend to enjoy outdoor activities.

EQAO reports are eagerly awaited in this school, which scores significantly higher than the board or province. At Larchwood, all teachers read the school report closely, and subsequent discussions identify deficient program areas.

Principal Susan Cousineau says: "EQAO helps us to find our focus. In-depth analysis helps us to establish both our goals and clear criteria for student learning."

At Larchwood, the in-depth analysis comes under the banner of a primary literacy critical pathway. As data were interpreted and areas of need (e.g., making connections, comprehension, higher-order thinking questions) were isolated, rubrics, anchor charts and lessons were formulated to address them. The staff targeted each area of concern for an eight-week period and then moved on to another.

Among the many successful initiatives that Larchwood has embarked on, a board-initiated 2008 math study group has paid great dividends. The group's mandate was to study and introduce the Ministry of Education's new approach to problem solving for mathematics. Group members met monthly and, between meetings, slowly introduced the new approach to their classes. Members observed each other teaching, and other staff members were also welcome to sit in. Gradually the three-step problem-solving model unfolded.

Step 1 was to introduce the problem. The teacher made sure that all the children understood it. Step 2 was solving the problem. Children were each given a math buddy (someone working at the same level). They were allowed to use any manipulatives they wished and asked to show their work. In Step 3, the students explained the logic and strategies leading to their solution. There were inevitably several ways to solve any given problem. Listening to the students helped the teachers understand how the students perceived the problem and how their logic led to the answers.

Problem solving has traditionally been a difficult area for students. The new model brought several interesting things to light: it was difficult for the students to begin, because they were so used to being told how to proceed by a teacher. Also, it

became apparent that some of their difficulties were due to a misunderstanding of mathematical signs. They did not realize that "x" meant "groups of," and they thought "=" indicated the answer rather than the balancing of the two sides of an equation.

Students have improved greatly and are displaying greater confidence in a difficult area of mathematics, as shown by their excellent EQAO math scores. The three-step approach to problem solving is now a mainstay at this school. Larchwood bases programming decisions on good data. The staff refers to primary and junior DRA scores and report card marks, but the item-analysis information in the EQAO reports is the jumping-off point.



Joanne Noel, Susan Cousineau (principal), Natalie Miller

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Recently, after examining these data, the staff made engaging students in assessing their own learning a goal. Students now keep portfolios, and conferences take place in the classrooms. Conferences allow for a more precise understanding of a child's performance level and provide a mechanism to challenge the student to improve. Students are involved in forming rubrics and anchor charts and are developing an excellent understanding of what is necessary to achieve various levels. As the students examine samples of work to which they can assign a mark, they participate in a form of moderated marking. These students are learning the language of assessment and taking steps to becoming self-directed learners.

To assist struggling students, Larchwood was able to access a Council of Directors of Education project grant, which afforded computers, programs and training. The programs Write Out Loud and Premier assist students with spelling and organizing ideas by allowing them to see and hear what they have written. Such assistive technology alleviates frustration and leads to more detailed and complete writing in the classroom and on EQAO assessments.

Larchwood also has an early reading intervention teacher who concentrates on students who are approaching grade level. Students receive 30 minutes of assistance each day, and parents are invited to workshops on helping to teach their children to read. At Larchwood, data analysis and intervention strategies

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have led to improved student achievement.

Principal Cousineau says: “Larchwood School is all about teacher collaboration. Student work drives instruction. We believe that all students can grow and succeed. Teachers are committed to a learning culture. They work humbly and don’t recognize their impact.”

GRADES 3 AND 6 STUDENT POPULATION

	GRADE 3	GRADE 6
Female	36%	67%
Male	64%	33%
English language learners	0%	0%
Special education needs	27%	7%
Born outside Canada	0%	0%
First language learned at home other than English	0%	0%



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