

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 21, 2002

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Westglen's Instructional Focus: Writing Across the Curriculum

ORIGINATOR: S. Busby, Principal, Westglen School

RESOURCE

STAFF: Kevin Becker, Les Hansen, Barb Wray (Instructional Leadership Team)

INFORMATION

The implementation of Westglen's instructional focus began in August 2000, with the district's initiative on *Blueprints for Supporting Teaching and Learning*. We were very fortunate to be included in the first 25 schools to participate in the piloting of this project. This process allowed us to analyze our results, reflect on our practices and determine a plan of action that would ensure all our students would be successful in all areas of their schooling. In consultation with our stakeholders, staff, students and parents, it was determined that a focus on writing would benefit our students in all areas of the curriculum:

*A school-wide coordinated effort to have all students of Westglen School show growth in their writing across the curriculum. Growth will be measured by the results of the Alberta Learning Achievement Tests, HLATs, and monthly school wide writing assessment.*

Once we determined our instructional focus the next steps taken were to determine what we would expect our students to be able to do and what our staff would be willing to do or change to get there:

Students will:

- Display a positive attitude toward writing
- Perceive themselves as good writers
- Learn strategies for retrieving information (research and report writing)
- Communicate effectively, accurately and creatively with others
- Write at grade level and enjoy it
- Have an understanding of the different types of writing
- Be able to write a coherent essay, in paragraphs with complete sentences and punctuation, each with a main idea, supporting details, and conclusion
- Be able to edit using consistent method
- Write for a variety of audiences
- Add more detail using "dress up" words
- Be willing to express their ideas on paper

- Know what is expected of them when they are asked to write
- Meet or exceed curriculum expectations
- Write in all subject areas
- Be able to reflect on their writing and self-evaluate

Staff will:

- Participate in workshops to learn how to present information on writing to students
- Provide many opportunities to write
- Provide feedback on success and ideas for improvement
- Add new concepts and skills every week
- Plan lessons and design assignments to ensure writing in all subject areas
- Work together as staff to ensure consistency
- Meet once a month for cooperative planning and collaboration
- Place direct focus on writers workshop
- Set goals, create rubrics and design checklists to assess and monitor writing
- Edit, praise, model and expose students to good literature and great writing
- Meet once a month to look at student writing samples
- Provide opportunities for writing at home and involve parents in the process
- Teach web, outlining and essay format
- Develop a school wide professional development plan to focus on strategies directed at teaching writing in all subject areas
- Design “kid friendly” rubrics so that students can assess their own writing

As we are now “ living our focus”, we see a tremendous improvement in student attitudes toward their writing. They are excited about writing and share their writing at our monthly assemblies, in our newsletters, on our WOW board and with their parents. Student Leadership Team meets once a month to share their ideas, express their concerns and offer suggestions for changes and improvement. The biggest result of the instructional focus has been that students are actively involved in their learning and are accepting responsibility on how to become better writers in all areas of their learning. They now view writing as an integral part of every day life.

With the implementation of the instructional focus we have seen improved results in student achievement. The November progress reports indicated that 40 per cent of our students met a Standard of Excellence in their Language Learning. Monthly HLATs indicate that 98 per cent of our students are writing at grade level and continue to show steady improvement and growth in their performance.

All our students from kindergarten to Grade 6 are involved in writing monthly HLATs which allow us to monitor growth. Our LASW teacher teams meet once a month to look at these HLATs and other forms of student writing to see where the students’ areas of strengths/needs are. Based on that analysis they participate in monthly on-site professional development sessions to reflect on their teaching practices, participate in writing in-services and look for effective research-based teaching strategies to assist them in planning for and delivering their lessons.

Instructional Leadership Team meets three times a month to set the agenda for our staff meetings and our instructional focus meetings. This team provides information, makes recommendations and offers ideas in order to assist staff in setting goals and planning our next steps. Teacher collaboration has been one of the highlights of the instructional focus. The other has been a steady improvement in students' writing across the curriculum as is indicated by our monthly dip sticking.

Implementation of our instructional focus also had an impact beyond the walls of our school. The parents are taking an active role in all aspects of this initiative. They support our writing program at home. Not afraid to take a risk, they participate in writing activities at the school allowing their children to score their writing based on a rubric. Any extra or co-curricular activities planned by the School Council reflect the high importance that writing plays in the life of our school community. Interactions among staff, students and parents involve professional conversations that focus on writing.

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