

The L.O.V.E. Letter ~ No. 19

The Newsletter of Project L.O.V.E. ♡ Fall 2005 ♡ PO Box 2000 Charlottetown PE C1A 7N8
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BOASTing about this thing called L.O.V.E.!

Project L.O.V.E. stands for Let Older Volunteers Educate, and is our elementary school project. BOAST stands for Bringing Older Adults and Students Together, and we find BOAST volunteers in intermediate and high schools.

In 37 schools across PEI, more than 250 very committed (mainly retired) older volunteers help students with their school work in various areas. In the elementary program, help is usually in that most important area, reading.

L.O.V.E. Volunteers go to their school once a week, spending between an hour and a whole morning or afternoon in the school.

They usually help one student at a time, listening and coaching them with words, reading aloud to model good pronunciation and expression for them, helping with classroom projects or to get caught up on missed assignments.

BOAST Volunteers are more flexible - some visit the school once a week, while others work on short-term projects, which may involve

more visits over a shorter period of time. The volunteer work is usually focussed on the areas of expertise of the volunteer.

Teachers whose students work with the Project L.O.V.E. and BOAST volunteers all agree: Their students benefit greatly from this help, gaining self-confidence through the interest shown in them by the volunteers.

Minister Commends Project L.O.V.E. at AGM

I appreciate these opportunities to hear about the work you are doing..... and to keep you informed of our work in the education system.

The first good opportunity I had to learn about Project L.O.V.E. was last year when I attended your annual meeting.

I was so glad to have that opportunity..... because over the year as we held some intensive discussions about literacy, I was able to gain a much deeper appreciation of the great contribution you make to literacy and to student achievement.

Literacy has risen to the top of our priority list in education.

Literacy has a powerful influence on our ability as individuals, to develop the social and intellectual skills that we need to reach our potential and participate fully in society.

Literacy is equally important to us as a province.... because strong provincial literacy levels help us to build a strong economy and a healthy society.

Over the past ten years, our government has invested heavily in key areas of education such as:

- New school construction
- More teachers and more teacher assistants
- More supports for students with special needs
- New curriculum
- Reading Recovery
- Peaceful and healthy school initiatives

Now, we are turning our attention to student achievement, and specifically those key areas of literacy... reading, writing and numeracy.... which are essential to learning everything else in life.

Improving literacy is as the heart of the work being done by the new *Task Force on Student Achievement*.

The task force is nearing completion of its public consultations. While all the feedback hasn't yet been analysed, some common themes are emerging.

Islanders are telling us that our system is very focussed on the 30 per cent of students who go on to higher learning.... and that we must provide more opportunities for all students to succeed.

They are telling us that they want more consistent measurement and reporting on how our schools and our students are doing.

And, they are telling us that our early literacy programs are working well... that they must be maintained and enhanced... and even extended to areas like mathematical literacy.

These comments are an excellent reflection of how important the work is that you do.... and the very valuable contribution you make.

The other major initiative that we began this year to improve student achievement is the new *School Improvement Planning* initiative.

Through this initiative, principals, teachers, parents and others will come together each year to set goals to improve their school. Ten schools will pilot the program this year.

The department is providing resources to

develop the model and to help the schools evaluate their results.

In doing so, we hope to engage a wider group of people in planning and implementing initiatives that will make our schools the best that they can be.

This approach is the one being recommended in the latest effective schools research.

Rather than simply ranking schools against each other or gathering and reporting on raw data, the School Improvement Planning Model brings people together to plan, implement and evaluate.... based on the unique needs of each individual school.

I hope that School Improvement Planning will increase parent involvement in our schools and provide greater opportunities for people like Project L.O.V.E. volunteers.... to provide greater input as part of the school team.

The past year was not without its challenges in education.

Like other departments, we were required to participate in government's efforts to reduce expenditures..... so that the high quality services we enjoy today are sustainable for us, and for future generations.

We are confident that the cost savings we found will

have a minimal impact on front line services.

The bottom line is that the education budget did increase from approximately \$224 million last year to \$227 million this year.

We look forward with enthusiasm to the coming year when we will receive the report of the Task Force.... and then to working with parents, volunteers and educators to improve student achievement.

I am sure that we can all learn a lot from your experience and wisdom and I hope you will be very involved in these exciting initiatives as they roll out.

In the meantime, we are very pleased to continue to support Project L.O.V.E.

Thank you again for your generous contributions and very best wishes for another successful year.

Another great group of 10-year Volunteers!

In 2003, Project L.O.V.E. instituted an award program for volunteers who have been with the program for ten years. Each year we are amazed at how many volunteers have been with us for this period.

This year seven

wonderful people have been working with students in their communities for ten years.

The 1995-2005 awardees are: Peggy MacRae, Belfast Consolidated School; Helen Rose, Eastern Kings Consolidated School; John Yeo, Montague Consolidated School; Betty Shaw, Parkside Elementary School; Beth Clements, Southern Kings Consolidated School; Georgia MacKenzie, Vernon River Consolidated School; and Geraldine MacDougall, Vernon River Consolidated School.

Winners were presented with a plaque by the Minister of Education at the Annual General Meeting, and their photographs will be found in this issue of the newsletter.

Stories shared at Luncheon

Upon receiving his 10-year plaque from Minister Dover, John Yeo, a volunteer at Montague Consolidated School, told the following story: He was attending the high school graduation, as he has for the last 45 years - Mr. Yeo was a teacher at the high school before his retirement.

One of the graduates came up and told him that he had read with him in Project L.O.V.E. when he was a student in Grade three. He

said; "I have you to thank for graduating today."

Mr. Yeo said no, that he had done it himself - but he said, "No. I really didn't like school, but you showed me that reading can be enjoyable, and that made me stay."

So, remember - you may not know it at the time but you are making a deep impression on some very young minds, and that impression may make a big difference in the future.

Evelyn Christie from Tracadie Cross School said one of her students arrived and said she didn't want to read.

Mrs Christie volunteered to be the reader this time, so she started, and the child sat, with her back turned and her fingers in her ears! Mrs Christie stopped reading, and said: "You can choose a sticker and go back to class," which the student did.

The following week she came back ready to read, and read every week after that!

Mrs Christie said it was hard not to laugh at the time, but she thought that giving the child her way once was a good idea, and it certainly made her more cooperative in the future.

A volunteer noted that one student was very hard to settle down - he was unable to sit still for more than a minute!

She offered to play

Lego after they read for 10 minutes. They would read for 10 minutes and then play for 10 minutes.

After a few weeks, the student's teacher was talking with the volunteer and noted: "I don't know what you did, but he is much more able to sit still in class now!"

Thanks, everyone, for your great stories - and your great solutions for the "little problems" that arise.

Early Literacy: The Key to School Success!

A new program developed by the American Library Association in the United States is making big waves in Canada too.

Barbara Kissick, librarian with the provincial library in PEI, attended a training session in Halifax in June and has come home with great ideas about how to help Island students be better readers when they get to school - and thus more successful in all school subjects.

The key to this, Barb said, is to understand that learning begins far, far earlier than most people knew. Parents and caregivers can prepare children for reading by practising six pre-reading skills, beginning at birth!

The program provides

background information on brain development in newborns and young children, and shows when the optimal learning periods for different skills are.

Participants in the program will receive brochures with age-appropriate skill-building activities. Some examples of these skills: For vocabulary-building in birth-to-two year-olds: Talk to your baby about what is going on around you. When babies babble or children talk, listen carefully and answer. Speak clearly, in short sentences.

For two-and-three year-olds in the skill area of print awareness, read aloud print in the community - signs, labels, menus. Point to words as you say them. Let the child hold the book and "read" or tell the story. For four-and-five year-olds in the skill area of phonological awareness (phonics), ask whether two words rhyme. Say words with chunks left out and have the child fill in the missing chunk. Make up silly rhymes together.

Barb will be giving a parents' workshop introduction to this program on September 14 at 10 AM at the Children's Loft at Confederation Centre Library. Call 368-4641 for more information.

If anyone is interested in learning more about this program, and especially, if anyone is interested in learning how to give presentations to parents in your community, please call Mary at the office (phone numbers on the front!).

This program would be a great help to parents and a terrific adjunct to Project L.O.V.E. - ensuring that children come to school ready to read!

Back to school time!

Here we are at the beginning of another new and exciting school year, one where there will be many changes. Good luck to all!