

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 14, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Donnan and Vimy Ridge: A High Performance Partnership

ORIGINATOR: Don Blackwell, Principal, Donnan School and Vimy Ridge Academy

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INFORMATION

Donnan School is a K through grade 9 school with a current population of 472 students. It serves the local neighbourhood of King Edward Park as well as the Meadows neighbourhoods in Mill Woods. Because Donnan is the district site for the Sports Alternative Program, 240 (51%) of our students arrive from other neighbourhoods in Edmonton, and also the nearby communities of St. Albert, Bruderheim, Ardrossan, Beaumont, Calmar, Stony Plain, Sherwood Park, and Leduc.

Vimy Ridge Academy is a grade 7 through 12 school with a current population of 372 students. The goal of Vimy Ridge Academy is to build and strengthen pride in Canada by focusing on Canadian studies while emphasizing high academic performance through self-discipline, leadership, citizenship, and experiential learning opportunities. Canadian Studies programming is integrated into all subject areas. Vimy Ridge Academy also offers a comprehensive dance program in cooperation with the Edmonton School of Ballet.

Our Instructional Focus Partnership

As a result of the district initiative, *Focus on for Supporting Teaching and Learning*, staff at both Donnan School and Vimy Ridge Academy began work on their instructional focus in September 2001. Both schools analyze their achievement results, reflect on practices and determine a plan of action to ensure all students are successful in all areas of their schooling. Independent of one another, both campuses identified reading comprehension as the instructional focus. Now that the schools are working in partnership, the focus has continued as an extension of the relationship between the two campuses. Our instructional focus statement is:

All staff will engage in a school wide effort to have all students show measurable academic growth by implementing proven reading comprehension strategies into instruction in all subjects. Growth will be measured through analysis of our students' results on Alberta Learning Achievement Tests and Diploma examinations, Highest Level of Achievement Tests and locally developed measures.

An instructional leadership team (ILT) has been established with staff from both campuses. The team meets on a monthly basis to implement a targeted professional development plan and reflect on current strategies and progress. In January, the ILT will focus on building collaborative teaching teams and implement a "looking at student work"(LASW) protocol. They will also

analyze data from our first administration of interim measures and determine three or four key strategies to improve our results based on the analysis. We can be proud of our accomplishments, students are the direct benefactors as we strive to reach our targets to improve reading comprehension.

Support for the instructional focus is building within our school communities as well. Newsletters from both campuses continue to promote improved reading strategies to be used at home, several parent evenings have occurred over the last two years in support of improved reading comprehension and more are planned. Our school councils are well aware of our instructional focus and support our efforts. Donnan has an extensive parent volunteer program to promote learning in the classroom.

A High Performance Partnership

Student achievement will always be enhanced when students are motivated and enthused about the curriculum and their studies. Real life application and relevance are keys to student understanding and to creating meaning. Students from both Donnan School and Vimy Ridge Academy have an advantage in these areas with their strong interests and passions in sports, cadets, music and dance.

Many Donnan students are involved in sports such as hockey, soccer, gymnastics, tennis, diving and skiing, some of them at a high competitive level. Many Vimy Ridge students are involved in cadets, music, and dance programming, again at high performance levels. Academic programming at our two campuses provides educational experiences that build on these personal interests. Students within both school communities learn to apply the self-discipline developed in their alternative program endeavours to their academic work. They learn to take their success on the ice or on the dance floor back to the classroom and apply their leadership and team skills to their academic work. Within our schools we use student passions to develop their performance in all areas.

We are currently very excited about the success that students realize when they apply their passion for high performance areas to their classroom studies. However, there are many further connections that can be made. We know that student learning increases when the learning is derived from personal experience and has meaning. Classroom projects that allow students to integrate diverse subjects with their passion in sport, cadet, dance and music help to provide the necessary link between academics and real life. This process allows learning to be authentic, real, integrated and enjoyable. Education is enhanced through real life connections whenever possible.

As our partnership grows we will continue to build on the synergy created between the enthusiasm our students demonstrate towards their performance area and their achievement in all areas of education. Student success in leadership, character development, cooperative team skills, and of course, in academics is always the priority. We will continue to promote learning and education through connections. We will continue to turn passion in to high performance. In the coming year, our challenge will be to build the partnership between the Canadian Studies, ballet and sports programs. Two staffs merging and working effectively with committed students and parents will create a unique high performance setting.

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