

# EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 26, 2005

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Successful Strategies to Enhance High School Completion Rates

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RESOURCE  
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## INFORMATION

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to provide information with respect to the work of high school staff to enhance high school completion rates. This report will outline how district professional development sessions are an integral component to the successful enhancement of teaching practice at the classroom level. Connections to the Eight Expectations, as part of the Supporting Teaching and Learning project will be highlighted, to demonstrate how this framework has resulted in promising practices for high school students.

### **Changing Practice Through District Wide Professional Development.**

Throughout the 2004-2005 school year, high school principals, assistant principals, department heads and lead teachers have been involved in monthly professional development sessions. At the October high school professional development session, staff reviewed successful course completion rates for grade 10, 11 and 12 core courses. Based on this analysis, staff created a plan of action that would build on successes identified, as well as provide further support in areas of need. Particular emphasis was placed at the grade 10 level, as this is typically where students initially experience failure. The plans were aligned to the District Expectations and emphasized elements that staff felt were most critical for changing results for students. District Expectations were clearly reflected in these plans: collaboration teams, use of effective research based teaching practices, implementing a professional development plan, realigning resources, looking at data and setting targets based on the analysis of that data; and support from the principal as the instructional leader of the school.

Subject departments at all high schools developed specific plans to improve successful course completion. These plans addressed some or all of the following:

- identification and implementation of best practices (based on research);
- suggestions for further professional development sessions tailored to the school's needs;
- establishing a process for staff to discuss and share successes and challenges in implementing the plan; and
- realigning department resources to support the plan.

At the February district-wide professional development session for high schools, participants had an opportunity to share and reflect on the impact of their plan. They looked at practices and strategies that had led to improved course completion. Many participants were excited about their results and the opportunity to share successful strategies with their colleagues. Examples of effective strategies discussed included:

- developing one on one relationships with struggling students;
- finding alternatives to giving students a zero for incomplete assignments;
- providing students with “second chances;”
- providing opportunities for students to complete assignments in class rather than assigning homework; and
- using assessment for learning practices (whereby students are not given a “mark” but rather specific comments on what was done well and what needed improvement).

Each school had its own unique stories to share, based on the particular needs of the student population. However, there were also many elements that were common: increased sharing and collaboration among staff, identification of best practices within departments, support from the school's administration team, and an emphasis on successful completion of grade 10 level courses.

At tonight's presentation, you will hear one high school's story about their work to increase course completion rates. Tracy Wright, from J. Percy Page, will share how her English department collaborated and implemented a plan to support struggling learners. You will hear how this project acted as a catalyst for further work at the school. Tracy's presentation, which was part of the February high school professional development session, modeled for all in attendance the power of staff working together to achieve superb results from all students.

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