

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 18, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Acting Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Homesteader School – Focus on Reading and Language Comprehension

ORIGINATOR: J. Dewar, Principal, Homesteader School

RESOURCE  
STAFF: Sandra Stoddard, Student Achievement Services

### INFORMATION

Homesteader School, located in south Clareview, operates two decision units that serve 274 students from pre-school to grade six. Approximately 35 per cent of the students at Homesteader School are coded special needs and receive programming in regular, inclusive, and segregated classroom models. Homesteader is a site for the Early Education program which serves 62 children with severe communication disabilities in four pre-school classrooms and four kindergarten inclusive classrooms. Homesteader is also a district site for 30 primary opportunity students in grades one, two and three.

During the 2001-2002 school year, the Homesteader staff analyzed student achievement data and realized that many students, at all age levels, were at risk in the area of reading and language comprehension. Thus, a decision was made to initiate the following instructional focus across all curriculums:

“All students at Homesteader School will show growth in reading and language comprehension skills as measured by school-based assessments (formal and informal), district HLATs and provincial achievement exams”.

Over the past five years, the Homesteader professional learning community has worked together to improve teaching and learning in the instructional focus by participating in common professional development opportunities and collaborative activities every week. All kindergarten to grade six teaching staff have, or are, participating in Balanced Literacy training to support the best practices of: building background knowledge; acquiring vocabulary; and shared reading. All Early Education staff use a communication model based on the Hanen approach, to improve receptive and expressive language skills. The Hanen approach encompasses the following best practices: to communicate “simply, visually, slowly, with emphasis and repeat, repeat, repeat.”

Collaboration, action research and reflection have been key to improving student achievement at Homesteader School. Every week teacher partners meet to discuss at-risk students, plan intervention strategies, and share ideas. Every month teacher partners meet

with the principal to monitor intervention plans for at-risk students and engage in professional dialogue about next steps for each of these students. In addition, monthly division meetings provide an opportunity for staff to plan together, to reflect and refine teaching practices, celebrate successes and ensure changes in practice. On a bi-monthly basis, the staff meets in triad groups to extend learning in the area of assessment.

Support for student success at Homesteader extends beyond the daily classroom work. Parents support the instructional focus work by participating in the Home Reading program. In addition, Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Edmonton have organized and implemented the Bellerose Literacy Mentor Project. This is a 12 week program in which Bellerose High School mentors go to Homesteader School to read with 28 at risk students one day a week. These mentors have had a positive impact on the reading skills and attitudes of these at risk students.

Homesteader School believes that the Instructional Focus work has brought together two separate decision units who now work collaboratively to increase student achievement. The teaching and learning framework has connected staff, students, parents, and the community in a united goal to ensure superb results from all students.

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