

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 13, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Improving Student Achievement at Highlands Junior High School

ORIGINATOR: J. Allen, Principal, Highlands Junior High School

RESOURCE

STAFF: Debbie Jackson, Corrie Ziegler

### INFORMATION

Highlands Junior High School, located in north-central Edmonton, is a learning community for 225 students in Grades 7 to 9. In addition to the Regular Junior High Program, Highlands is a district site for the Behaviour and Learning Assistance Program, the Opportunity Program, Literacy Program and Pre Advanced Placement Program.

The staff at Highlands strive to create a healthy and innovative learning community that builds on the strengths of individuals and the collective group. Staff are committed to providing a safe and secure environment which will enable all students to grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, physically, and culturally. In order to meet the needs of all their students, Highlands' staff work collaboratively with each other, with other district staff and with community partners.

Highland's staff are learning about and practicing leadership skills through a school-wide focus on differentiated instruction and technology. By understanding clearly where learners are in relation to curricular outcomes and merging this understanding with the use of technology as a tool, teachers are better able to meet the diverse learning needs of their students. Staff believes technology stimulates, motivates and engages students. As teachers provide and utilize a variety of technologies such as wireless laptops and interactive white boards, students are given opportunities to learn in different ways and they are offered choices as to how they will demonstrate their learning. Four teachers attend the professional development opportunities for teacher-leaders offered through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS) Differentiation Project. These teachers share their new learning and lead the work in their classrooms, as well as across the school. To further build capacity within the school, additional support from district consultants is accessed as needed. The result is that more students are taking ownership for their learning, producing higher quality work and improving their achievement.

As part of the AISI Community Collaboration Project, Highlands' staff collaborates extensively with staff from the following district schools: Montrose, Rundle, Abbott and RJ Scott. Collectively they are able to access additional resources to target specific common needs that would not have been possible otherwise. They meet in various groupings to collaborate around best practices that promote resiliency and create differentiated, positive

learning communities. As well, community partners provide foundational support for Highlands' staff, students and parents. To meet the diverse learning needs of the student population, the staff relies on the expertise and support provided through partnerships with organizations such as Métis Child and Family Services Society of Alberta, Aboriginal Youth and Family Well-being and Education Society, Alberta Conflict Transformation Society, YWCA and Youth Addictions Awareness. By working together, everyone benefits; staff are continuously learning while ongoing, appropriate and timely support is provided to students and their families.

As the staff work to continuously improve by learning and implementing new strategies, they have found their involvement in the AISI coaching pilot to be invaluable. This pilot has provided another opportunity for teachers to collaborate with colleagues within a flexible framework that supports teachers as they visit each other's classrooms and peer coach one another on a regular basis. Professional learning for Highlands' staff is teacher driven and job embedded, leading to the intentional implementation, integration and refinement of practices that support differentiated learning.

At Highlands School there are high expectations with regard to student learning and behaviour. The dedicated staff works collaboratively with each other, with community partners, district staff, and most importantly with students and their parents to ensure that expectations are met and everyone continues to improve. The combination of commitment and collaboration has resulted in a learning community that believes in building effective teaching practices and supports that will lead to bright futures for all students.

ES:gj