

## Celebrating Success in District 2

### Students' Language Arts Skills Improve with Introduction of *First Steps*

*First Steps* is a professional development resource which helps primary, elementary and special education teachers determine a child's reading, writing and oral language levels and to plan appropriate teaching strategies so that students can succeed in language arts.

The Northern Peninsula/Labrador South School District (District 2) initiated the *First Steps* pilot because of its potential to increase the literacy levels of students by helping teachers become more effective in teaching literacy. In 1997-98, the school board's Primary Program Specialist and three teachers were trained as *First Steps* tutors and given time to plan and prepare workshops. The program started at six schools and grew to nine in the second year. Most schools started with writing, followed by spelling, reading, and oral language. At first, training and support were

provided by tutors who travelled from school to school. In the third year, training more tutors allowed for a school-based approach. This coincided with a Department of Education initiative to implement *First Steps* in K-3 throughout the province.

#### Improved Test Scores

Teachers generally found the writing component of *First Steps* to be of greatest value to them because they came to better understand forms of writing and became more systematic in teaching them. Most importantly, elementary and junior high teachers reported that students coming to them were more familiar with the major forms of writing. In the 2000-2001 provincial Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) for primary language arts, the pilot schools already implementing *First Steps* writing strategies scored higher on the writing section of the test than other schools in the district. *First Steps* is also helping teachers

deliver more systematic instruction in oral language skills, an aspect of the curriculum that had previously been, to a great extent, ignored. Students now do more news telling, interviewing, and oral reading.

The district plans to expand the use of "class profiles" to determine where weaknesses exist and to plan appropriately to meet students' needs. *First Steps* resources will also be used, where appropriate, to highlight the need for interventions and support for students who need extra help. In addition, the district plans to begin using an extension of the *First Steps* program, known as *Stepping Out*, at three junior high schools in the region.

The *First Steps* program has already benefited students in District 2. With full implementation, continued use, and ongoing support, teachers expect an even greater positive impact on students in the future.

#### District 2 Profile

	2003-04	2002-03
Schools	29	29
Students	2908	3073
Teachers	275.4	288.5
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	10.2	10.3

