

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 8, 2005

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Jackson Heights – Focus on Reading Comprehension

ORIGINATOR: L. Elkow, Principal, Jackson Heights School

RESOURCE
STAFF: Fern Reirson

INFORMATION

Jackson Heights School is located in the Jackson Heights neighbourhood in northeast Mill Woods. Current enrolment is 321 students in kindergarten to grade six. Approximately 87 per cent of students reside within neighbourhood boundaries. School enrolment reflects the cultural diversity of its community. The school building opened on November 25, 2002 and capacity was exceeded by September 2004. Jackson Heights offers regular programming, with French as a Second Language instruction provided to all students in grades three to six. The school's library-media program, music and physical education programs enhance high expectations for academic achievement, character, conduct and citizenship development.

Work to establish a school-wide instructional focus began before the school opened, in Spring 2002. These early plans did not accurately reflect the actual needs of students who transferred to the new school from approximately forty schools across the city. Initial baseline data from school-based measures indicated that approximately 53 per cent of students did not meet grade level expectations in reading comprehension and that this had an impact on achievement in other subject areas. This information guided staff in revision of its instructional focus plans. By January of the first year of operation, school-wide commitment was made to an instructional focus:

The Jackson Heights School instructional focus is reading comprehension, and is a coordinated, school-wide effort to have all Jackson Heights students demonstrate measurable growth in reading comprehension across the curriculum as measured by HLATs, Provincial Achievement Tests and school-based assessment tasks.

Best Practices are implemented school-wide. These practices include the 3-Rs (retell, relate, reflect), vocabulary development, building background knowledge and questioning. Common practices and consistent language serve students well at all levels, including students at-risk, students who require enriched learning opportunities and English language learners.

As a professional learning community, staff are committed to ongoing improvement. Professional reading and research are considered critical to "the work." District consultants,

experts on staff and professional networks facilitate ongoing professional development. Collaboration experiences promote the sharing of expertise and support risk-taking with new ideas, skills and strategies. This year, staff have extended their learning to include assessment for learning strategies, effective strategies for looking at student work and team processes. Staff actively engage in individual and collective reflection and review of practice. Peer observations, coaching, and professional conversations support these activities. The Instructional Leadership Team is instrumental in planning, mentoring, modeling and supporting work at the school level. This is an evolving journey led by student needs and evidence of achievement.

Students and staff benefit from parent and community involvement and support for the school's focus on reading. Attendance at reading promotion activities, commitment to daily home reading, volunteer service as reading mentors, participation in parent information/learning support sessions and positive feedback about the impact of the school's reading focus on achievement and on enjoyment of reading denote a positive home-school-community relationship. School-wide literary events and additional library resources are among the contributions made by parents and community.

From the school's conception, early input from parents, community and staff translated into shared values for a strong school library media program. The school community demonstrates their commitment to the school library through ongoing investment that assists in the provision of a quality resource collection, leadership of a qualified teacher librarian and knowledgeable support staff services. The school responded to research that demonstrates the importance of allowing students' access to a quality collection of print and media resources through a professionally developed school library-media program led by a teacher-librarian. At Jackson Heights School, collaborative planning and team teaching between the teacher librarian and classroom teachers creates quality learning experiences for students, and highlights the focus on reading. Through its focus on reading and its library, the school promotes a lifelong appetite for learning and for enjoyment of the reading experience. Staff work to build a foundation in multiple literacy skills to prepare students for success in a knowledge/information-based society. The Jackson Heights school library media centre is very much the "heart of the school." The programming and services offered by qualified library staff are critical in ensuring that the school's culture of reading is embedded in practice

At Jackson Heights School, staff, students and parents are dedicated to an educational environment that leads to excellence, working together to achieve superb results from all students.

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