

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 11, 2005

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Mary Butterworth School – Focus on Reading Comprehension

ORIGINATOR: J. Bayly, Principal, Mary Butterworth School

RESOURCE  
STAFF: Susan Tywoniuk, Darren Park, Camille Loken

### INFORMATION

Mary Butterworth School, located in north-central Edmonton, serves a student population of 592 students. It is a district site for Literacy, Opportunity, and Behaviour and Learning Assistance students.

In the spring of 2001, the staff made a decision to initiate an instructional focus on reading comprehension as the most effective means of improving instruction and student achievement. This decision was based on an examination of historical Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT) results, grade nine Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) results and teacher-awarded marks.

Teachers were involved in staff professional development sessions that supported the implementation of highly effective, research based reading comprehension strategies such as: Pre-Reading Strategies, Graphic Organizers, Vocabulary Development, Identifying Main Ideas and Supporting Detail. In addition, the staff developed a highly focused Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) program that integrated personal reading with reading activities based on character development.

The staff believes that the strong focus on reading comprehension across all subject areas and the strong commitment to improved academic success resulted in increased student achievement. The HLAT results and PAT results demonstrate an impressive improvement over a five year period. In addition, on both the student and staff attitude survey results, questions pertinent to learning and focus on achievement reveal extremely positive attitudes about the strong focus on achievement and learning in the school.

After working with a reading comprehension focus for four years, the staff are now refining teaching strategies and skills by extending the professional development activities into the area of assessment.

In the spring of 2005, a three-school partnership was formed with Rosslyn, Westminster and Mary Butterworth schools. The 85 teachers from the three schools will participate in common monthly workshops and common professional development days in order to learn new strategies and skills about student assessment. This type of in-servicing provides teachers

with the opportunity to spend a month at a time trying out new strategies prior to coming together for follow-up sessions where they discuss how the new strategy worked for them, how students reacted and how to refine the strategy. This cycle of building expertise, ensuring change in practice, monitoring and communicating is continually repeated with a new facet of assessment being introduced every month.

The teachers of all three schools are also involved in Instructional Walk-throughs, using a structured protocol. The overall thrust of the walkthroughs is to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching through observation, providing feedback and using this data to plan next steps.

Current research by Davies, Black and Wiliam, by Chappuis, Stiggins, and Archer, indicates that job embedded professional development and peer mentoring is the most effective method of improving the quality of teaching.

At Mary Butterworth School, we will continue to improve the quality of teaching through job embedded professional development to achieve superb results from all students.

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Sources:

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Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment (1998), Paul Black & Dylan Wiliam, King’s College publication