

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 28, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Responses to Board Requests for Information

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent
J. Bidulock, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE
STAFF: Gloria Chalmers, John Edey

INFORMATION

BOARD REQUEST #201 MARCH 24, 2009: PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING WHETHER OR NOT WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT EACH DISTRICT STUDENT HAS AN ADULT WITH WHOM HE OR SHE CAN TALK TO AND SHARE HOPES, FEARS, PROBLEMS AND SUCCESSES. WHAT STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS ARE IN PLACE AT SCHOOLS TO ENABLE CHILDREN TO BUILD AT LEAST ONE POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH A CARING ADULT? A variety of strategies, programs, or services are implemented in schools to foster healthy and positive relationships between students and adults within each school community. At the most immediate level, schools identify all students at risk, including students who appear to be distancing from the school and its activities, and develop intervention strategies to re-engage. This work will be further enhanced as we move into the fourth round of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) 2009-2012, which will focus on the area of student engagement.

In elementary schools, the classroom teacher is often the person who provides the most immediate positive and formative relationship for each student in the classroom, and students naturally will confide in their classroom teacher. Elementary schools also, with specific intentions for fostering positive relationships, develop programs that emphasize character education, community building, and a safe and caring environment to foster open and inclusive communication between students and teachers.

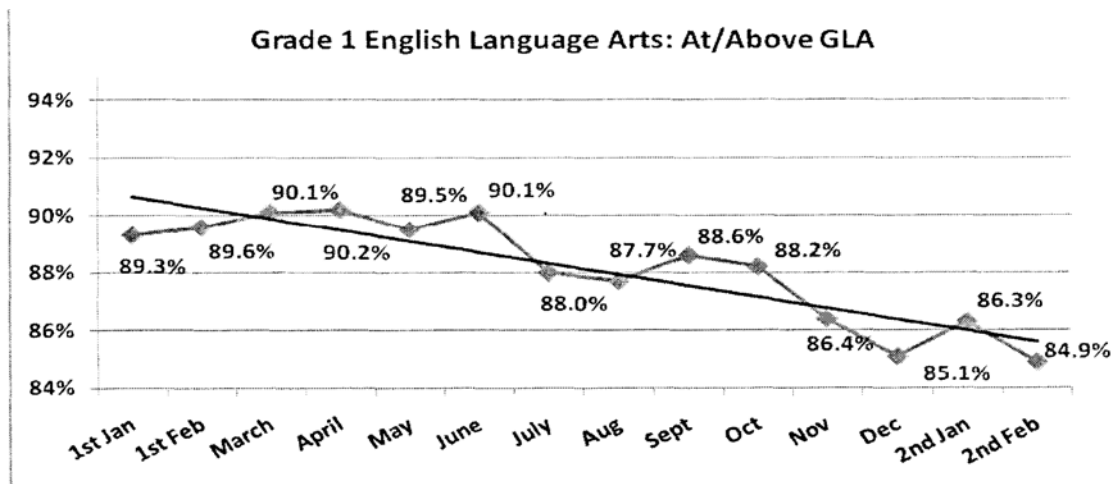
Junior high schools use a number of strategies to ensure that students connect with at least one adult. These strategies include: cross-graded home room organization with the same home room teacher for three years, teacher advisor groups, assigning one core teacher for English language arts and social studies and another for math and science, regular grade level meetings to discuss strategies to reach students of concern, counselling services, and access to district resources like Consulting Services school social workers or external resources such as Edmonton Student Health Initiative Partnership (ESHIP) emotional/behavioural counselling services.

High school students have a grade co-ordinator or teacher advisor as a primary contact for each student. High schools also provide extensive student counselling services through student services departments, and utilize school social workers through Consulting Services.

In addition, many schools have each developed a range of community services partnerships in which other adults provide such support. Examples include: school resource officers (Edmonton Police Service), success coaches (Family Centre), a family therapist (at City Centre Education Partnership schools), mentorship coordinators, Big Brothers and Big Sisters mentoring, Roots and Wings workers, artist in residence programs, Study Buddy (University of Alberta and other post-secondary institutions), and a variety of parent volunteer activities that provide caring adults for interaction with students at risk.

BOARD REQUEST #202, MARCH 24, 2009: PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING ANY TRENDS WITH RESPECT TO THE SUCCESS OR STRUGGLES OF 4 YEAR OLDS IN OUR KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS. WHAT IS THE RATIONALE FOR HAVING A MARCH 1ST CUT-OFF DATE FOR KINDERGARTEN ENTRANCES AS OPPOSED TO A SEPTEMBER 1ST CUT-OFF DATE? WHAT ARE THE PRACTICES OF OTHER URBAN BOARDS IN ALBERTA WITH RESPECT TO ENTRANCE INTO KINDERGARTEN? While there is no achievement information for Kindergarten, there is evidence that some younger students do not do as well as their older peers in the early years of school. Provincial data for students in early elementary grades shows that younger children are less likely to meet grade level expectations than their older peers. The data shows approximately five per cent difference between the oldest and youngest group in the percentage of students meeting standards as measured by Grade Level of Achievement (GLA) data for English language arts and mathematics. By the time students finished Grade 3, this age-related learning gap has largely disappeared based on GLA data. However, in contrast, Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) indicate that this age-related learning gap persists and is still large in Grade 3. The relationship between age and achievement is a straight line that persists until at least Grade 3. This means that regardless of which month Kindergarten students are allowed to start school, the 'relatively' older students are more likely to do better than their younger peers. It is important to recognize that most of the youngest students are meeting grade level expectations (85 per cent as compared to 89 per cent of the oldest group of students).

A graph of the Grade 1 English Language Arts: At/Above GLA Correlated to Age is provided below to illustrate how age impacts achievement.



This graph shows percentages of students who were at or above grade level in Grade 1 relative to birth month. The straight line represents a linear trend. Students with birthdays falling on the 1st January/February were the oldest in the cohort and students with birthdays on the 2nd January/February were the youngest. There was a notable age-based difference in student achievement in Grade 1 with the oldest students outperforming the youngest ones by approximately five percent.

Teachers, particularly in Division I, need to be aware of the age-related learning gap when assessing and supporting relatively older and younger student learners. There is a potential for either over- or under-estimating some students' potential because students start school at a different point in age and development. Each child could be progressing at a 'normal' rate but they would not all be at the same place in their learning because of this age-related effect. Staggered entry into Kindergarten is one suggested strategy (students enter on their birthday month). However, it is not clear how this would help since younger students would then 'miss' some of the instructional time for Kindergarten. (Reference: Alberta Education, January 2009, *Grade Level of Achievement: 2007-08 Report on Programs*, pp. 19-22.)

Another well-established learning gap is related to socio-economic factors. Children from low socio-economic backgrounds, on average, come to school with a pronounced learning gap particularly in vocabulary and concept development. Early learning opportunities are crucial to reducing this learning gap. Early entry into a rich full-day kindergarten and other early learning opportunities for these children can help to improve their academic outcomes in the early years of school. This research would support an earlier start to Kindergarten and other early learning opportunities. (References: DeCosta, 2008, *Longitudinal Effects of Full-day Kindergarten Through to Grade 6*. Study prepared for Edmonton Public Schools; Hart, B. and T. Risley, Spring 2003, *The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3*, *American Educator*.)

All four large urban boards (Edmonton Public, Edmonton Catholic, Calgary Public and Calgary Catholic) have the same starting age requirements for Kindergarten.

It is interesting to note that high mobility is a much greater and more persistent risk factor for a student's achievement than age. Impact continues into Grade 9, on average seven per cent more students with high mobility are not meeting grade level outcomes as compared to less mobile students.