

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 29, 2008

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Improving Student Achievement Through the Outreach Programs

ORIGINATOR: S. Keith, Principal

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

Outreach Programs, located in ten different sites across the city, offer junior and senior high school students alternative learning environments which are beyond the traditional school setting. These alternatives give students another chance at educational success. Within Outreach, there are three distinct programs: The Learning Stores, Transitions and New Directions.

Learning Stores

There are five learning stores strategically located across the city which provide programming to high school-aged students. A full range of high school courses are available with a strong emphasis on Work Experience. The students served through this program include students who have left a traditional school setting, secondary students, fourth and fifth year high school students, or expelled students. Student success rates are high; 84 per cent of the students pass their courses. A total of 1324 students were served by the Learning Stores in 2006-07 and they wrote 264 Diploma examinations. The successful completion rate was 91 per cent on those exams and resulted in 152 students receiving their high school diplomas.

Registration for the program at the Learning Stores occurs throughout the year. Students work on individualized programs that follow the Alberta Education Program of Studies. They work on one course at a time and are required to complete one module of work per week. Students are also expected to come on-site for assistance as required and to write all of their exams. Teachers provide mentorship to students and assist them in setting realistic goals for achievement, set timelines for course completions as well as determine attendance expectations. The nature of the program enables teachers to focus on individual students and they frequently see positive results in a short time as students concentrate on individual courses and are motivated to complete them.

Transitions

There are two Transitions programs which provide educational services to junior and senior high school students. Students in this program are ones who have had a great deal of difficulty maintaining regular attendance at school, have serious substance abuse issues or who have difficulty coping in a larger setting. Referrals to these programs usually come

through district schools and a large number of students within these programs have had referrals to the attendance board. Junior high students are expected to attend every day while high school students have a two hour per day attendance requirement.

The larger of these two programs is housed at the YMCA Enterprise Centre and is a partnership between Edmonton Public Schools and the YMCA. In addition to Edmonton Public teachers, the program also has a full time youth transitions worker, an aboriginal consultant, an AADAC worker, a public health nurse and a social services worker, though not all are at the Centre on a full time basis. During the 2006-07 school year, Transitions provided services to 196 students.

New Directions

New Directions programs are situated in three different locations and were set up by the district to accommodate students who had been expelled from two or more district schools. Students have to earn the right to move back into a regular classroom setting. This is accomplished through a requirement for full day attendance as well as a point system. Through the point system students earn points for work completed, attendance and behavior, and homework completed. This approach has been an effective motivator for these students. Sixty-nine students were directed to the program during the 2006-2007 school year. Of these 69 students, 60% earned the right to return to a regular school or return to New Directions for 2007-08.

To meet the diverse learning needs of their students, Outreach staff use a variety of teaching strategies which include individualized instruction, multiple entry points, one course at a time, goal setting, mentorship, high standards and the development of strong relationships with students. Wherever possible, intake interviews include parents and teachers maintain regular contact with them, especially if student attendance and/or behavior are an issue.

The staff from all sites actively participate in job-embedded professional development activities that include collaborative planning sessions. This collaboration takes many forms: within sites, between sites, as well as regular meetings with lead teachers from each site to discuss issues and challenges that are impacting the learning of their students. Staff also work together to identify next steps to support the students. These discussions inform and guide the professional development plan for teachers. Areas that have been a focus for professional development include: knowledge of new or revised curriculum and resources; new research findings in teaching and learning practices; strategies for working in groups and one-on-one; and an understanding of the range and roles of community agencies. Another form of professional development is opportunities for staff to work together to create locally developed courses as an alternative to the existing distance learning materials. Staff have found these courses to be motivating and more user friendly for the students.

Outreach programs are effective in providing educational support to students for whom traditional schooling has been a challenge. The opportunity for students to be a part of a small class setting and to receive individual attention makes it possible for students to see themselves as learners and develop more positive attitudes towards their education. The future for these students is brighter through Outreach Programs.

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