

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 12, 2002

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: North Edmonton School's Instructional Focus on Literacy:
Teamwork with Consulting Services and the Community

ORIGINATOR: S. Sawchuk, Principal, North Edmonton School

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

North Edmonton School is the oldest school in northeast Edmonton dating back to 1913. It serves 201 students from kindergarten to Grade 6 in the regular program and includes programming for students in the mild mental disability program. North Edmonton School draws students from its immediate neighbourhood as well as from the Miller area. The school motto "A Nice Place to Be" reflects a school climate that fosters both academic achievement and character building.

In February of 2001, the staff and parents at North Edmonton agreed on literacy as the instructional focus for the school. It was a logical choice given the needs of our students, many of whom are at risk of not succeeding in school. At that time, the school had already been part of the small class project since January of 2000. As well, North Edmonton became involved in an AISI project that allowed the school to offer full day kindergarten, small Grade 1 classes, Balanced Literacy in Division I and Reading Recovery. In September of 2001 Balanced Literacy was extended to Division II. This combination of structured programming in language arts combined with effective teaching strategies has been instrumental in improving our ability to provide reading instruction that addresses the individual needs of each student. It has helped us align our assessment strategies and resources to complement our teaching strategies. It has streamlined our professional practice, fostered teacher collaboration, and enabled us to help our students become more effective readers, writers, and communicators.

The path to embrace literacy as an instructional focus grew in incremental stages and included Consulting Services early in its inception. Consulting Services was involved in the full complement of services offered through the Balanced Literacy Program and the Reading Recovery Program. In addition, a Reading Recovery consultant began to teach part time at North Edmonton in September of 2000. In September of 2001, the Reading consultant became part of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). Patterned on the Blueprints For Supporting Teaching and Learning district initiative, our ILT has benefited from the expert advice and assistance of Consulting Services in helping us group students for instruction, monitor the progress of students, and provide additional supports to students still

encountering difficulty. For example, based on the analysis of data from the assessments used as dipstick measures to track reading progress, some Grade 2 students at our school receive additional small group instruction to improve their reading skills and help them achieve mastery at reading levels commensurate with their grade. Research shows that receiving intensive assistance in reading in the first few years of school is critical to increased levels of student literacy in later years.

Our instructional focus on literacy reaches out into the greater North Edmonton community to encompass 3 – 5 year olds as well. Since September of 2000, the Learning Together Program offered by the Centre For Family Literacy provides free programming for 3 – 5 year olds three half days a week for 16 weeks at a time between September and April. Funded by a variety of educational institutions and agencies including Edmonton Public Schools, Learning Together fosters literacy in pre-school children by providing a forum to develop an interest in reading at an early age. Part of the success of the program is due to the required parental participation. Parents must accompany their students and are provided with training on how to nurture literacy at home. Although the parents and students are grouped separately, they spend at least one half hour together each session to practice helping their children develop literacy skills. Free transportation and day care for younger siblings is provided at no cost for those who require this assistance. Research done on a similar program in the United Kingdom indicates that pre-school children who participate in such a program demonstrate higher literacy skills as well as improved reading readiness skills upon entering school. Many of the students who participate in the Learning Together program enter kindergarten in North Edmonton School.

Our plans for the 2002–03 school year include the continuation of these initiatives to promote literacy. With a firm partnership between the school, Consulting Services and the community based Learning Together program, we anticipate significant improvements in student achievement. It has become evident to us that the collaborative efforts of all the stakeholders on literacy as our instructional focus has had a positive impact on teaching and learning at North Edmonton School. Improving the literacy levels of our students will remain a priority for us because it has the power to help our students reach their maximum learning potential. In fact, we have considered changing our school motto to “North Edmonton School – A Nice Place to Read” to more accurately reflect our school instructional focus.

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