

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 27, 2010

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Improving Student Achievement Through Authentic and Meaningful Opportunities for Writing

ORIGINATOR: J. Bidulock, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

Engaging students in regular, authentic writing experiences supports the District's Priority of ensuring every student is successful in their program of studies with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The development of writing skills is an integral part of preparing students to be successful for life in the 21st century.

Through the use of writing in all subject areas students can unify curriculum, connect and deepen understanding, and learn through shaping and organizing their thoughts and ideas. Writing can guide student learning. As students write they process knowledge, make connections, theorize and summarize, draw conclusions, apply knowledge and reflect on their own understanding. The synchronicity between reading, writing and oral language is supported through quality teaching and ample time for practice with formal and informal writing genres.

Quality teaching is crucial to the development of student competencies in writing; students come to understand themselves, engage with ideas and information and give expression to their own voices. Regular opportunities for writing relating to topics of interest, combined with explicit instruction, coaching and feedback supports the development of writing skills. Students at all levels need to write for different purposes, different audiences and using different formats. Teachers need to share criteria, provide descriptive feedback and scaffold learning.

Edmonton Public Schools provides supports to teachers in the development of 21st century writing skills in a variety of ways. Programs such as 6 + 1 Writing Traits, Balanced Literacy and Writer's Workshop support teachers as they design authentic writing lessons and opportunities for their students. Teachers provide collegial support to each other through collaborative learning networks, looking at student work and visiting classrooms. The District's Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) project supports the teaching of writing through action research related to engaging all students in 21st century literacies across the curriculum. Professional learning days, such as the Freedom Writers on January 11 and 12, 2010 with Erin Gruwell, and David Warlick on November 5 and 6, 2009 also supported teachers in learning how to effectively design authentic writing experiences for and

with students. For the past 13 years, teachers have been involved in collaborative marking of student HLAT writing responses. This collaborative work has resulted in teachers gaining a deeper understanding of standards and assessment in writing. Teachers also track data and look for trends and gaps at an individual student, class and school level. This tracking and analysis of data results in programming that is tailored to support student learning needs. This collaborative work has also enhanced the teacher's ability to give students purposeful feedback based on writing criteria. Students more clearly understand "what counts" when reflecting on their own writing or when providing feedback to their peers

Access to appropriate media and technology is important as students produce, enhance and present their work. A growing body of evidence indicates that effective integration of technology can improve both the quantity and quality of student's writing as well as their confidence and engagement. Schools are increasingly using the Internet to engage students in authentic and integrated writing experiences. TAG, an online magazine, coordinated through Consulting Services, is one example of how students and teachers engage in writing via the global, digital world. This virtual magazine has provided students with a worldwide audience for their writing. To date, TAG has had over 45,600 viewings from more than 75 countries around the world. Students see purpose and meaning in their writing; they are more engaged and deeper learning results.

Supporting student writing is an essential component of the District's K-12 Literacy Plan. The District's Vision 2020 of 100 per cent high school completion includes achieving maximum success within the realities of globalization, knowledge work and accelerating societal change. Competency in literacy, including effective writing, lays the foundation in creating bright futures for all students.

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