

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 9, 2010

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Improving Student Achievement Through Balanced Literacy Instruction

ORIGINATOR: J. Bidulock, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

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INFORMATION

In 1997-98 Edmonton Public Schools offered the first opportunity for a two-year inservice and coaching model called Balanced Literacy to four elementary schools. The program was created by Dr. Anne Brailsford, Reading Specialist within Edmonton Public Schools. The program was originally designed in response to requests from district principals to support a balanced approach to early literacy learning.

Edmonton Public Schools' first priority commits to excellence in literacy teaching and learning. A balanced approach to literacy learning and teaching is internationally recognized as the model that works. This approach provides different routes to achieving the goal of competency in literacy for students and teachers. A balanced approach includes a focus on reading, writing, working with words and developing oral language skills. The tenets of Balanced Literacy are aligned to the Alberta curriculum. The instruction provided by Balanced Literacy teachers meets the literacy needs of all students through differentiated approaches, multileveled materials, increased time for literacy instruction, ongoing assessment and a variety of groupings and communications. At the very core of the program is the knowledgeable teacher who facilitates students' literacy learning. A team of Reading Specialists within Edmonton Public Schools continually refines this approach to ensure that the Balanced Literacy model meets a standard of excellence. Each Balanced Literacy Consultant is also a Reading Specialist, supported by a master's degree.

In the first year of implementation (1997-98), Division I teachers at four schools were supported in their learning by one Reading Specialist. Today, teachers across more than 140 schools have embraced the Balanced Literacy modules of long term professional learning, that includes demonstration lessons and job embedded coaching. The Balanced Literacy consultant team is currently comprised of 11 Reading Specialists working a total of 8.5 FTE. Since its inception close to 1300 teachers have been certified in Balanced Literacy.

In addition to the programs for teachers in Kindergarten, Division I and Division II, Balanced Literacy Reading Specialists also support teacher assistants through a strand designed to support learners in Balanced Literacy classrooms. As well, support has been extended to schools from outside Edmonton Public Schools both in teacher training and in providing a coordinator training program for district leaders across Western Canada. An additional component supports school-based literacy leaders (i.e. principals) in deepening their understanding and support for this approach. Instructional leadership is an integral piece of a whole school approach to improve teaching and learning.

Balanced Literacy programming exemplifies the quality literacy instruction needed for each student in each classroom. Effective problem solving, metacognition and critical thinking are hallmarks of the skills required in today's world. These skills are developed by students as they are engaged in becoming increasingly literate in Balanced Literacy classrooms. The successful results of students, the continued demand from teachers and principals and the responsive nature of Reading Specialists come together to ensure a bright future for Balanced Literacy programming and bright futures for all.

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