

NEW BRUNSWICK BEST ACADEMY

# CHANGING THE ASSESSMENT CULTURE

Sarah McLachlan  
[Sarah.McLachlan@nbed.nb.ca](mailto:Sarah.McLachlan@nbed.nb.ca)  
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## **OUR SCHOOL**

New Brunswick Best Academy is a rural school located in Loyalist, New Brunswick. The school opened its doors in September 2010 for 270 students in grades 6 – 12, 20 teachers and 2 administrators. Schools in Silverwood and New Maryland were closed and students were transferred to this new school, built halfway between the two communities. NBBA is described as a “technologically-rich” school. All classrooms are equipped with Smartboards and FM systems. Every student at NBBA has a netbook computer for their use both at school and at home.

Teachers were placed, based on their teaching assignment, into 1 of 2 teams: Middle School or High School. It has been necessary for the principal, vice-principal, guidance counselor and resource teacher to be members of both teams. Team meetings occur every 3-4 weeks and are usually led by an administrator. Currently, two Professional Learning Communities (PLC) exist: Mathematics and Language Arts. These groups meet once each month.

High school students are scheduled into 5 periods of instruction each day. A 30 minute block of time after lunch has been established as “advisory period” for high school students. Twelve groups of 15 multi-aged students were created to meet with the same teacher every day for the entire school year. Students in grade 9 will continue with the same teacher until graduation from high school. Students may work on homework, attend extra-curricular meetings, prepare scholarship applications, participate in group discussions or get extra help from teachers. A balance between teacher directed and student directed activities is expected. Students must do something that is considered a good use of time. About every 6 weeks, a special event is organized by the athletic department or student council to promote school spirit without interfering with classroom instructional time.

## **CAPSTONE PROJECT**

**GOALS:**

1. To develop an assessment culture at NBBA that focuses on improving student achievement
2. To examine current research on formative and summative assessment in team meetings at NBBA
3. To support teachers with implementing best assessment practices with their students

**IMPLEMENTATION:**

During our first year of existence, building a school climate, for and with, our students became our primary focus. In our second year, we have placed emphasis on building teams and PLC's. Due to scheduling difficulties, team and PLC meetings are held after school.

After undergoing the provincial school review process in February 2012, it became evident that teachers and administration were ready to examine the assessment practices in classrooms at NBBA. Summative assessment is the norm and the reviewers encouraged the school leaders to provide professional development in formative assessment to the teachers.

Classroom teachers, at this time, are making assessment decisions individually. The change in assessment culture must be done slowly. If teachers feel overwhelmed, the process will have less chance of success. This capstone project only begins to address the necessary changes.

**PROJECT TIMELINE:**

<b>Date(s)</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>Facilitator(s)</b>
March 30, 2012	All teachers, grades 6 – 12	1 hour PD on current assessment research	Leonard Cohen, Mathematics Lead, School District 18
April – May 2012	Math 112 classroom	Teacher implemented ideas from EDUC 6153 to model. Pre-test/Post-test written; embedded formative assessment on Tuesdays and Thursdays; students provide feedback through peer assessment; students charted progress as a means of motivation; teacher tracked individual student and classroom results; one math teacher from numeracy PLC visited classroom to observe	S. McLachlan
June 2012	HS Team	Teacher will share data and observations from pre-assessment and post-assessment with team.	S. McLachlan
June 2012	All teachers, grades 6 – 12	A summer reading assignment will be provided; chapter one from “Ahead of the Curve” (Reeves); “Using assessments to Improve Teaching and Learning” written by Thomas R. Guskey	S. McLachlan and A. Murray, NBBA Principal
August 2012	All NBBA teachers; all teachers from two feeder schools (Doaktown Elementary & Upper Miramichi Elementary)	½ day Professional Development session with Dr. Ray Williams, Saint Thomas University	S. McLachlan; Nelly Furtado-, Doaktown Elementary Principal; A. Murray, NBBA Principal; N. Furtado UMES Principal
Sept. 2012	High School Team; Middle School Team	Theme: Embedded Formative Assessment; Each teacher will be provided with document from the EDUC 6153 course; team will review document; teachers expected to choose 1 new embedded formative assessment to try in the classroom	S. McLachlan; A. Murray

		before next team meeting	
October 2012	High School Team; Middle School Team	Teachers report back to team with successes and challenges of the embedded formative assessment; teachers expected to try a different embedded FA before the next team meeting	All teachers
Nov. 2012	High School Team; Middle School Team	Theme: Motivation; Teachers will be presented with ideas for motivating students in the classroom; ex. Unwrapping outcomes with students; charting results of FA's; goal setting with students; teachers expected to try a strategy before the next team meeting	S. McLachlan
Dec. 2012	High School Team; Middle School team	Teachers report back to team with successes and challenges of the motivation strategies discussed at November team meeting	All teachers
January 2013	High School Team; Middle School team	Theme: Effective Feedback; Teachers will be presented with best practices in giving specific, descriptive & timely feedback to their students	S. McLachlan; A. Murray, NBBA Principal
February 2013	High School Team; Middle School team	Teachers report back to team with success and challenges of the feedback strategies discussed at January team meeting	All teachers
March 2013	High School Team; Middle School team	Theme: Fair Grading; Teachers will be presented with best practices in how assessments become grades; discussions will take place on giving zeros, deducting marks for late work, using the "mean" to create grades; teachers will be given chapter 6, "The Last Frontier: Tackling the Grading Dilemma" by Ken O'Connor to read before the next team meeting	S. McLachlan; A. Murray, NBBA principal
April 2013	High School Team; Middle School team	Discussion of O'Connor's article	All teachers
May 2013	High School Team; Middle	Team meeting will focus on developing an initial draft of an assessment policy for the 2013 – 2014	S. McLachlan; A. Murray,

	School Team	school year.	NBBA Principal
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## **RESOURCES**

The resources from Saint Thomas University's EDUC 6153 Assessment course will be utilized. The textbook "Ahead of the Curve" by Douglas Reeves will be used. NBBA Principal, Barbara Long has agreed help with the facilitation of the professional development that the teachers need.

## **CONCLUSION**

This capstone project, if successful, only begins to make a change in the assessment culture at NBBA. It is hoped that through this initial project, teachers will be convinced that changes are necessary if we hope to increase student achievement in grades 6 – 12. As a follow up to the 2012 – 2013 project, PLC's should work to develop Common Formative Assessments after identifying and unwrapping the essential outcomes in each grade level.