

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Norwood School: Focused on Research

ORIGINATOR: H. Raymond, Principal, Norwood School

RESOURCE  
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### INFORMATION

Norwood School, located in the centre of Edmonton, is a member of the City Centre Education Project, and serves a diverse student population of 198 students in Kindergarten to Grade 6. A preschool program for 13 students exists through a provincial grant. Full day kindergarten exists due to AISI funds. Norwood School ranks number five in the district's ranking of high socio-economic needs.

Identification of our instructional focus began in spring 2001. During that school year, teachers engaged in extensive discussion of the students' achievement test results. Particular attention was given to steps that might lead to improvement. When the school staff began pinpointing specific skills that would benefit all students, it quickly became evident that gathering and synthesizing information and making inferences were the areas that would be of most value for all students. The following statement, developed during in the spring of 2001, expresses our focus:

*A school-wide effort to have all Norwood Students be able to gather and synthesize information and make inferences from a variety of sources through the implementation of a school-wide research process program as measured by HLAT scores, provincial tests and teacher administrated assessments.*

In exploring our data two needs were immediately apparent. We needed to develop a clearer understanding of how to improve students' abilities to synthesize and make inferences using inquiry based learning in a research context. We also needed to develop a means of measuring student progress. In inquiry based learning students formulate questions about a topic. They build new knowledge about this topic through answering these questions. This process assists students to develop skills they will need for life long learning. Students learn strategies to address problems that may not have clear solutions. They also learn to deal with change and challenges to understanding as they search for solutions. We are working to help students to become familiar with the inquiry process through understanding a framework that supports researching for information. They are learning a variety of inquiry skills and strategies for independent and group use.

We began the 2001-2002 school year with a PD session for the entire faculty on the topic of research and the skills students need to effectively engage in inquiry based learning. We established a half time teacher librarian position and determined that the teacher in this position would work with the classroom teachers, information technology staff and school principal to develop inquiry based learning activities for all students from preschool to grade 6. We continued our work with consultant support over the year building our understanding of inquiry based learning in research. We established best practices related to this learning. Our Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) assisted the staff to select, implement and add a number of related schoolwide best practices. These are Know, What, Learn (KWL) charts, questioning using Blooms Taxonomy and other higher level thinking questioning tools and Thinking Maps.

Meanwhile, our ILT discussed the type of measures that would be useful to assess growth. Achievement test scores and HLATs were an obvious selection and had guided us in determining our instructional focus. We also wanted to establish internal targets and measures to guide our instruction. Selecting an internal assessment was an evolving process. After examining and testing various possibilities, we decided to focus on students' abilities to formulate questions to guide their research as the skill to be measured.

We have taken a variety of other steps in support of our focus work. We have built a strong collection of non-fiction and reference books to assist students research topics related to the curriculum. We continue to work closely with district consultants to assist with the implementation of the best practices and in particular "Thinking Maps." Teachers continue to attend inservices, to learn together, and to apply what they learn in their classes. Both internal and external measures show that our students have made achievement gains over the past three years. These gains can be attributed in large part to an environment focused on student success, with specific attention to inquiry based learning.

We recognize that effective implementation of an instructional focus requires attention to a number of other matters. At Norwood School, implementation of our instructional focus is built on a base of staff collaboration and development of positive attitudes for learning. The work of our school therapist from the Family Centre, a counseling type position, whose responsibilities are to assist in addressing various student difficulties, has been essential. The Partners for Kids mentorship program that has established over 110 matches between a caring adult as a mentor with our students is focused on weekly contact to do one-on-one literacy and inquiry based learning activities with the students has been invaluable. The mentors also contribute to building student character through their weekly visits. Establishment of a Caught Caring Program in partnership with our Character Education Program has helped to establish a positive school climate so that students are prepared to learn. The totality of all these efforts, carried out by a strong and highly skilled staff are, we believe, key to establishing our environment for success and to achievement of superb results from all students.

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