

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

December 14, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Terrace Heights School - Focus on Achievement

ORIGINATOR: G. Kushnir, Principal, Terrace Heights School

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

Terrace Heights School is located on the east side of south central Edmonton. The current enrollment is 95 students from Kindergarten to Grade 6 with 27 per cent of them being coded as having special needs. Terrace Heights is a district site for the Learning Strategies Program.

By adopting the district's focus on achievement and working within the framework outlined in the eight areas of expectation, staff at Terrace Heights School are constantly challenging themselves to strive to create a school where all students demonstrate high levels of achievement. To help guide this work staff have created the following instructional focus statement:

At Terrace Heights School our Instructional Focus is a whole school collaborative effort to have all students demonstrate measurable growth in reading comprehension and writing proficiency. This growth will be achieved through the implementation of a school wide focus on literacy using research-based strategies and measured by district Highest Level of Achievement Tests (HLAT) and school based performance assessments.

In order for the school to ensure high levels of learning for all students it became necessary to examine current practices. A review process uncovered two areas that needed to be immediately addressed: increasing results of special needs students and increasing the number of regular program students reaching the standard of excellence on Provincial Achievement Tests.

In the year 2002-2003, we realized that the needs of special needs students required a review of the school's literacy practices. Based on this review staff agreed to implement the following three research based best practices: acquiring vocabulary, activating background knowledge and using graphic organizers. In the spring of 2003, staff also decided to extend the development of the school's literacy teaching by training teachers in balanced literacy.

The second area addressed was increasing the percentage of regular program students performing at the standard of excellence. In examining the organizational structure of the school, the staff decided to implement a different organizational approach. The traditional generalist approach was replaced with a more specialized approach for Division II students at the beginning of the 2003/2004 school year. Division II teachers no longer teach all subjects. Instead, half of the teachers are assigned to teach language arts, social studies and art. The other teachers teach math, science, physical education and health. This new structure provides staff with several advantages:

1. Balanced literacy is generally phased into a school over a period of several years. As a result of the new structure, fewer teachers needed to be trained because language arts teachers were providing instruction to more than one class. This resulted in all students receiving balanced literacy instruction. The new structure cut both the timeline and cost of implementing a literacy program.
2. Teachers formed collaborative teams based upon fewer subject areas. Teams used this collaborative time to agree upon the most important concepts to teach in each subject as well as an effective timeline for teaching these concepts.
3. Math and Science teachers were able to support each other in incorporating the school's literacy focus and best practices in their subject areas.
4. Math and Science teachers focused on providing students with a more hands on inquiry based model of instruction.

While the work conducted over the last two school years was both challenging and demanding, the student achievement payoff was profound. The results of the special needs population provided the first evidence of success as the percentage of students at or above grade level on district HLAT exams rose 33.5 per cent in reading and 49.9 per cent in writing. In addition, they also performed exceedingly well on the provincial exams as the numbers of students achieving the acceptable standard rose in all grade and subject areas recording increases between 8.3 per cent and 88.9 per cent. The grade 6 special needs students also performed very well in relation to the standard of excellence as they record increases between 8.3 per cent and 27.3 per cent for all subject areas. The standard of excellence scores recorded by the regular program students also increased and ranged from a low of 34.5 per cent in social studies to a high of 61.1 per cent in science.

The staff at Terrace Heights are continually seeking to create a learning community where the success of all students becomes a sustainable and repeatable event. For the current school year, staff are addressing interventions for "at risk" students. The entire staff works together to meet the needs of these students, regardless of whether or not they teach the students. Staff have also implemented a school-wide writing program. Finally, staff have enhanced the collaborative framework in place at Terrace Heights. Teams now ask the following questions each time they meet: What are students expected to learn? What are the instructional practices we will employ to ensure that learning takes place? How do we know if learning is taking place? How will we respond when students don't learn?

Perhaps the largest benefit to come from improved achievement results was the response of the staff at Terrace Heights. They have become firm believers in the art of the possible and are committed to ensuring that achievement of "Superb Results from all Students" becomes a reality at Terrace Heights.

GK:gj