

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 23, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees
FROM: E. Schmidt, Acting Superintendent of Schools
SUBJECT: Eye See...Eye Learn Program: A Partnership
ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Executive Director
RESOURCE
STAFF: Karen Bardy, Gloria Chalmers, Margaretha Ebbers

INFORMATION

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Background: The Alberta Association of Optometrists developed the *Eye See...Eye Learn Early Childhood Eye Health and Vision Awareness Program*. The Association has received endorsement for this program from Alberta Children's Services, Health and Wellness and Education and pilot funding through Children's Services for a three year period ending March 2007. They have introduced this program in the jurisdictions surrounding Edmonton and had an independent study conducted on their initial pilot in Elk Island Public Schools. The study provided evidence in support of extending the program to other jurisdictions. In this third year of the program, the Association felt ready to implement it in a large urban board and to learn what is required for success in such a setting.

The Program: The program was developed as an early intervention and prevention strategy. Because current statistics tell us that fewer than 20 per cent of children in Alberta have an eye exam before entering school and 25 per cent of students kindergarten to grade 6 have vision deficiencies, prevention and early intervention was deemed to be necessary. The program has the potential to help identify vision disorders at an early age when some disorders can be corrected and to avoid issues due to uncorrected vision problems.

The program involves informing schools, specifically elementary principals and kindergarten teachers, kindergarten children and their parents/guardians of the importance of early eye examinations. Every effort has been made to eliminate or minimize extra work for teachers, to develop a process that is easy to follow. Each kindergarten teacher in participating schools receives a binder with information and activities related to vision and an information package for forwarding to parents. The information for parents advises about the importance of early screening, that eye examinations are at no cost as they are fully covered by Alberta Health and Wellness and that those children found to require glasses receive one free pair of eyeglasses.

The Partnership: The Association will provide binders, parent information packages, staff information and a staff member to help coordinate the program implementation. As needed, they will provide information about the location of optometrists and ophthalmologists by

geographic areas to facilitate parents/guardians accessing this service close to home. They will translate key information into six languages to support broad involvement of parents/guardians. As noted previously, they will be providing one free pair of eyeglasses to kindergarten children found to require glasses.

The district, through the programs unit, will liaise with the Association, provide information on locations of kindergarten programs, numbers in each program and ensure effective communication with district staff.

The Implementation Plan: Schools are being advised of this program through this board report and, subsequently, through the Superintendent's Memo. The distribution of parent information packages is scheduled for October 2006 in recognition that September is too busy a month to introduce such a program.

Conclusion: The district is pleased that the Alberta Association of Optometrists chose Edmonton Public to pilot its urban implementation. The district, some years ago, in collaboration with Capital Health offered a similar program to students in a few selected high needs schools. We know from this experience that this did result in a number of our students having vision problems addressed in a timely manner. Additionally, our work with our schools and community regarding at risk students informs us that a significant percentage of these children and youth have sight and hearing issues. This program will enable us to at least respond to the vision needs at the kindergarten level.