

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 4, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Abbott School: Writing In Order To Communicate Clearly and Reflect Organized Thought

ORIGINATOR: D. Michailides, Principal, Abbott School

RESOURCE

STAFF: Julie Barker, Christine Fraser, Aaron Muller, Sheila Tingley, Kathy Toope

INFORMATION

Abbott School is located in the heart of Beverly in northeast Edmonton. Approximately 85% of the students live in multi-family housing, with approximately 15% of our students coming from single-family homes. Transiency rate in the school ranges from 90-100% making continuity for students a school-wide challenge. According to the district's ranking of high socio-economic needs schools, Abbott has dropped from the fourth highest needs school to the eighth.

Abbott serves a diverse population of approximately 230 – 250 students in the regular program kindergarten to grade six. In addition Abbott offers full day kindergarten, and programming for students with learning disabilities in the Strategies Program. School-wide challenges include dealing with low rates of literacy, poverty, attendance and high evidence of special needs. Through Aboriginal education, a Native Liaison worker supports our Aboriginal students in dealing with attendance, educational and social issues. Additional support for these students is being provided through the Ben Calf-Robe Society's Aboriginal Head Start program, Mother Earth and Me, and ABC Head Start.

Abbott School is provided with a full time on site community developer coordinator and a family therapist through the support of the United Way, Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Family Centre through the Partners For Kids program. Due to the diverse needs of our school community, we continue to develop partnerships with many other community businesses and agencies in order to promote public education and to support the high expectations for academic and social excellence for all our students.

In the fall of 2001, in-depth work on establishing a school-wide instructional focus began at Abbott. An extensive review of Highest Level of Achievement Tests (HLATs), provincial and school data indicated that students at Abbott were not attaining desired levels of achievement in writing in comparison to the rest of the district and province. The staff reflected on their students and their teaching practices and made the decision to challenge and maximize the potential of all students in writing. Out of this process the following statement of our focus for Abbott emerged:

At Abbott School, parents, staff, students and community members will work together to improve achievement levels for all students in writing. Students' writing will communicate ideas clearly and reflect organized thought. Growth will be measured by the results of the Alberta Learning Achievement Tests, HLATs and school wide writing assessments.

Peter Senge emphasizes the importance of an organization working towards similar goals. Therefore, we established an Instructional Leadership Team of ten staff members. The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS) funding enabled us to have all staff trained in Balanced Literacy and we were able to maintain a Reading Recovery Program. To assist us with our focus on writing, we established our best practices, using the acronym "**W.R.I.T.E.**":

- **W**hen we write at Abbott we use what we know and have experienced
- **R**ubrics and exemplars
- **I**nclude graphic organizers
- **T**he writing process
- **E**xcellent literature to read

Simply developing an acronym to display our focus was not enough and it became obvious we were not living our focus. Improving student achievement meant we had to look at our teaching practices, stop doing what was great and concentrate on implementing only excellent teaching strategies. Balanced Literacy and all of its aspects fit perfectly into the instructional focus framework, and although we saw improvements in reading scores, the program did not appear to have the same impact in improving writing skills.

Through the recommendation of the assistant principal and our reading specialist, the staff decided to become trained in *6+1 Traits of Writing Program*. This inservicing allowed staff to reflect on their writing practices, identify areas of need in student writing and empower students to take ownership in making the changes necessary to increase achievement. Assessment for learning practices included in this program not only changed our students' attitude towards writing but it also delivered a powerful message to our staff who now feel that they are better teachers of writing. The assessment tool from this program is now incorporated in other subject areas and is used in students' self-reflection and evaluation of their behaviour, effort and attitudes.

Throughout this school year, staff tracked student performance on the three of six writing traits: ideas, organization and word choice. Staff felt these three areas provided students with the necessary first steps in evaluating and improving their writing. If students are able look at their own writing with a critical eye, they then have the tools necessary to make improvements in their writing. Our school assessments show that students are making gains and we are anxious to see the results of the HLATs and provincial achievement tests.

The *6 + 1 Traits of Writing Program* has been the thread that has helped us tie the instructional focus framework together. It has provided staff with excellent tools to perfect their craft and assist us in achieving superb results from all students.

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