

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 8, 2007

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Queen Elizabeth – A School in the “Engaging All Learners Through Differentiated Instruction” AISI Project

ORIGINATOR: D. Jones, Principal, Queen Elizabeth School

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

Queen Elizabeth High School is located in the north central area of Edmonton and serves approximately 950 students. Queen Elizabeth offers a wide variety of programming to meet the needs of the students ranging from the Individualized Support Program (ISP) to Advanced Placement (AP).

Past involvement in cycle one and two of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS I) projects supported enhanced teaching and learning at Queen Elizabeth. Cycle 1 focused on strategies for students at risk and the creation of the Students Targeting Academic Results (STAR) program. Cycle 2 focused on reading comprehension, effective teaching strategies, thinking maps and assessment for learning strategies, which led to approximately a three per cent increase in overall course completion rates for 2005-2006.

In the spring of 2006, staff made a decision to participate in the “Engaging All Students Through Differentiated Instruction” AIS I project as the most effective means of improving student achievement for all students at Queen Elizabeth. This decision was based upon a multi-step process that began with analysis of core course completion rates and diploma results. Staff realized that despite the gains in achievement as a result of past AIS I work, they were not meeting the needs of all of learners. After reading articles and professional literature to clarify understanding of differentiated instruction and engaging in extensive dialogue, the decision was made to participate in the Differentiated Instruction AIS I project. Staff are excited with this choice. They feel that the Professional Learning Community at Queen Elizabeth as well as the diverse group of learners in the building will only benefit as staff build expertise and change practice through involvement in this AIS I project.

Under the leadership of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), staff at Queen Elizabeth have put in place a targeted and job embedded professional development plan with regards to Differentiated Instruction (DI). This plan systematically sets out to meet the district’s four elements of professional development: to build expertise, ensure change in practice, monitor student learning, and to communicate effectively. To build expertise, a professional library was created and continues to grow; the ILT is involved in regular professional development sessions; teachers collaborate to develop DI lessons and units and then share these lessons

and units at staff meetings. Collaboration of staff also occurs within the cohort schools – Queen Elizabeth, Wagner and Strathcona. Moreover, Queen Elizabeth staff presented at the district’s “Differentiated Instruction: Beginning the Journey” professional development day.

To ensure change in practice the principal and department heads, as instructional leaders, visit classes on a weekly basis. Staff are also encouraged to engage in interclass visitations. An internal school wide Instructional Walk Through was held on April 26, in which teachers were invited to observe colleagues teach a differentiated lesson. Reflection and dialogue followed at a school wide professional development day on May 4, 2007.

The monitoring of student learning at Queen Elizabeth is on-going. Marks are posted bi-weekly in classrooms and monthly achievement results are analyzed. In addition, staff have increased the number of reporting periods. To assist in monitoring student learning staff conducted a learning styles survey so that student and teacher are aware of how each student learns best.

The last element of an effective professional development plan relates to communicating effectively, not only about changes in teaching practices, but also about the impact of those changes on student learning. At Queen Elizabeth, communication with all stakeholders – parent, students, and staff – is a priority. Over and above the collaborative work described in this report, Queen Elizabeth staff create displays, participate in parent council meetings and information evenings, write newsletters, and post and discuss achievement results.

The culture of Queen Elizabeth is dynamic, energizing and responsive to the diverse student population housed within its walls. Teachers continually reinforce a culture that they refer to as “a culture of willingness to try new strategies”. The Professional Learning Community at Queen Elizabeth shares a common vision of meeting the needs of all learners through differentiated instruction and strives to connect educational content taught to *all* students in meaningful ways. Differentiated instruction allows staff to focus on who they teach and how they teach so that it results in optimal learning for all students.