

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 15, 2008

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Improving Student Achievement at Parkdale Elementary/Junior High School

ORIGINATOR: M. Hanson, Principal, Parkdale Elementary/Junior High School

RESOURCE
STAFF: Ann Mah, Karen Bardy, Corrie Ziegler

INFORMATION

Parkdale School is a kindergarten to grade nine school located in central Edmonton. The school provides programming for 206 students and offers regular elementary and junior high programs, as well as full day kindergarten, Literacy and Opportunity programs. Thirty-eight percent of the students at Parkdale are self identified Aboriginal and 11 per cent are English Language Learners. Parkdale is on a modified school calendar in which the school year begins in August with two week recesses in October, December and March and five weeks over the summer. Parkdale staff believes this continuous learning model results in students who are more focused and able to retain their learning after breaks, as well as enhanced staff wellness.

The instructional focus at Parkdale School is Reading for Meaning. To meet the diverse learning needs of their students, Parkdale staff use a variety of teaching strategies that focus on improving students' literacy skills. Some of these strategies are: guided reading, reciprocal teaching, balanced literacy, 6 + 1 writing traits, Accelerated Reader, Reading Recovery, Linda Dorn's comprehensive literacy model, and Middle Years Literacy Intervention program. Through inservicing and an on-site coaching model, Edmonton Public School consultants have provided extensive support to Parkdale staff to learn these reading and writing strategies. As well, consultants have provided support to staff through professional development sessions about student centered math as well as the new math curriculum. Additionally, staff from Parkdale and the staff from the City Centre cluster groups participate in monthly targeted professional development sessions to meet the learning needs of all students. As a result, district highest level of achievement test (HLAT) results at Parkdale have shown promising growth over the past five years, including a continual increase in junior high writing results. Consequently, the school's list of students needing intervention strategies has decreased.

Cohort work provides another avenue for exploring, refining and enhancing teaching and learning to meet the diverse learning needs of all students. Parkdale's cohort consists of Parkdale, Major General Greisbach, McCauley and R. J. Scott/Lawton. This cohort work centers on the philosophy of differentiated instruction. Teachers from all four schools

actively participate in job embedded professional development activities that include instructional walk throughs, interschool visitations and effective planning sessions.

The students at Parkdale School have many needs beyond the learning environment, which have an impact on their ability to experience success in school. To support students and their families in areas of need, Parkdale School as part of the City Centre Education Project and the Community Collaboration Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) Project are collaborating with other City Centre schools and community partners to support the students and families in these schools. Parkdale is one of three K-9 City Centre schools that share facilities to offer a wider range of junior high complementary courses. Parkdale School hosts Visual Arts and Computer Studies and students have the opportunity to study Band, Outdoor Education and CTS Modules at McCauley and Spruce Avenue Schools. Additional supports and resources that have resulted from collaborative work with schools and community include: on-site family therapy, dedicated children's services support, an on-site community health nurse, two success coaches, an Aboriginal Mentor, a Partners for Kids Program, and the Edmonton School Lunch Program.

As further support to the students in their schools, all City Centre staff are exploring research and practices to foster resiliency in the students. Resiliency work involves developing an environment that fosters positive relationships that affect optimal development. This in turn gives individuals the ability to respond more effectively to setbacks and adversity. This approach began by staff listening to a powerful presentation by Dr. Martin Brokenleg in 2004 on working with students at risk. The staff learned about the four components of the Circle of Courage: Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity and how to apply the philosophy behind the circle to engage all students. Staff have since been working with Resiliency Canada to implement a resiliency framework to support student learning. The students in grades three to nine completed a resiliency survey which helped to determine a student's level of resiliency. Survey results were debriefed with students, families and the staff. Overall school survey results were also shared with community agencies (Region 6, City of Edmonton and the Family Centre), who have worked collaboratively with Parkdale staff to develop a strength-based approach to working with children, youth and families.

Overall, the focus on literacy, resiliency and the Circle of Courage has had significant impacts, including:

- Increase in student achievement
- Increase in students' positive behavior and attitude towards school
- Improvement in attendance and punctuality
- Decrease in suspensions and expulsions
- Increase in the number of grade nine students making the successful transition to high school.

Parkdale students and families are supported in and out of the school using a multidimensional approach that focuses on educating the whole child. Collaborating with other schools and community partners has led to innovative ideas for creating a school climate that ensures Bright Futures begin at Parkdale School.

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