

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 12, 1999

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dossdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: A School-Wide Literacy Focus Improves Student Achievement at Mount Pleasant School

ORIGINATOR: C. Corothers, Principal, Mount Pleasant School

RESOURCE

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INFORMATION

Mount Pleasant School, located centrally on the southside of Edmonton, serves 360 students from Kindergarten to Grade 6. The school offers a Mainstream program, is a district site for children with behavior difficulties, and is home to the Cogito Alternative program which is in its fifth year of operation.

A multi-track school faces many challenges in creating a unified and coordinated focus. Common threads that contribute to the success of Mount Pleasant school's growing reputation is a focus on high expectations for academic excellence and an emphasis on the importance of literacy. All staff in the school have embraced this emphasis which has contributed enormously to student success in reading, writing, spelling, penmanship and the proper use of grammar.

The Mainstream program is in its third year of using the Balanced Literacy approach from Kindergarten to Grade 6. This approach emphasizes a balance among the five general outcomes that comprise language arts, and focuses on each child's achievement level through strategies such as direct, whole-class, and small-group instruction. Four blocks of language instruction are provided daily and focus on word recognition, guided reading, self-selected reading, written expression, and spelling. Associated literacy strategies such as listening, speaking and viewing are integrated into content area subjects.

The Cogito program uses the "Open Court" literature series, and the Spelling Road to Reading and Thinking Program" as the primary Language Arts resources in Kindergarten to Grade 6. The "Writing and Spelling Road to Reading and Thinking Program" is an intense phonetics course where students learn the sound-symbol relationship of letters. The printed language is presented as a series of phonograms, each

of which represents one of the component sounds of a spoken word. The teaching strategy is multi-sensory in a whole group/teacher directed setting, whereby students view, hear, speak and write the English phonograms. From phonograms, students progress to writing words and sentences. English grammar rules are introduced and taught. The accumulation of this knowledge assists students in reading and decoding unfamiliar words and in specific writing assignments. Precise techniques for good handwriting are taught and proper writing posture is emphasized. The Open Court series provides students with challenging literature that enhances student reading comprehension.

For the past three years, a staff member has used her Reading Recovery training to work with lower achieving 6 year old children in first and second grade who are having difficulty learning to read and write. Children meet individually with the teacher for 30 minutes each day for an average of 12-20 weeks. The goal is for the children to develop effective reading and writing strategies. During this relatively short-term intervention, these children make faster than average progress so that they can catch up with their peers and continue to work on their own in the regular classroom.

The success of the school-wide literacy focus on student achievement can be attributed to several factors:

- staff mentoring, collaboration and inservicing
- continuity of approach to teaching literacy within each program
- school-wide focus on a common goal of improving student writing
- continuity of resources and materials used in each program from K to Gr. 6
- parental support
- student familiarity with common routines and expectations in each approach

In our presentation, we will highlight some specifics of each of the approaches used in our school. In addition, we will share some of our results and why we are convinced that our school-wide vision of students being successful readers and writers is being achieved.

CC:jj