

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 9, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Acting Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Rundle School – Focus on Building Background Knowledge

ORIGINATOR: B. Bryson, Principal, Rundle School

INFORMATION

Rundle School is located in northeast Edmonton, serving a population of 240 students. It is a district site for Behaviour and Learning Assistance students. Based on the socioeconomic standings and transient nature of the community, Rundle School ranks fourth on the district's list of high needs schools. Inconsistent student attendance is a great concern.

Building background knowledge to develop reading comprehension was chosen as the school's instructional focus. To arrive at this decision Rundle staff worked collaboratively to analyze the school's achievement data. Through professional discussions about the broad topic of reading comprehension, staff came to the conclusion that the most significant factor in building reading comprehension skills for students was to enhance the students' background knowledge. With increased background knowledge, students are able to make better connections to reading materials. Rundle students lack this background knowledge because they have limited experiences outside of their community.

Rundle staff believes that improving the reading comprehension skills of students will lead to higher levels of achievement in all subject areas. Teachers embraced the targeted professional development opportunity of Balanced Literacy training to enhance their skills in supporting literacy development. A Literacy Coordinator was identified within the school to research, share and implement new ideas with staff. Students have been given opportunities to build background knowledge via field trips outside the school and also by inviting resource people from various disciplines to develop the students' understanding and awareness of the greater community.

In addition, staff recognized that building positive relationships with students was vital to ensure attendance, effort and self confidence. Research shows that students with strong feelings of belonging and are engaged with their learning are more successful. Embedded in the school culture is the total acceptance of every child and the commitment and tenacity of the staff to ignite the learning of every child.

Rundle formed a trio grouping with Glengarry and Evansdale schools this year to gain an understanding of the uniqueness of programming to meet students' needs in other schools. AISI funding has supported common professional development activities including the work of Anne Davies in Performance Based Assessment, Trevor Calkin's Power of Ten (strategies to help students build their numeracy skills) and the 6 + 1 Writing Traits. Teachers from all three schools have participated in instructional walkthrough activities, providing all staff with an

opportunity to observe best practices in each of the schools and provide each other with reflective feedback.

AISI funding has supported the work of the school's Literacy Coordinator, provided collaboration time for staff to reflect on student achievement, target areas for improvement, correlate current reading research with school data and to continue to develop best practices to build on ever changing information. The commitment of Rundle Staff to expanding student horizons, participating in quality, enriching experiences and developing internal expertise in supporting reading comprehension has resulted in a dramatic improvement in school based, HLAT and Provincial Achievement Test results.

The driving force for the staff, a vision of increased achievement results and accessing the total community as a learning environment is Rundle School's equation for success.