

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 25, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Acting Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Supporting At-Risk Learners: District Attendance Pilot

ORIGINATOR T. Parker, Executive Director

RESOURCE

STAFF: Charlotte Bragg, Judy Craig, Barry Heffernan, Sherry Matter, Sue Shaw, Ingrid Tenkate, Corrie Ziegler

INFORMATION

Research indicates a high positive correlation between consistent attendance in school and positive student achievement. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) found that low academic achievement correlates with chronic absenteeism, school drop out, low self-esteem and poor employment potential. "Conversely, higher academic achievement is linked to regular school attendance, stronger connections to school and community, increased participation in post-secondary education and lower rates of delinquency."²

On February 15, 2005 and February 6, 2006, Leadership Services staff offered attendance inservices to principals and teachers. These sessions provided some strategies and support to address attendance issues and challenges. Although these inservices were well received, they did not provide the depth and follow-up to significantly address attendance challenges. Participants indicated that one of the first challenges in addressing attendance issues is the ability to accurately track and identify students who are not attending. The frequency of absences can often go unnoticed for long periods of time. A system that could effectively and efficiently alert school staff that a pattern of inconsistent attendance is developing was viewed as a necessary first step in addressing attendance issues. When an attendance concern is identified, strategies for investigating the causal factors can then be put in place.

Pilot Project

To address the issue of accurately tracking and identifying students with attendance concerns in a timely manner, staff from several decision units (Leadership Services, Consulting Services, Student Achievement and Student Information) worked together to create an attendance pilot project. The first component of the project was the creation of an attendance alert system on the district's Student Information System (SIS). The new attendance alert program in School SIS allows schools to set attendance "flags" to assist them in monitoring student attendance, whether homeroom or period attendance. The SIS program shows a flag icon on the student record in School SIS when a student has surpassed a school set limit for either absences or lates.

As this attendance alert system is a newly developed component in SIS, it was recommended that a pilot project be implemented to transition a smooth and error free program for district wide use.

A cross section of schools were invited to participate in this project, and included representation from elementary, junior and senior high schools. (See Appendix I for the list of schools in the project). An information and training session was held on March 13, 2006 for the principal or delegate and the administrative assistant responsible for SIS. A mid-term session is scheduled for May 9th and the final review planned for sometime in June.

The purpose of this attendance pilot is to:

- Gather feedback from school staff in relation to the effectiveness of the SIS Attendance Alert system, as well as suggestions for its enhancement.
- Share strategies for improving student attendance such as: developing positive relationships with parents and students, student engagement with school, ensuring appropriate classroom programming, persistent and consistent follow-up of attendance concerns in a timely manner, use of internal and outside resources, referral to the provincial Attendance Board, and assist with re-entry when necessary. Research shows that “absenteeism and truancy are *symptoms* of another problem, rather than being the problem itself”².
- Create communication networks among schools regarding attendance issues and share expertise that already exists in schools to address attendance concerns.

The feedback received from principals and teachers involved in the pilot over the course of the next three months will be carefully examined. In June, decisions will be made as to next steps with this project. It is believed that much will be learned throughout the upcoming months that can be shared with all district staff as we work together to achieve superb results from all students.

ES:gj

References:

¹ From the National Association of Secondary School Principals as quoted in the DesMoines Public School Attendance Report, Winter 2005.

² From the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL); Education Alliance as quoted in the DesMoines Public School Attendance Report, Winter 2005

APPENDIX I – Pilot Project Schools

APPENDIX II – Attendance Matters

Attendance Pilot Project Schools

Amiskwaciy Academy

Braemar

Dan Knott

Eastglen

Eastwood

Glengarry

Major General Griesbach

Horse Hill

Jasper Place

Killarney

King Edward Academy

Lawton/R.J. Scott

Lee Ridge

Londonderry

Montrose

Newton

Prince Charles

Sifton

ATTENDANCE MATTERS

