

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 15, 2002

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Virginia Park Artist/Writer's Workshop Project

ORIGINATOR: D. Morris, Principal, Virginia Park

RESOURCE

STAFF: Raffaella Montemurro, Doug O'Brien

INFORMATION

Virginia Park Elementary School is located in the northeast area of Edmonton. Since 1977, Virginia Park has been designated as an elementary school providing fine arts core programming. The mission of Virginia Park School is to ensure the success of all students in their goals pertaining to their schooling.

During the 2000-01 school year Virginia Park School introduced the AISI project which is an Artist/Writer's Workshop model that began by involving students from Grades 3 to 6. In 2001-2002 it encompasses all grade levels K through 6. The Artist/Writer's workshop embraces writing as another art with which to express ourselves and addresses diverse learning styles – kinesthetic, auditory, and visual.

This project has addressed the following about our school and its students:

- We view writing as an art and therefore it is consistent with our alternative program that focuses on the arts.
- Our student population has few academically at-risk students.
- We have a large number of students who are high achievers academically.
- The project is consistent with our instructional focus, which we have worked to identify through our ongoing work with Blueprints for supporting teaching and learning. Through a close and thorough examination of our results and student needs, we have determined that “higher level thinking” and “problem solving skills” are the two possible areas that Virginia Park will focus upon to improve our student achievement. Both of these areas are integral parts of the Artist/Writer's workshop and the challenging and creative nature of the program.

Virginia Park is in the first year of development of a formalized instructional focus plan. The two identified areas of focus are at present being refined and developed into a final statement for the end of the 2002 school year.

The writing workshop occurs weekly for 75 minutes for each class, with both lead-teacher and classroom teacher working and modeling the process with the students. The format is always the same and has become almost a “ritual”. Students write in response to a work of art, their own art, poetry, and prose, and to stories by famous and lesser-known writers. All participants, including both teachers and students, are artists/writers together. Sometimes students write first, then make art from their writing; other times they write from a common experience.

Students then are invited to share orally. This part of the workshop has also helped students value and appreciate each other, thereby encouraging a supportive and respectful environment within the class.

Most importantly, the students have been given the gifts of time and opportunity to hear each other’s words, to hear their own words, and to recognize their crucial place in the world of art and writing.

Our lead-teacher, Raffaella Montemurro, works with Grades 4 through 6 and collaborates with our Grade 3 teacher, Doug O’Brien, who conducts his own workshop with his students. Mr. O’Brien also spends a half-hour with both the Grade 1 and 2 classes as well as Kindergarten, sharing literature and emphasizing the powerful effect of artwork.

The success of the Artist/Writer’s Workshop has been phenomenal and has exceeded our expectations. This is especially true in the area of language arts where our students demonstrate confidence in their writing skills and creative abilities. It is also very evident in the high achievement level of students at Virginia Park in language arts at all grade levels.

DM:bl