

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

December 10, 2002

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: École Richard Secord School's Instructional Focus: Daily Practice of Reading and Writing

ORIGINATOR: C. Corothers, Principal, École Richard Secord School

RESOURCE

STAFF: Stacie Arends, Brenda Brusnyk, Barb Greenlaw, Chris Harris, Kathleen Marzolf, Kate McIntosh, Renee McLaws, Parkash Pannu, Helen Shellenberg (Instructional Leadership Team)

INFORMATION

The implementation of Richard Secord's instructional focus began in January 2000, with the principal's involvement in a district level principals' institute related to developing an instructional focus in a school. Initial discussion took place at that time regarding a focus for the school, based on the direction the school was moving to meet the needs of our students. Later in the fall of 2001, Richard Secord became involved in the district's initiative on *Focus on Supporting Teaching and Learning*. Implementing an instructional focus for the school was a smooth transition as the school has a long-standing tradition of emphasizing literacy. With a huge library at the center of the school, a strong emphasis on reading is an integral part of the school's tradition. In a similar way, writing has received a high degree of attention over the years with an annual school-wide writing fair with visiting markers. So in order to begin "the work," we focused on writing and reading across curricular areas, recognizing that these skills will improve student achievement in all areas. Our efforts in exploring the seven areas of instructional focus began in full force in the fall of 2001.

At Richard Secord, there is a school-wide effort to have all students working towards showing measurable growth in their ability to write and read, through the implementation of a daily school-wide reading and writing program. Growth will be measured by the results of the Alberta Learning Achievement Test, HLAT's and internal monitoring measures.

During the 2001-2002 school year, we determined that our best practices would be those strategies used in the Balanced Literacy program with kindergarten, grade one, two, five and six teachers receiving their first year of training in this language arts methodology. Four school-wide writing tasks, including the district HLAT, were conducted to determine baseline data in the area of writing. Teachers came together with grade level counterparts to mark and review each writing task. Data was collected and graphed for staff to analyze. In the area of reading, the school's home reading club received an even higher profile. Weekly home reading minutes are turned in each Monday morning and collected by parent volunteers for tallying. Individual

and class totals are monitored, incentives are provided and reading minute plateaus are displayed. There is a huge buy-in by parents and students alike. In order to increase accountability for teachers and students, term minute totals were included on the progress report with class averages used as a comparison for parents. Parent volunteers created a gigantic reading display to advertise our reading theme for the year. A total of nearly three million minutes was accumulated over the 2001-02 school year. University student volunteers were recruited to read with those students who, for whatever reason, were not able to turn in their reading minute totals each week. The Instructional Leadership Team was instrumental in getting our instructional focus work off to a good start in the fall.

At the start of the 2002-2003 school year, we feel that we are certainly “living our focus.” Many of the components of our instructional focus work are firmly in place, e.g.:

- All teachers are using the Balanced Literacy program to teach language arts, teachers are either in year one or two of their training. French Immersion teachers are using components of the Balanced Literacy program in their classrooms. Division I French Immersion teachers are attending district level inservicing with other district FIM teachers to explore ways to adapt Balanced Literacy programming in a FIM classroom setting.
- Interim measures have been established, e.g., bimonthly writing tasks for all students, bimonthly reading comprehension assessments for division II students, and established reading level targets for division I students.
- Full and half days as well as early Thursdays have been set aside for teachers to come together to collaborate by marking student writing, looking at student work, establishing best practices, sharing strategies to encourage reluctant writers, and adapting instructional practice as a result of feedback from looking at student work and reviewing internal measures data.
- The Instructional Leadership Team is continuing to play a strong leadership role in the school as we proceed on our journey.
- There is enhanced visibility of our instructional focus work, e.g., displays of student writing, instructional focus statement is posted around the school, writing assessment rubrics are displayed, and enhanced teacher talk about the progress our students are making is taking place
- A student friendly version of the school’s instructional focus statement has been developed and appears everywhere in the school: *“At Richard Secord, we succeed because every day we write and read.”*

As this school year progresses, we have identified several areas where we would like to deepen our focus. We are presently putting together our data from the first two writing tasks and making a comparison with how our students performed last year on similar writing tasks. This information will be shared among teachers and a summary of the data on display for parents. We continue to need to access the necessary teacher materials and student resources to strengthen our focus on daily practice of reading and writing. We plan to pare down the wide number of best language arts teaching practices used in the Balanced Literacy program to a manageable best practices list to be used across classrooms. We would also like to see the implementation of our instructional focus have a greater impact beyond the walls of our school. We know parents are aware of the work we are doing, however, we would like to encourage a more active role in all aspects of our focus area.

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