

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 25, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Athlone School: Student Instructional Leadership Team

ORIGINATOR: S. Stoddard, Principal, Athlone School

RESOURCE
STAFF: Hugh Albo, Shirley Gresik, Phyllis Reynolds, Bryan Sonnichsen,
Dave Tomaszewski

INFORMATION

Athlone School, located in northeast Edmonton, serves a diverse student population of 230 students in Kindergarten to grade six. It is a district site for the Behavior and Learning Assistance Program. According to the district's ranking of high socio-economic needs schools, Athlone is 24th. School-wide challenges include dealing with low rates of literacy and high evidence of special needs and "at risk" students.

Identification of our instructional focus began in the winter of 2001, following a professional development session that was organized by Principal Support Group One. Immediately following this in-service, the staff at Athlone began to dialogue about the seven areas of focus. Much of the discussion centered on the analysis of our achievement test results and the identification of school-wide strengths and weaknesses. The analysis of our results, coupled with a desire to improve student achievement, led to the establishment of an instructional focus in the area of literacy. While initially, much of the dialogue centered around narrowing our focus, i.e. focusing on reading comprehension or the writing process, the staff determined that reading and writing could not, and should not be separated. Collectively the staff believed that a broad focus on literacy was what our achievement data indicated would be of most value to our students and the key to overall academic improvement. The following statement, developed during the 2001-2002 school year, expresses our focus:

ATHLONE SCHOOL'S INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS

A school-wide coordinated effort ensuring **all** Athlone students
show growth in their literacy skills across **all** subject areas.

Measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highest Level of Achievement Tests• Provincial Achievement Tests• Teacher Observation• Student Work• School Generated Measures in reading comprehension and writing	Teaching Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balanced Literacy Strategies<ul style="list-style-type: none">Word componentReading componentWriting component• Higher level questioning strategies• Test Taking Skills• Engaging Parents/Community as partners in learning
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Following the establishment of our instructional focus, a targeted professional development plan was identified to build expertise in balanced literacy. This plan included ongoing inservicing, onsite coaching, and collaboration.

In addition, internal assessment measures were established for both reading comprehension and writing. A reading assessment, which measures the skills of analyzing, synthesizing, sequencing, inferring and associating meaning, is provided to all students. As well, students are provided writing prompts to assess their writing skills. These internal measures are given to all students every eight weeks. Results from these internal measures are used to drive practice in the classrooms. These results are used as an assessment for learning tool.

Athlone School has taken a variety of other steps to ensure that our instructional focus drives our practice. The instructional leadership team, with staff input, developed a protocol for looking at student work. All staff engages in this collaborative process on an ongoing basis and uses the feedback as a means of improving professional practice. An observation tool, which incorporates all the strategies of balanced literacy, has been developed to assist teachers in their observation and peer coaching sessions. A variety of other collaborative initiatives are taking place at the school on an ongoing basis. The staff at Athlone School would say that collaboration is what is moving the instructional focus work forward.

Both internal and external assessments show that our students have made incredible achievement gains over the past three years. Our achievement is consistently higher than district and provincial averages in all areas. Such was certainly not the case prior to the instructional focus work. In addition, we have also met and exceeded our internal measure targets. It is our belief that achievement gains can be attributed to an environment focused on student success, high expectations, embedded professional development, and collaborative engagement of staff, parents and the community in the instructional focus area.

While achievement gains were evident, there was concern that students were somewhat left out of the instructional focus work. Without student engagement, we recognize that our results have not yet been realized. With that in mind, a student instructional leadership team, comprised of one student from each class, was developed. This team of students helps other students in their class understand our best practices, interpret achievement data and use the data to set classroom and school wide goals. This team has truly had an impact on ensuring the data collected is used as an assessment for learning tool. We believe it is this student engagement that will allow each and everyone of our students to achieve their full potential.

The totality of all these efforts, carried out by a strong and highly skilled staff is, we believe, key to establishing our environment for success and achieving superb results from all students.