

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 23, 2000

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dosdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Capilano School: Student Achievement in the ALPHA  
(Dependent Handicapped) Program

ORIGINATOR: D. Fernet, Principal, Capilano

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### INFORMATION

Capilano School, known as the “Little School with the Big Heart”, sits on a hill overlooking the river valley. The geography of the area, coupled with the type of people who have settled in Capilano, gives the community a small-town flavour. People are exceptionally community-minded, and habitually work together on projects and activities. As a result, we have a very high participation rate in parent involvement with the school. Parents in the school community place a high value on achievement and citizenship; their children reflect those attitudes. Capilano’s focus is to provide a successful educational experience with high expectations for achievement for all of the student population, whatever the ability level of the student.

Capilano has a population of 137 children at present. Of those, 120 are registered in the regular academic program. We are also the southside district site for dependent handicapped children aged 6 – 12. We call that program the **ALPHA** program. The word means “*Beginnings*” in Greek, and the letters also form an acronym for “*Adapted Loving Patient Helpful and Accessible.*”

Capilano has been a district site for the Dependent Handicapped Program since 1979. There have been radical changes in the philosophy and implementation of the program over the years. It has gone from a “segregated classrooms” model to one of “integration and inclusion” in as many classroom and school activities as each child can manage.

Our ALPHA students are profoundly handicapped; each of these children has multiple disabilities. It is worth noting that over the past few years, we have been receiving more and more students who are medically fragile or otherwise require increasing levels of personal care. This year we have 17 students in the program, and for the 2000-2001 school year we are expecting about 20.

The ALPHA children will always be dependent on others to assist them in their daily living skills and routines. So when we speak of “Achievement” with our students, we recognize that they are not learning advanced reading, writing or math skills. Yet, if we focus on the fundamental meaning of what it means to achieve: “to make gains by work or effort” --- then our students demonstrate tremendous achievement. And they do so despite the formidable challenges of their disabilities.

Our vision statement for the ALPHA program articulates that all of our students will have:

- individualized programs adapted to each child's unique cognitive and physical needs
- a multisensory approach
- a rich environment that includes integration into K-6 classrooms
- activities that teach specific goals and provide sensory stimulation
- life skills training as well as individualized physiotherapy and feeding programs.
- high emphasis on student achievement.

The ALPHA Program's objectives for student achievement, of necessity, take on a very different flavour from the norm.

### **ALPHA Program Objectives for Student Achievement:**

1. Increase student's awareness in a variety of environments. This allows for transfer of skills and generalization of concepts that are taught; and provides stimulation, motivation and awareness.
2. Increase control of students' personal environment. We work on improving the students' fine and gross motor skills and give students a sense of control over their lives by offering choices
3. Improve students' ability to relate to and learn from others. There is a focus on communication and socialization skills. With the help of all our staff and students, we foster and enhance each student's interpersonal skills.
4. Maximize students' ability to function in their own environment and assist them to be successful in other environments. We teach basic life skills such as feeding toileting and dressing skills. We also teach basic concepts of cause and effect, matching, sorting, basic counting and sight-reading within a functional task setting.

Special "achievement moments" in the ALPHA program are when students are able to stand alone momentarily, or when they initiate signing "*eat*" for the first time to let staff know they are hungry, or when a student independently follows a routine to complete a simple task. The joy and excitement for staff when one of these "achievement moments" occur is overwhelming. We understand the effort it takes for these little individuals to complete simple tasks and we take tremendous pride in their accomplishments. Each achievement illustrates that the child has taken another step toward the goal of becoming self-sufficient.

By providing ALPHA students a stimulating multisensory learning environment with a creative, knowledgeable staff who adjust the level of instruction to meet each individual child's needs, we have seen extraordinary student growth and achievement over time.

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