

# **PLYMOUTH RIVER SCHOOL COUNCIL REPORT**

**2013-2014 SCHOOL YEAR**

**June 20, 2014**

**by**

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## Introduction

The School Council focused much of its time designing and implementing the *PRS Poetry Contest*. The theme of the poetry contest was science, which was aligned with each grade level's science unit: Grade K – Frogs; Grade 1 – Woodlands and Ponds; Grade 2 – Gardening; Grade 3 Sun, Moon, and Stars; Grade 4 – Plant Life Cycles, and Grade 5 – Student Choice. A different genre of poetry was assigned to grade level groups: K/1 – acrostic, 2/3 – cinquain, 4/5 – haiku. A brochure was designed that included rules, an explanation of the theme of the contest, and categories for awards. Categories included the following: Best Overall Poem, Best Artistic Representation of a Poem, Most Creative Poem, and Best Cooperative Poem. Winners of each category had their poems displayed in the front hall and presented their poems at All School Meeting. All entries were posted throughout the school.

**Goal 1: As a result of the emphasis on expository writing in the Common Core, teachers in grade 2-4 will instruct students on the essential elements of argumentative and information writing. Teachers are expected to instruct the program with fidelity which includes following a pacing guide and submitting a sample portfolio of student writing.**

- The system adopted the program Empowering Writers and provided for second, third, and fourth grade teachers to attend a one-day training in the fall. The training included instruction in persuasive, narrative, and expository writing. Through observations and team meetings it was documented that teachers taught the program with fidelity and utilized a pacing guide. A portfolio of student writing was included in teacher evidence binders.
- The PRS Poetry Contest focused on science content that related to grade level units allowing students to blend expository writing in a poetry genre.

**Goal 2: As a result of the emphasis on using informational text in the Common Core, teachers in grades 1-5 will select, develop, and implement activities to teach the elements of information text fulfilling the standard of approaching a balance of informational and fictional text. Teachers are expected to provide a portfolio of ideas and lessons and student work of how they have integrated informational text into their literacy block and the content areas.**

- The initiative was to increase non-fiction in K-5. The new CCSS required students to be immersed in information about the world around them. The new standards require a 50/50 balance between literacy and informational text. Our teachers are charting their usage of materials to document what we are doing well and to allocate resources for next year. Based on these findings, materials will be ordered.

**Goal 3: As a result of focusing on the critical areas of the Common Core State Standards in Massachusetts in grade levels K-3, 80% of students will show significant growth on the grade-level District Determined Measure pre and post-tests.**

We have completed the three year transition to the MA Curriculum Frameworks incorporation the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The district mathematics specialists introduced unit packets (10-12 per grade) for grades K-5 outlining new content as well as content that shifted to another grade-level. In some cases, we found the need to modify lessons or provide additional resources to ensure we were providing opportunities for students to show growth in the critical areas at each grade. In conjunction with this need, the state required grades K-3 to develop district determined measures (DDMs) that would show student growth over time. The math committee looked at a variety of options for our DDMs and decided to develop measures that would measure growth as well as increase our instructional focus in the critical areas of mathematics. The following describe the DDMs and show the growth percentages at each grade, K-3 for PRS.

**Kindergarten – Profile of Progress**  
Students were assessed on nine counting & cardinality tasks in the fall and in January. District wide Average Growth - 53%/PRS Average Growth – 54% (Moderate growth is 40%-60%)  
Percentage of students at each growth level: Low – 28%, Moderate – 36%, High – 36% (72% showed adequate growth)  
Next Year: September pre-test, January post-test.

### **Grade 1 - Fact Fluency**

Students were assessed on addition fact fluency in December and in February. Teachers piloted a variety of data-collection strategies.  
PRS Average Growth – 54% (Moderate growth is 40%-60%) Due to a variety of strategies, no comparative district data is available at this time.  
Next Year: We will continue with our fact fluency goal and students will take an addition pre-test in September, an addition check-in & subtraction pre-test in December, and addition & subtraction post-tests in May.

### **Grade 2 - Modeling Addition & Subtraction Strategies**

Students were assessed before unit 4 and after unit 6.  
District wide Average Growth - 57%/PRS Average Growth – 54% (Moderate growth is 40%-60%)  
Percentage of students at each growth level: Low – 36%, Moderate – 15%, High – 47% (62% showed adequate growth)  
We are pleased that 47% of the students had high growth. We feel that the 36% at low growth is a result of the structure of the tasks on the assessment. There were 4 questions that were worth 3 points each and if the children missed the concept, they could have possibly missed all 3 points and even if they found the sum or difference, they may not have used a question mark for the unknown in the equation or clearly showed the strategy they used to solve the problem. We will be conscientious about the point system on the 2014/15 assessment. One of the main goals of the unit revisions and DDM was to formally teach students to use open number lines to solve problems. Significant growth was evidenced on these questions.

Next Year - Students will be using the EM4 materials and due to shifts in unit content the DDM will be administered before unit 5 and after unit 6.

### **Grade 3 – Bubble Gum Factory Fractions Unit**

A team of teachers with representatives from PRS developed a new fractions unit and students were assessed before and after the implementation.

District wide Average Growth - 65%/PRS Average Growth – 66% (Moderate growth is 40%-60%)

Percentage of students at each growth level: Low – 6%, Moderate – 22%, High – 72% (94% showed adequate growth)

We were impressed with the results of the fraction unit DDM. Students and teachers alike enjoyed the structure of the unit and their learning was evident in the outstanding growth results.

Next Year – We will teach the unit again and students will take the same assessment before and after unit 8.

Our overall results from this pilot year were informative in terms of assessment and question design, supplemental curriculum materials, the importance of highlighting the instructional shifts in the CCSS and helping students understand the concept of taking a test on subject matter they have yet to learn. We look forward to implementing our revisions and analyzing the impact they have on the growth results.

### **Amendments to Goals 1 and 2\***

Overall MCAS scores for PRS were quite high with a rating at the 98 percentile; however, the “high needs” subgroup failed to meet the PPI and CPI Massachusetts targets. As a result, a meeting with representative teachers, specialists, and special education teachers was conducted similar to last year to complete a needs assessment and develop an amendment to the School Improvement Plan that included improvement objectives and strategies. The School Improvement Team felt it important to continue on the same path which directed us to increase Tier 3 time. Instruction focused on conceptual development, computation, and math facts, while ELA highlighted decoding skills, reading comprehension, and writing in persuasive and expository genres. The school continues to implement the MCAS Preparation Course in grades 3-5. The selection process was guided by MCAS scores of students from the “high needs” subgroup.

**Goal 1: Improve MCAS/ELA and reduce proficiency gaps (Progress and Performance Index) by targeting the five components of effective reading instruction through a prescriptive instructional scheme for students in grades K-5.**

- MCAS ELA data was analyzed to identify classroom trends as well as student growth percentile by classrooms. We will continue to identify classrooms with low mean scores in the 2014-2015 school year.
- Beyond our Wilson groups, we will continue to implement a program at grades 3, 4, and 5 focused on fluency and comprehension for students not on an IEP. Each small group

met for 75 minutes a week during the school day. Students worked with our two reading tutors in small groups that included reading fiction, informational text as well as the Lexia Core 5 program and Raz kids in the computer lab.

- The reading specialist took struggling at risk literacy learners not on IEP's for an extra hour a week to provide foundational skills before entering third grade.
- An advanced reader component was added to grade four during tiered instruction (RTI) and we continued with a similar program in grades K-3. The advanced reader component in grade four focused on the discussion of novels using questions that focused on higher level thinking. Our goal is to incorporate a similar program in grade five for the 2014-15 school year.
- Our special education teachers and reading tutors identified "high needs" students and provided Tier III reading support in small groups on decoding, fluency, and comprehension strategies. Students used programs such as Read Naturally, Visual Thinking Strategies, Wilson Language, and Visualizing and Verbalizing to increase their reading skills. Regular progress monitoring using DIBELS oral reading fluency samples indicated growth and areas of need to be addressed in separate small group lessons. During these small group classes, students also benefited from guided instruction in answering open response questions.
- Students not on IEP's also benefited from small group reading instruction during RTI time. Reading tutors took small groups of students to work on fluency, decoding and comprehension skills. Classroom teachers worked with remaining students using a variety of fiction and informational texts to teach reading skills. The RTI block was a highly useful period for all students of all instructional levels.
- This is the third straight year that we have implemented an MCAS preparation course in ELA. Students were selected according to the lowest scores achieved on MCAS, classroom and formative assessments, and their membership in the "high needs" category. Teachers planned and implemented a seven week MCAS preparation course for third, fourth and fifth grade students. Each session was one hour in duration with an average participation rate of thirteen students. A sampling of the topics covered included genre and theme, words in context, style and language, main idea and supporting details, myths and traditional stories, plays, poems, cause and effect, nonfiction, and the rules of English. Finding evidence from the text and answering open response items was also included.
- Two reading incentive programs were implemented and included a very successful Reading Olympics and the *PRS Summer Reading Program*. PRS had an impressive 67% of students participate in the 2014 Winter Reading Olympics. Students earned a Gold, Silver or Bronze medal based on minutes read. We also had a solid response from teachers and staff reading to earn their medals. All medals were awarded by administration at our March All School Meeting.

**Goal 2: Improve MCAS Math and reduce proficiency gaps (Progress and Performance Index) by integrating best practices and the Common Core State Standards.**

- The fourth grade team continued its implementation of a 45 minute skills period, which increased from one in two cycles to a daily period. The team moved beyond addressing the needs of Tier 3 students in literacy and math to include direct instruction of our most

able readers. This group analyzed three novels (Number the Stars, Journey to Topaz, and The Indian in the Cupboard) at a reading level of grade 5-6 with our reading specialist. Students were transferred in and out of the group based on assessments and classroom performance.

- Melissa Smith, Assistant Principal taught three Tier III math sessions per a six day cycle to fourth graders. Two sessions with nine students were dedicated to support “high needs” students. All of those students were on IEPs and scored warning, needs improvement, or proficient on MCAS 2013. The third session with seven students without an IEP was dedicated to those who did not receive formal support, but could benefit from increased practice and review. Their MCAS scores ranged from needs improvement to low proficient. In all sessions, the primary content focus was answering an open response question. The secondary focus was fact fluency (PRS grade 4 student learning goal) and the critical areas of common core (multi-digit multiplication/division, an understanding of fractions, and analyzing geometric shapes)
- Our four special education teachers who support students in grades 1-5 volunteered to work with students before and after school several times per week. High needs students in grade four were invited to join special education teacher, Elizabeth Foley, for a math group on Wednesday mornings from 7:30-8:10. During this time students worked on math fact fluency, MCAS style open response problem solving, multiplication and division skill building, and practice of concepts being learned in the classroom. Students worked with computer programs, small group games, interactive lessons, worksheets, and hands on materials to develop an understanding of math concepts.

Special Education teachers Alisa Valley and Christine Rogg provided a Tier 3 time for “high needs” students by providing small group tutoring before school. They invited seven second grade students and six third grade students. Their attendance rate was 98%. The sessions occurred on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 7:40 – 8:10 starting in October and ending in June. Each of the students has an Individual Education Plan. Instruction focused on fact fluency skills and time and money at each student’s instructional level. Also, a para-educator provided math fact fluency instruction to fifteen first grade students. The para-educator and Christine Rogg assessed and reviewed their progress in order to determine targeted skill instruction as needed. Each student received 20 minutes of skill instruction at their individual level twice per cycle. The students met in small groups at the beginning of the school day 8:20-8:40.

Anna Bernal who supports grade five classrooms, established a morning math group on Tuesday’s from 7:30 – 8:10 am to remediate and instruct students on math concepts. The group was composed of “high needs” students who scored warning or needs improvement on the fourth grade Math MCAS. Instruction included fact fluency practice, remediation of multiplication and division skills and preview/review of concepts learned in the classroom such as perimeter, area, exponents, fractions, decimals, and order of operations. Students were also instructed on test taking strategies.

- This is the seventh straight year that we have implemented an MCAS preparation course in math. Students were selected according to the lowest scores achieved on MCAS and

classroom formative and summative assessments. Also selected were students on the cusp of moving from low proficient to needs improvement. Group size averaged twelve with a combination of regular and special education students. Teachers planned and implemented a seven week MCAS preparation course for third, fourth and fifth grade students. Each session was one hour in duration with an average participation rate of thirteen students. Topics covered strands where weaknesses were prominent and also included test taking strategies and answering open response items. Homework assignments were a prerequisite and they received feedback for improvement.