

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Patricia Heights School - Focus on Writing

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RESOURCE  
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### INFORMATION

Patricia Heights School, located in west Edmonton, serves a student population of 285 students in Grades K–6. Overall, achievement results at Patricia Heights are consistently strong.

Identification of our instructional focus began in the spring of the 2001 school year. Work leading up to the definition of our instructional focus began with an examination of our achievement results. With strong results overall, we focused on the fact that the number of students achieving the standard of excellence in reading in grades 3 and 6 was significantly higher than the number who achieved the standard of excellence in writing. Our discussion led us to some in-depth exploration about what makes for a high quality writing program. In addition to their writing in language arts, we also wanted to make sure that our students could write clearly about what they were learning in other subject areas. We felt this would help them clarify their thinking and deepen their understanding.

In September 2001 the following statement was developed to express our focus on writing:

*Our instructional focus is a whole school coordinated effort to have all Patricia Heights students show measurable growth in their ability to write competently for a variety of purposes and audiences through a school wide focus on writing. Student growth will be measured by school wide writing samples, the HLAT writing task in May, and the provincial achievement test.*

Using the eight expectations in the “Supporting Teaching and Learning” framework, we moved ahead quickly that year in the development work for our focus on writing. An Instructional Leadership Team was formed to set direction and provide leadership in our work. We decided that, in addition to the provincial achievement tests and the Edmonton Public School’s Higher Level of Achievement Tests, we would develop a school - wide writing measure to be administered three times a year with the administration of it paralleling the Higher Level of Achievement writing test. Ways to measure and evaluate student work were explored and eventually developed for all grades K-6. Goals for student growth were set relative to all three measures.

We focused on building a strong collaborative team of teachers to ensure that we were moving together towards the attainment of the goals we set. This also helped us build the commonality of programming across all grade levels that is an important part of a school wide focus. Through a collaborative process called Looking at Student Work we analyzed individual pieces of writing produced by our students and discussed next steps for growth in writing. During the 2003-04 school year we added monthly Study Group Meetings to provide increased opportunities for teachers to work together on literacy programming at our school.

Teachers identified well-researched practices for providing a quality writing program that we believed would define the writing program at our school. Through collaborative effort and with the leadership of the Instructional Leadership Team, five statements were developed to capture these best practices and to represent our beliefs about the teaching of writing. Each of these statements encompasses a number of very specific strategies that I will refer to in my presentation. Each year, one of the statements is selected for in – depth discussion, experimentation, and development to increase our expertise in using these strategies.

Our focus last year on the use of children’s literature led to increased knowledge and skills in the use of children’s literature to improve writing. We also examined our practices for our independent reading program, particularly in division 2, with the result that our students became more avid readers and more knowledgeable readers and writers. Our students know that good writers are good readers. Selections from children’s literature have become models for demonstrating powerful writing to our students.

This year we have chosen to focus on our statement “Students use writing to develop and extend their thinking.” We are exploring a variety of strategies to help our students use writing to extend their thinking and learning in all content areas. In September, we worked with a math consultant to explore writing in mathematics to extend mathematical understanding. Several teachers are registered in professional development modules on “Reading and Writing in Mathematics”. They will be sharing the strategies they learn at our next Professional Development Day when we will focus on successful writing strategies for the content areas.

In this the fourth year of our Instructional Focus on Writing, we are still learning about teaching the art of writing. We have added the study of the Six Write Traits as a new tool to be incorporated into our writing program. We will continue to learn more about this approach in collaborative teams through our Study Groups. What is truly exciting for us is the fact that we are a community of learners working together as a staff to discover how to make the greatest difference for every one of our students. Our achievement results consistently show the impact this work is having on the achievement of our students. Our instructional focus work has given us the structure and the impetus to move that learning forward.

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