

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 14, 2005

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Angus McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Focus on Achievement – Ross Sheppard High School

ORIGINATOR: J. Lawley, Principal Ross Sheppard High School

RESOURCE

STAFF: Claudine Coleman, Powell Jones, Deb Stirrett, Ellen Wells, Maureen Yates-Millions

INFORMATION

Ross Sheppard High School, located in north-west Edmonton, serves a student population of 2,056 in grades 10 through 12, who come from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, from over 35 different junior high schools. Students are attracted to Ross Sheppard due to our strong tradition of excellence in academics, athletics, fine and performing arts, international languages and career and technology studies programming. We offer French Immersion, Mandarin Chinese, Community Life Skills, Interactions, Sports Alternative, and the Canadian Hockey Skills Academy programs affording students a wide range of choice. Ross Sheppard also offers a host of programs designed to meet the various needs of all at risk students in our community.

Ross Sheppard staff began the instructional focus journey in 2001. Through close examination of achievement results, the staff identified and agreed upon a reading comprehension focus with particular emphasis on vocabulary. The Instructional Leadership Team, comprised of 21 department heads and administration, led staff in an examination of current practice. Strategies were identified to enhance vocabulary development across all subject areas.

Most recently, it was determined for the 2004-05 school year that staff needed to expand the focus to read:

*Our Instructional Focus is a school-wide coordinated effort to have students of Ross Sheppard School show improvement in their Strategic Reading Skills (reading for meaning) as measured by school performance based assessment and Provincial Achievement Tests.*

Ross Sheppard students needed to improve their ability to glean meaning from text. Marian Garner, an English teacher, offered to assist in the acquisition of key strategies related to reading for meaning. Utilizing an introductory text by Cris Tovani, *I Read It But I Don't Get It*, Marian introduced all staff to a host of tried and true reading strategies. Since then, a best practice "Tool Box" has been initiated so that staff can collect and share their best practices on an on going basis.

Cross-curricular groupings met to discover ways to enrich teaching practice with selected strategies and the staff were asked to implement a whole-school, reading for meaning strategy called “KWL”. KWL concentrates on students activating background knowledge and thinking about “K”, what they already know, “W”, what they would like to know or need to know, and “L”, thinking about what they have learned and what they need to learn in order to solidify the information presented to them. All staff members committed to using the KWL strategy in their classrooms. Opportunities to share KWL related best practices at our general staff meetings and in department collaborative planning time have been consistently scheduled.

Ross Sheppard staff also decided to zero in on the “during” reading process step and focus on student and staff note taking. Staff believe that students who are able to take effective notes will be more successful in their studies.

Effective note-taking was introduced by the Instructional Leadership Team and will now be highlighted and reinforced with all staff throughout the coming year. Many teachers have introduced the skill to their students. The expectation is that all will integrate note-taking into teaching practice during the 2005-06 school year. School Council parents are highly supportive of our direction and are looking forward to working in partnership with the integration of this strategy.

Students at risk of not completing their high school diploma were identified during the first weeks of the current school year. Staff have worked diligently to utilize best practices and collaborate with colleagues to ensure that all students experience success in their courses. Learning Strategies courses enable students to enrich their skills in organization, strategic reading, study skills and note taking. “Keep Learning at Shep” (KLAS), a flexible classroom environment, affords 140 students the opportunity to tackle their courses in an alternative learning environment. Completion statistics for the KLAS learning environment are promising and will be available in late June.

The Strategic Reading Focus in Supporting Teaching and Learning has been a very rewarding journey for Ross Sheppard staff, students, and parents. Analysis of school based and provincial achievement tests have shown considerable improvements at all grade levels. The number of students successfully completing grade ten courses has improved in all core areas. Rather than a focus on students in their diploma year, staff are now focusing on developing strategies for all grade levels and abilities.

Staff at Ross Sheppard will continue to place emphasis on students and their ultimate success in their studies. They will endeavor to add to their “Strategies Tool Box” in order to ensure that each and every student is afforded the opportunity to achieve superb results.

JL:gj