

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 24, 2005

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Windsor Park School – Focus on Achievement

ORIGINATOR: W. Thurber Gratton, Principal, Windsor Park School

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

Windsor Park School is located in south west Edmonton in close proximity to the University of Alberta. The school has a population of 173 students in kindergarten to grade six. The school maintains one class at each grade. Achievement results are consistently excellent and there is a close working relationship between students, staff, parents and the community.

The instructional focus work on excellence in writing has been ongoing since the 2001 school year. At that time, staff reviewed district and provincial exams and decided that with the high ability level of students, more students should be attaining the proficient and excellent levels of performance in their writing. The writing results were analyzed on a grade by grade basis and best practices were selected that could increase the quality of student writing in all genres and in other subject areas.

In 2001, the following instructional focus statement was developed:

A school-wide effort to have all Windsor Park Students show measurable growth in their ability to write expertly in a variety of genres through the implementation of a school wide writing process program as measured by school performance based writing assessments, Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT) in writing and provincial achievement tests.

With the instructional leadership team (ILT), teacher-librarian and consultant leadership, teachers began to address this statement by developing a consistent writing program that teachers would use to teach the writing process across all grades. It was believed that this would create continuity throughout the grades and develop a common vocabulary about teaching and learning the writing process. The best practices staff selected were: making connections between reading and writing by using quality literature; selecting vocabulary that demonstrates effective word choices for the form, purpose and audience of a writing piece; and organizing ideas. The first interim measure used to monitor student progress related to writing was administered twice during the 2001-2002 school year. The HLAT writing rubric was used to judge the grade and performance levels of student writing. The interim measure data indicated the best practices resulted in positive gains in student writing.

After three years, staff noted a plateau in the number of students increasing their performance levels. Students had met or surpassed the goals set for writing performance levels. Last year staff reviewed the 2003-2004 internal and external results with a consultant from student assessment. One hundred per cent of division one students and 99 per cent of division two students were writing at or beyond grade level. Sixty-nine point five per cent of students were writing at the proficient or excellent level. From this analysis and discussion, it was determined that staff could impact student learning in an additional way while continuing to focus on effectively teaching the writing process. Staff agreed that students would benefit from being more actively engaged in their learning. Staff adopted best practices related to student involvement in assessment for learning whereby students are learning how to establish criteria for assignments and master a variety of revision strategies.

The interim measure changed from teachers evaluating the writing prompt to students assessing their own writing using a rubric and criteria they had participated in creating. Students were taught a variety of revision strategies to apply to their draft piece. Aside from the fact that the students' ability to accurately assess their writing increased from 38 per cent to 52 per cent this year, teachers observed that students were much more willing to re-write when they were involved in the criteria development and assessment. Results from the 2004-2005 school year will show whether or not this work has impacted overall student achievement in writing.

For 2005-2006, staff plan to continue to focus on excellence in writing and student involvement in assessment for learning strategies. Through ILT leadership and partnering with other schools, staff plan to increase teacher understanding of assessment for learning best practices and refine the ability to teach children how to be the best writers possible. Staff are also continuing to find ways to integrate effective writing practices into other subject areas. Windsor Park's professional development plans for next year are related to these goals.

Parents are very supportive of the direction the school is taking and both students and teachers are enthusiastic and positive about the results thus far. The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement support for the instructional focus work on excellence in writing has impacted the quality of student writing. It has also allowed teaching staff the collaborative time and professional development opportunities to work together to provide students with many writing and assessment strategies to apply across the curriculum areas. This learning will be of great benefit to students as they move to junior and senior high with excellent writing skills and confidence in their ability to recognize and address their strengths and weaknesses.

WTB:gj