

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 6, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Kate Chegwin's Instructional Focus: Higher Order Thinking Skills

ORGINATOR: L. Parker, Principal, Kate Chegwin School

RESOURCE: Linda Bartett Satinder Bhatti, Harnaik Dhaliwal, Linda Larose,  
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INFORMATION

Kate Chegwin School serves the educational needs of 538 students in grades 7-9 in the Ridgewood community (Mill Woods). In addition to regular programming, it is also a district site for a Behaviour Assistance Program. Within our community there is a high degree of multi-cultural representation with many students having English as their second language.

Over the past few years, all Edmonton Public Schools have been developing specific instructional strategies designed to address areas of learning where students are achieving at less than their full potential. In our particular situation, the implementation of the Instructional Focus at Kate Chegwin began in August 2001. An analysis of school based test results, HLAT's and Provincial Achievement results over the past few years indicated our students are experiencing difficulty with tasks in which they are asked to:

- Apply learned material in new situations;
- Analyze material, compare, contrast, draw conclusions or make inferences about that material;
- Synthesize/reorganize information to form new structures or patterns, make predictions, develop ideas more fully; and,
- Evaluate, verify or critique the value of material for a given purpose.

The implications were clear, our teaching staff needed to place greater emphasis on the development of our students' ability to extend their thinking beyond the basic understanding of the subject content being studied. To achieve this objective, the staff began utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking Skills as one of many strategies to be implemented in our efforts to fully develop these skills in our students.

*Through a school-wide effort, all Kate Chegwin students will show measurable growth in their ability to demonstrate higher order thinking skills. Indicators of success will include Provincial Achievement Tests, HLAT Reading Tests and a variety of school developed assessment tools, including common term exams.*

The greatest challenge over the past year has been to provide continuity in implementing our instructional focus. As a new to district principal administrator and key member of the Instructional Leadership Team, this challenge was compounded by a significant turnover in staffing. Bridging last year's work with this year was a critical first step in moving forward the Instructional Focus work. In order to ensure success for all stakeholders, it was crucial to create an environment that recognized and rewarded excellence, caring and accountability.

Over the past school year, the school Instructional Leadership Team developed and implemented a process whereby staff completed a critical examination of our chosen school improvement strategies. The primary objective of this exercise was to ensure staff members unanimously supported our school plan and possessed the requisite knowledge base to understand and implement each initiative. Engaging in this exercise has solidified our commitment to the plan and has served to increase all staff members' level of understanding regarding the implementation of Higher Order Thinking Skills.

### **Process for Implementation**

#### *a) Background Information*

Developing a thorough understanding of the district initiative and the work performed last year was instrumental in gaining acceptance of the initiatives by all staff members.

#### *b) Work in Progress*

More fully understanding the breadth and depth of the district initiative allowed us to set more meaningful parameters and provide criteria for the implementation of our school plan. A sampling of the strategies and experiences that we have successfully implemented include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Data analysis of achievement exams; identification of areas of weaknesses/ strengths in our students; staff collaboration time; setting goals/objectives for the ILT; developing a common vocabulary; aligning our resources; regular collection and group analysis of student work; Best Practice Breakfast Club meetings; utilizing district consultants; accessing professional development offered by the district; engaging parents: newsletters, bulletin board displays, and regular school council presentations.
- The use of Bloom's Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking in all aspects of teaching and learning.

*This best practice enables both teachers and students to become aware of and practice thinking/questioning skills that require knowledge comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In other words, we learn how to learn.*

- School Wide Literacy Program during which students engage in literacy based activities that develop and enhance higher order thinking skills.

*This best practice provides time each day for students to receive instruction and practice in understanding, locating, and using information from a variety of sources. As they develop these skills, they develop the potential to become life long learners.*

- An assembly was held on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003 introducing Kate Chegwin's instructional focus to the student body. "*HOT SHOTS*" (*Students with Higher Order Thinking Skills*) was presented with a PowerPoint presentation showing how students have been using Higher Order Thinking in their everyday lives, whether it is at school or in the community.

c) *Planning for success*

The successful implementation of the instructional focus will result in two positive outcomes:

- Significant improvement in student achievement.
- Recognition by all staff members of the need to continually engage in activities that will improve personal practice.

### **Further Implementation Required**

Reflection and critical examination of our Instructional focus strategies will be conducted on an ongoing basis. Input, solicited from students, parents and teachers, will be used to modify and strengthen our plan as required. Finally, more clearly defining the parameters of our school improvement plan will provide us with specific information with respect to the current and future implementation of our instructional focus across the curriculum.

The staff of Kate Chegwin School strongly believe the pursuit of excellence through the stimulation of intellectual curiosity and the development of higher order thinking skills will ultimately empower our students to become responsible and productive citizens. We believe all students and teachers must be provided with meaningful guidance, support and a challenging environment if true change is to occur. We also believe that risk-taking, dedication and hard work are key ingredients of successful school improvement. It is our desire to develop and sustain an environment that allows for these attributes to flourish.

“You cannot have students as continuous learners and effective collaborators, without teachers having the same characteristics.”

-Professional Learning Communities at Work, Richard Dufour and Robert Eaker

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