

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 26, 2005

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Laurier Heights School – Focus on Achievement

ORIGINATOR: N. Iriye, Principal, Laurier Heights School

INFORMATION

Laurier Heights School, located in west Edmonton, serves a student population of 455 students from kindergarten to grade nine. It is a district site for French Immersion, late French Immersion and junior high opportunity. Achievement results at Laurier Heights continue to be strong.

In the fall of 2001, staff engaged in intensive conversations about student achievement. An analysis of results from provincial achievement exams, Highest Level of Achievement Tests (HLATs) and teacher generated assignments indicated that staff needed to focus on higher order thinking skills to improve student achievement. The following statement was developed to express the instructional focus:

"A school wide effort to enhance the higher order thinking skills of students as measured by provincial achievement tests, HLATs and school based assessments".

An Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) representative of all the different programs in the school was formed. Under the leadership of the ILT and with consultant support, the staff looked at higher order thinking skills research and its incorporation into the classroom. Peer coaching, questioning strategies, graphic organizers, and habits of mind (for example, metacognition which is thinking about thinking) were some of the best practices examined. Students were taught Bloom's Taxonomy (levels of questioning). Classroom and school displays reflected the different levels of thinking required for different types of tasks. Using a structured process for looking at student work, staff shared strategies for incorporating higher order thinking skills into teaching and evaluation practices.

In the spring of 2004, to further improve achievement, the staff began to examine assessment for learning strategies including: giving effective feedback; questioning to promote learning; student self-reflection; peer editing; and setting criteria with students. These strategies gave the school's higher order thinking skills focus a specific context and direction. Self evaluation requires students to analyze and synthesize their work and apply their thoughts to new situations. This results in enhanced student self-reliance and independence as learners. Effective use of these strategies is highly correlated with improved achievement.

In the fall of 2004, the staff formalized this new direction by refining the instructional focus statement to:

*“A school wide effort to enhance the higher order thinking skills of students **through self assessment** as measured by provincial achievement tests, HLATs, and school based assessments”.*

Staff quickly embraced this new direction and all have been able to successfully adapt assessment for learning best practices into their teaching. Three main areas that staff are focusing on include: the student’s abilities to use criteria (knowing in advance how they will demonstrate understanding); demonstrate objectivity (looking at their work with an objective eye); and set goals (how would they do things differently next time). To support this work a common set of graphics was developed that helps to unify displays of student work in the school. An interim measure was developed to monitor student progress in these areas. This interim measure can be adapted by teachers for effective use in all classes and programs at Laurier Heights.

The school is exploring ways to expand assessment for learning strategies outside the classroom. Students and staff have incorporated assessment for learning strategies into student led conferences, character education, and the mission/vision statement. Assessment for learning strategies gives parents a framework for looking at their children’s work with them.

The Supporting Teaching and Learning framework has provided an effective structure for Laurier Heights’ staff to focus on enhancing student achievement. By forming collaborative teams, looking at student work, and participating in inter/intra school visitations, teachers have supported each other, learned from each other and have enhanced the teaching and learning process. Laurier Heights’ excellent achievement results demonstrate that when staff work together, they achieve superb results from all students.

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