

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 14, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Acting Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Gold Bar School – Focus on Building Blocks of Literacy

ORIGINATOR: T. Terlesky, Principal, Gold Bar School

INFORMATION

Gold Bar School is located in south-east Edmonton and presently has a population of 153 students. In addition to providing a regular kindergarten to grade six program, it is a district site for Behaviour and Learning Assistance students.

Gold Bar School has a long tradition of developing student's literacy skills. As early as 1998, staff identified the need to focus on literacy and began by setting up a Literacy Room for at risk division one students. Coupled with this focus was the need for teachers to participate in professional development activities to hone their literacy skills. When the district introduced the concept of identifying a school wide focus and best practices, working collaboratively and participating in professional development, staff recognized that they had in fact been doing much of this work already. This recognition validated the work that was underway at Gold Bar and energized staff to focus more deeply on what they believed were important to the development of children's literacy skills. With deeper consideration and many professional conversations, an instructional focus that embraced this tradition was created.

The focus statement that evolved at Gold Bar is: "Building Blocks of Literacy". This focus statement encompasses three areas: Literacy, Technology and Fitness. Staff have been working collaboratively to deepen their instructional practices in each of these areas. Staff believe that through this integrated approach to learning, they will continue to enhance the achievement of all students.

Gold Bar staff identified best practices within each of the three building blocks. A strong home reading program, effective use of thinking maps and a focus on decoding skills are key practices within the Literacy block. The Technology block assists students in using technology as a tool for learning, which is integrated into all subject areas. Through technology, research skills, higher order thinking skills and effective communication of learning have contributed to student success. The Fitness Block provides students with a well rounded program. Daily physical education helps create healthy bodies which contribute to healthy minds.

The staff's strong commitment to increasing student achievement and citizenship has resulted in impressive Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT) scores. The writing results reveal a significant gain over the past three years. An impressive 8% increase validates for staff once again that the move toward literacy is paying off. The reading HLAT scores also indicate a significant increase in student achievement. In three years students have shown a

5.6% improvement in their reading skills. Both student and staff attitude survey results show extremely positive attitudes towards achievement and learning. This positive trend helps to solidify the staff's commitment to the focus, and the students.

This year, Gold Bar staff have focused on job embedded professional development. Through regular collaborative activities, staff share their expertise with each other, and this has resulted in deep and meaningful teacher growth. As examples of collaboration, the teacher/librarian works with each classroom teacher to collaboratively plan units or individual lessons. Both teachers bring their expertise to the table and share their strengths with each other. All Gold Bar staff work together to collaboratively mark student writing assignments. Through this marking process, staff talk about how they teach writing and support each other in "next steps" for writing instruction. Teachers with expertise in physical education share their passion, energy and knowledge about effective practices in this area. Throughout each of these conversations staff discuss challenges as well as successes. Together, they identify solutions to challenges. More importantly, staff talk about individual students – what worked for a particular child and what didn't. Last year's teacher talks to this year's teacher – and the current teacher builds on the success the child experienced the previous year. Staff at Gold Bar believe that it is through these powerful, professional conversations that learning happens for ALL students – one child at a time.

Through the successes, teamwork and commitment to student learning, Gold Bar staff are confident they will continue to enhance student achievement, and put in place one more building block towards successful high school completion.

ES: gj