

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 25, 2008

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Improving Student Achievement at Strathcona High School

ORIGINATOR: H. Van Ginhoven, Principal

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

Strathcona High School, located in south Edmonton, serves a student population of 1,438. It is a district site for the Learning Disabled and German bilingual programs. Strathcona High School is the second largest Advanced Placement program in Canada where students have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses in Studio Art, Biology, Calculus, Chemistry, English, Environmental Science, French, German, Physics and Social Studies.

Supporting All Students

Strathcona staff work collaboratively to support all students, with a focus on students at risk of not completing high school. This work begins the moment students enter Grade 10. A transition program for all Grade 10 students provides assistance in developing effective academic and social strategies, as well as early identification of students at risk. The staff believe the success of this program is directly related to the ongoing collaborative work between junior high and senior high staffs and with parents. An additional support program, the "Scona Connection", coaches a team of students to act as facilitators for the transition of Grade 10 students into high school. This program prepares students to assume greater responsibilities for decision-making through the building of relationships with Grade 11 and 12 students.

Strathcona staff work collaboratively to provide a learning environment where students are given the skills to become global citizen and leaders of the 21st Century. One size does not fit all and therefore multiple opportunities for learning are offered. For example, students in search of challenge and rigor to engage their thinking have selected the Advanced Placement (AP) program, which offers students the opportunity to work rapidly through prescribed Alberta curriculum to allow time for the Advanced Placement curriculum. Teachers in this program emphasize higher order thinking skills for a large portion of instructional time. Over and above the regular teacher, students are fortunate to have frequent exposure to experts of international repute during the course of their three high school years. In this way they are well prepared for university.

Other students become engaged through enrolment in Languages Other Than English (LOTE) courses. Research shows that students who are fluent in two languages score higher in a variety of literacy and numeracy tests. Students who pass the international diploma examinations in French and Spanish receive an international diploma to certify their language skills and to receive international accreditation. German Language and Literature students will also have the opportunity to write the Sprachdiplom (German Language Diploma), entitling them to one year of free university education in Germany.

Collaborative Learning for Teachers

Although the various program offerings at Strathcona High School are one way to engage students, staff also understand the importance of differentiating instruction within programs and within classrooms. Therefore, staff have selected differentiated instruction as the area of instructional improvement, in keeping with the belief that one size does not fit all learning. To model their belief, staff themselves are also involved in a variety of differentiated professional learning opportunities, based on interest and learning needs. Staff are currently learning in flexible groups: within departments, across departments, and with staff from other schools. Within these groups, they have selected (based on interest and learning need) from a range of topics related to differentiated instruction: homework, student learning styles, ethnic background, integrating special needs students, reading instruction across the content areas, effective assessment practices, and leadership. Through an action research-based approach, staff collectively formulated next steps regarding best practices, implemented the practices and reflected on the results of the implementation of these practices on student learning. To support learning about and implementation of differentiated instruction, the entire staff, along with several other district high schools, attended a professional development day focused on *Engaging Students through Differentiated Instruction* with Dr. Vera Blake.

At Strathcona High School, there is a great deal of pride in the continued excellence in learning. Through the offering of varied learning opportunities for students, coupled with the support of committed teachers who model lifelong learning, in a collaborative environment that builds strong and trusting relationships, the promise of bright futures can be realized.