

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 26, 2002

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A.McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Minchau School's Instructional Focus: Written Communication Skills

ORIGINATOR: Sue McKenzie-Robblee, Principal, Minchau School

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

Minchau School, located in southeast Millwoods, serves 346 children in K-6. It is a district site for the Learning Strategies program, which presently has 60 students in four classes, grades 2-6. There are also many special needs children integrated into classes, and there are approximately 70 children with aboriginal background attending the school.

The implementation of Minchau's instructional focus began in August 2001. Our involvement in this initiative caused us to analyze our results in greater detail, reflect on our practices, and determine a plan of action that would ensure that our students would be successful in all areas of their schooling. In consultation with our staff, students, and parents, it was determined that a focus on writing would benefit our students in all areas of the curriculum.

All Minchau students will show measurable growth in their ability to use written communication skills across the curriculum. This school-wide writing process will be measured through individual writing portfolios, writing rubrics, HLAT writing tasks and provincial achievement tests.

Minchau staff and students are exploring four practices this year designed to have children develop writing skills and attitudes that promote life-long writing. Everything that we do has a connection to writing. The practices that we chose are:

- the use of a writer's notebook where children can collect ideas, practice literary devices, notice and take note of the world around them, and record interesting facts.
- shared writing experiences where children have many print models for varied writing genres and collectively construct writing with "think aloud" techniques.
- the wonder of words which allows the children to increase their use of strong language, develop their writer's vocabulary, and create spelling dictionaries.

- maintaining the main idea, which allows us to develop the questions that writers and editors need to ask about pieces of writing so that the voice, content, organization, and style of the piece is clear to the reader. We will be working with the children on editing, revising, and drafting their writing so that it says what they intend it to say.

Every student at Minchau has a portfolio of student work. These collections of student work demonstrate what a student can do over time in relation to the curriculum or individual program plan. These portfolios allow students to set goals for their writing and learning and to reflect on their progress towards achieving these goals. The staff and students develop assessment rubrics for assignments included in the portfolio so that the learning can be monitored and evaluated by children, parents and staff. As a school staff we have developed three writing goals for every writer in our school. The students and teachers will be evaluating writing samples in the student portfolios during our November student-parent-teacher conferences. At this time new goals will be collaboratively set for the next learning term. The children's portfolios are a great source of pride and motivation for them and are a part of the process where they learn to take responsibility for their own learning, and to articulate their success and growth as learners over time.

Our process for communicating about student learning is an important part of our work with parents, who help us to engage their children in a meaningful way through reflecting on and setting goals for writing success. Through our school newsletters, parent council meetings, handouts for parents, conferences, and also through our personalized student agenda books, we support student writing at home in a manner consistent with our approaches at school. Parents are encouraged to model the importance of writing by responding in student journals, in student agenda note sections, and in their personal writers notebooks, which are distributed in school council meetings. Our learning conversations with parents and children take place continually throughout the year.

Minchau Television and small group assemblies are ways in which we share the successes we are having as a school community and serve to communicate our instructional focus which is an integral part of everyday life at Minchau.

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