

Grandview Public School

Durham District School Board Oshawa, Ontario

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About the school ...

Grandview Public School is located in Oshawa, a city on the Lake Ontario shoreline that has been a major centre for the Canadian automotive industry. The school, in the southeastern part of town, offers a Kindergarten to Grade 8 program to approximately 275 students, the majority of whom walk to school. Many students face economic challenges (approximately 40 per cent of parents/guardians have not completed high school) and many struggle with physical and communication disabilities (including autism, mild intellectual disability and visual impairment). Yet the school's vision of excellence prevails, with students and their families celebrating achievement in a range of school activities from academics to arts to athletics.

Grandview has made steady progress over the last few years on the Primary and Junior EQAO assessments. The most recent assessment had very positive results, with a 100 participation rate – including students working on Individual Education Plans (23 per cent in Grade 6, 20 per cent in Grade 3). According to the principal, the foundation for improved student learning and achievement is “the empowering structures put in place by previous leadership and the internal drive of individual staff. Grandview staff persist in attempting new strategies to support their students. Continual reflection and adjustment to practice are evident – teachers became their own professional learning community!”

Some Snapshots

Students ...

- take part in Excellence Assemblies (celebrating achievements in academics, arts, athletics, attitude) and Literacy Sharing Days (multi-grade groups meet to read their own writing)
- compete in Legion Remembrance Day Writing Contest and Durham District's Penstrokes and perform in Captivate Media Festival
- participate in the School Community Council's mini-stick tournament (student and staff teams compete, students act as referees and score keepers)
- take advantage of homework drop-in in the library/computer lab/SERT office (before, at recess, over lunch) and social skills recess activity program

Parents ...

- volunteer regularly in classrooms and the library
- fundraise and donate materials to support programs, such as “Scientists in the School”
- use the school website to work with children (each class page provides information to support learning – educational links, assignment information, suggestions for student improvement and opportunities for additional support)

Ongoing improvement ...

Seventy-seven per cent of Grandview students are now achieving at or above the provincial standard in Grade 3 reading, with 83 per cent in writing and in mathematics. Each of the Grade 6 assessment results have increased by at least 20 percentage points.

Success after struggle ...

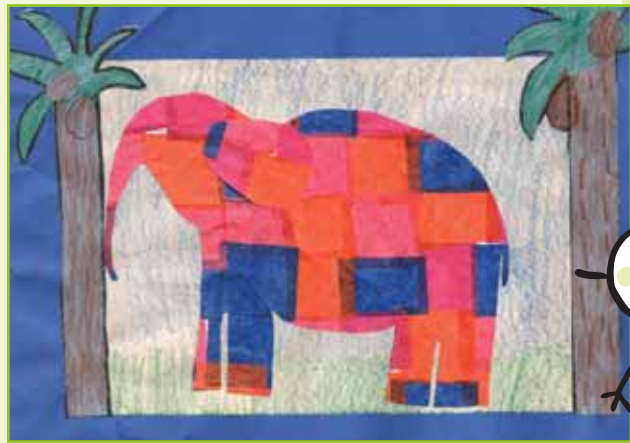
Change began to take hold with a clear commitment to working together on behalf of student learning and achievement. The school adopted a professional learning community model to foster collaboration among the principal, teachers and support staff (special education resource teacher, teacher-librarian, literacy coach, literacy and numeracy facilitator) with one end in mind – namely, to build success for each and every student. PLC meetings began with reviewing data and setting reading targets, followed by table talk focused on a SMART goal set by each individual teacher to improve reading for an individual student. Professional dialogue focused on sharing best practices and next steps to improving literacy throughout the school. The PLC model evolved to regular divisional PLCs, focused on both literacy and numeracy, and most recently into hubs/networks exploring key issues among local area schools.

Grandview is built as a back split so that each division has its own floor, with three or four classrooms on each. This structure created a natural isolation between divisions. The initial planning through the divisional PLC promoted more consistency within each division. Since there is often only one class per grade, teachers had previously worked individually on their separate grade programs. Through active dialogue and implementation of similar strategies, each division has moved toward a common approach for learning in literacy and mathematics. These strategies began to be shared by divisional PLCs and have since developed into a school-wide approach so that students are presented with similar formats and structures each year as they progress through the grades. In mathematics, for example, all teachers are using the same template of numbers, pictures and words to support problem solving. In literacy activities, teachers initially used a mnemonic strategy to help students extend and enhance answers. Now they have developed a more sophisticated framework for students as they continue to reflect on the best way to get deeper responses from students.

Teaching, learning and leading ...

Descriptive feedback. Setting high standards is key to improving learning. But just as important is providing students with the necessary, “just-in-time” feedback so that they can reach the next level. Teachers work together to provide students with the information needed to improve. They share learning goals with students and the feedback they provide relates directly to these goals. Primary teachers have used a “rainbow template” provided by their literacy coach. All teachers use trait-specific comments to provide specific, descriptive feedback (verbal and/or written, as appropriate).

Gradual release of responsibility. Moving beyond basic reading toward critical literacy where students can analyze text and search for deeper meaning and connections has been a goal in all grade levels. Teachers have scaffolded higher-order thinking skills by first modelling the new learning through these activities, then supporting independent work and then helping students transfer these skills to other subject areas. Student-generated anchor charts are used extensively to facilitate scaffolding for all types of learners. Regular opportunities for students to refine written work and share written responses among peers has provided visual exemplars of quality grade-level work.



Coaching. A positive coaching environment requires trust and persistence. Building relationships that make it safe to open classroom doors and share challenges creates a positive collaborative culture. Having the support from peer “experts” (literacy and numeracy coaches) has been significant in sustaining growth and change. Teachers now “coach” one another and readily request help and clarification to improve their practice. The teacher-librarian team teaches with staff to support the use of research and multi-media units. The literacy coach and SERT work closely with teachers to support programs.

Technology. Technology is a large component of programming at Grandview not only in the self-contained classrooms for Multiple Exceptionalities and Behaviour Assessment but also throughout the whole school. Assistive technology, such as Kurzweil and Premier Suite, is available for identified students, as well as those who are struggling. The development of student multi-media presentations has been increased with the purchase of a SMART Board for the library last year.

“We get nothing but help from the school ... teachers are very good about making children feel that we are all one.” *Parent*

“Every child can and will learn. It’s how we go about finding the way that the child learns best.” *Teacher*

“We teach the whole child.” *Teacher*

Moving into the future

- ◆ explore and implement new learning strategies that will help to differentiate instruction for students who are struggling
- ◆ find opportunities to meet with other staff and other schools to revitalize family of schools initiatives in literacy and numeracy
- ◆ continue to develop inclusive practices (interested especially in uses of technology to support exceptional students and those who are struggling)
- ◆ continue to develop non-fiction reading and writing skills
- ◆ continue to delve deeper into writing through the use of anchor charts and graphic organizers and to find ways to support students in giving more developed answers