DATE: February 5, 2019

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Strategic Plan Update: Literacy

ORIGINATOR: Nancy Petersen, Managing Director, Strategic District Supports

**RESOURCE
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ISSUE
The purpose of this Strategic Plan Update report is to provide the Board of Trustees with an overview of the data, strategies and initiatives used in support of high quality teaching and learning of literacy, highlighting the District's work around Literacy Foundations.

BACKGROUND
In 2018, Edmonton Public Schools formally reaffirmed the District Strategic Plan for the 2018-2022 term. The District Strategic Plan has three priority areas with supporting goals and outcomes. The plan provides common direction and alignment between the work of the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent of Schools and District staff. The plan serves as the foundation for a District culture of evidence-based decision making, assurance and accountability.

To demonstrate the District's commitment to transparency and accountability, Strategic Plan Update reports were introduced in 2016–2017 as an extension of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR). The reports are intended to provide the Board of Trustees with detailed progress towards the goals and outcomes of our Strategic Plan.

CURRENT SITUATION
This Strategic Plan Update report reflects the work in support of high quality teaching and learning of literacy and is in direct response to Priority 1 Goal 2 of the 2018-2022 District Strategic Plan, P1 G2: More students demonstrate growth and achieve student learning outcomes with a specific focus on literacy and numeracy.

KEY POINTS
This Strategic Plan Update report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of work in support of literacy, highlighting the District's work around Literacy Foundations.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES
ATTACHMENT I   Strategic Plan Update: Literacy

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EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Strategic Plan Update:

Literacy

February 5, 2019

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INTRODUCTION

This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an update on the District's efforts in support of literacy. Priority 1 of the 2018-2022 District Strategic Plan calls for the District to foster growth and success for every student by supporting their journey from early learning through high school completion and beyond. The Outcome of Priority 1 Goal 2 of the 2018-2022 District Strategic Plan sets the direction that more students will demonstrate growth and achieve student learning outcomes, with a specific focus on literacy and numeracy.

Literacy is the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct and communicate meaning in all aspects of daily living. Along with numeracy, students need strong literacy skills to learn across subject areas and to navigate and make meaning in an increasingly complex and technology-driven world. With this is mind, schools and catchments, in collaboration with central, are very intentional in the area of literacy instruction.

There are many approaches to how schools across the District respond to the literacy learning needs of the students they serve. One way the District supports building teacher capacity in the area of literacy that has resonated across catchments, is through the Literacy Foundations professional learning series. Literacy Foundations is an intentional, research-based, comprehensive approach to literacy instruction designed to support teachers in teaching literacy across all subject areas.

This report outlines the data, strategies and initiatives that staff of Edmonton Public Schools are using in support of high quality teaching and learning of literacy, highlighting the work around Literacy Foundations.

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

The District uses data to inform decisions about literacy teaching and learning supports. This data, which includes both provincial and District-gathered data, tells a story of growth and opportunity.

The District's Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) results for Grades 6 and 9 and the Diploma results for Grade 12 (Appendix I) provide the opportunity to analyze District trends in student achievement year-over-year and long term. These results serve as an indicator for measuring growth in literacy; however, the District is mindful that the impact of growth in literacy serves as a foundation to support growth across subject areas. The District's Highest Level of Achievement test for writing (HLATs) and grade level in reading reporting (Appendix I) reflect a District perspective as well as provide schools with data to inform progress and programming for individual students. Key results related to these data sets include:

Grades 6 and 9 English Language Arts PATs
- The District has experienced an 18.7 per cent growth in the number of students writing the Grade 6 PATs over the past five years. Not only are there more students participating in the exam, District enrolment data shows us that this cohort is a more complex demographic of learners. Despite this increased complexity, the District has been able to maintain and even slightly increase both acceptable standard and standard of excellence results.
- There has been an increase in the number of Grade 9 students challenging the exam (14 per cent) and a decrease in the performance of the Grade 9 cohort.
  - Results of the Grade 9 English Language Arts PAT signal the importance of the District-wide Focus on Reading and the efforts to expand this focus into junior high and high school.

English Diploma Exams
- There is an increase in the number of students who are challenging both English 30 diploma 30-1 (5.7 per cent) and 30-2 exams (0.7 per cent).
- The District is seeing improvement at both the standard of excellence and acceptable standard on both exams.
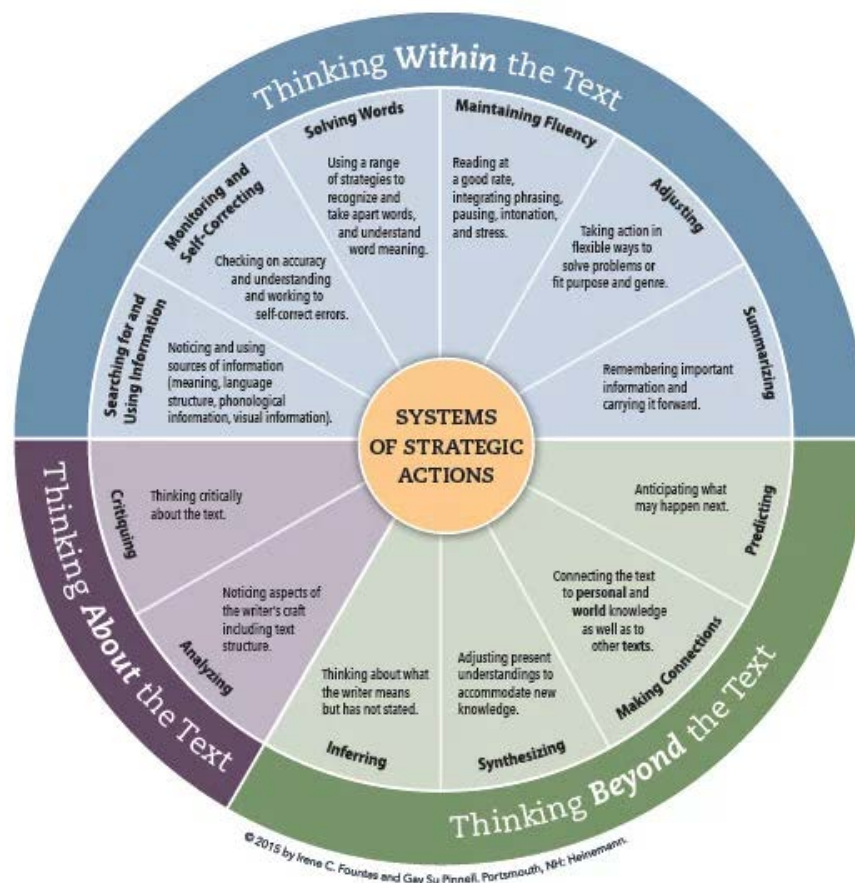
Grade Level in Reading Reporting

- Beginning in 2015-2016, through the District-wide Focus on Reading, schools began to report grade level reading results centrally for students in Grades 1-6 relative to the Alberta Education Programs of Study.
  - This collection of reading level data is currently extending into junior high, with the long-term plan to have District reading level data for students in Grades 1-12; June 2018 saw the reporting of Grade 7 students and June 2019 will see the addition of Grade 8 students.
- Currently this data primarily serves to support teachers working with individual students; as this data set matures it will also inform a District perspective around student reading.

District Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT) for Writing

- Each year, students in Grades 1-9 participate in the HLAT - a locally developed writing assessment.
- The District has seen a downward trend in HLAT results, reinforcing the need for the District's focus on high-quality teaching and learning in the area of literacy, with writing-focussed initiatives such as Writer's Workshop and collaborative work time for HLAT marking remaining important strategies continuing into the future.

TOPIC OF FOCUS: LITERACY FOUNDATIONS

As researchers have come to better understand the science behind a child's journey to becoming literate, the complexity of teaching and learning literacy has surfaced. Historically, the so-called "reading wars" often constructed an either/or paradigm between two traditional approaches - phonics versus whole language. Current research conclusively demonstrates that reading and writing are complex interrelated processes that require the combination of many skills to be successfully executed. The following diagram is one research-based construct demonstrating the complexity of literacy thinking as articulated through the work of Irene Fountas and Gay Pinnell[1]:

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[1] © 2015 by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. Portsmouth, NH; Heinemann.

Literacy Foundations is a District developed series of professional learning sessions for teachers designed to address the complexity of literacy learning and build teacher capacity around literacy instruction across grade levels and subject areas. It both deconstructs and surfaces the complexity of thinking involved in literacy learning through evidence-based practices, with each session reinforcing the others. Participating teachers are supported through training, coaching and collaboration to develop the knowledge and skill set to become confident teachers of literacy, regardless of their teaching assignment.

Literacy Foundations integrates practices and research from a variety of literacy models to construct a narrative of how to support the development and growth of literacy skills. While Literacy Foundations brings together many quality approaches to teaching literacy, its framework and instructional strategies do not replace or limit other effective approaches but rather complements them. There are many examples where teachers are able to integrate their learnings from Literacy Foundations alongside other proven approaches such as the Daily 5 or Empowering Writers. Teachers also improve their diagnostic skills to assess the multiple components of literacy, and thereby are able to provide targeted, differentiated programming, supports and interventions for their students. Within a school community, Literacy Foundations promotes the creation of a common vision and language and a sense of a shared responsibility for the literacy growth of all students.

Literacy Foundations was first offered as in-person professional learning in 2015-2016. The Literacy Foundations online module was introduced in 2017-2018. Literacy Foundations is also available as a summer institute course offering. To support a range of learning preferences, Literacy Foundations has a flexible delivery approach: teachers can begin with an online course (including video content modeling strategies, module handouts with research references, lesson planners and lesson samples), either individually or as part of school or catchment cohort. It also includes opportunities for classroom-embedded coaching, responding to classroom diversity and contextualizing to a particular subject area. Literacy Foundations has resonated as an effective model of professional learning, with schools from every catchment participating in this work. In 2017-2018, 162 teachers participated in Literacy Foundations. To date in 2018-2019, 161 teachers have participated in Literacy Foundations.

Literacy Foundations Professional Learning Series

The following is an overview of the Literacy Foundations professional learning series. Overarching to the intention of Literacy Foundations and woven throughout the learning series is the use of the gradual release of responsibility framework[2]. The framework sees the teacher beginning the learning through modelling the work, then begins to co-construct with the students, provides support for the students as they collaborate and then gradually moves away to allow for students to work independently. This approach is responsive and intended to be adjusted according to student learning needs.

The following table identifies the general theme and key learnings of each of the eight sessions in Literacy Foundations:

Session Topic	Key Learnings
1. Setting the Scene "All students can be engaged, successful readers"	• Explore the six elements of effective reading instruction. • Investigate researched practices in literacy instruction. • Review the gradual release of responsibility framework. • Build an understanding of how to create independent reading time in the classroom.

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[2] Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2008). *Better learning through structured teacher: A framework for the gradual release of responsibility*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD

2. Thinking Process "Students grow and evolve from an emergent reader to an expert reader"	• Learn about the areas of thinking that are foundational to reading comprehension. • Increase awareness of the interplay between thinking processes and reading comprehension skills. • Build capacity related to the role of *reader response* in literacy instruction.
3. Guiding the reading "Students build confidence and independence in reading"	• Build awareness of reading as a problem solving activity. • Learn how to set a purpose for reading, invite predictions, encourage discussion and affirm and explicitly teach effective strategies that can be applied to other texts. • Determine how to select appropriate instructional texts.
4. Reading instruction "Students learn strategies to develop fluent reading behaviours"	• Understand the interrelated components and processes of reading. • Learn how to prompt students and adjust instruction based on teacher observations and assessments.
5. Word Study "Students increase literacy skills by investigating and understanding patterns in words"	• Understand how word study evolves across the grade levels. • Develop word study strategies for supporting students.
6. Guiding the writing "Students build confidence and independence in writing"	• Learn how to support students from modeled writing through to shared and independent writing. • Build capacity related to writing for different purposes.
7. Text organization and writing "Students learn strategies to develop fluent writing behaviours"	• Build capacity around demonstrating how texts are organized to create a particular message and meaning. • Develop strategies to support students in organizing their own writing, by deconstructing and analyzing sample texts.
8. Reading and writing connections "Students develop literacy skills through differentiated programming"	• Explore sample case studies to develop formative assessment strategies. • Build capacity around using areas of strength and areas for growth to adjust programming for diverse learners.

Teachers can continue to build their literacy expertise by completing additional targeted professional learning sessions that expand on Literacy Foundations, such as:
• Building on Foundations: Assessment.
• Building on Foundations: Below Grade Level Reading and Writing.
• Building on Foundations: Vocabulary Development.

Literacy Foundations has also been differentiated to meet the unique needs of teachers and learners in the junior high context. For example, rather than word work there is a focus on vocabulary development specific to different subject areas. Other examples of junior high focus include:
• Vocabulary development reflecting a more sophisticated understanding of language structure and word origin.
• The professional learning has been designed to intentionally engage teachers across junior high subject areas.
• Fostering awareness that all junior high teachers support literacy development through all subject areas in different ways.

- Teachers learn to adjust their planning and resources for a wide range of student literacy levels, while working with the more complex content of junior high subject matter.

CONTINUING SUPPORTS AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Additional to Literacy Foundations, there are numerous other District, catchment and school Initiatives that promote quality teaching and learning in literacy instruction. To enhance central support of quality literacy teaching and learning, Curriculum and Resource Support accessed surplus dollars to fund six additional junior high literacy consultants. These consultants support the work of schools and catchments and the development of resources. Their work contributes to many of the initiatives listed below.

Collaborative School and Catchment Work

- Twelve out of 13 catchments had goals related to literacy as part of their collaborative catchment plans for 2017-2018. Using data to direct the work, these plans outlined a variety of literacy interventions, assessment tools and professional learning in which schools and catchments engaged to support the teaching and learning of literacy.
- Schools and catchments are building capacity in literacy assessment. This work includes:
  - Assessing whether students are reading at, above or below grade level (for the District-wide Focus on Reading).
  - Benchmark assessments (e.g., Fountas and Pinnell).
  - Collaborative HLAT marking.
  - Exploring the use of common English assessments.
  - Implementing junior high reading assessment tools.
  - Catchment-level communities of practice focused on literacy and supported through lead teachers and job-embedded professional learning.
  - Collaboration days for teachers of English 10-1, 10-2, 20-1, 20-2, 30-1 and 30-2 are scheduled throughout 2019.

Professional Learning

- Key professional learning for teachers and District leaders that further builds foundational and leadership knowledge and skills has been provided, including:
  - Leading Through Quality Literacy Programming.
  - Literacy Coaching: the Role of the Literacy Leader.
  - Deepening Literacy Development Through Inquiry and Project Based Learning.
  - Phonological Awareness for Emergent and Early Readers.
- In 2017-2018, Curriculum and Resource Support provided literacy professional learning to 3,083 teachers and 1,842 coaching visits; 241 teachers attended literacy-focused summer institutes in 2018.
- To date in 2018-2019, 1,453 teachers have attended literacy professional learning sessions, 251 teachers have received coaching and 45 have received support through consultations; this work includes targeted support for 109 literacy intervention teachers.
- In 2018-2019, a literacy teachers' community of practice for junior high was established and began meeting regularly to explore a culture of reading and best practices.

Supporting Resource Development

- Numerous resources to support literacy are under development, revision or are now available, including:
  - Reading Essentials: Considerations for Junior High Reading Instruction.
  - Key Characteristics of Grades 7, 8 and 9 Readers.
  - Resources to support literacy development in French Immersion and Bilingual programs.
  - High School Text Selection Conversations Video Series and Discussion Guide.
  - Sample Teacher Resources to Support Teaching and Learning in Elementary Language Arts.
  - Key Vocabulary to Support Mathematics: K-9 (also in French, Spanish and German).
  - Descriptions and Considerations for Informal Reading Inventories and Assessments: K-12.

- All junior high schools were provided with *Reading Essentials: Considerations for Junior High Reading Instruction* to support junior high teachers in developing students' reading skills in Language Arts and across the content areas.

Parent Supports
- Resources for parents continue to be developed and made available, including:
  - As part of the Junior High Online Resource Initiative, 20 junior high digital homework support videos, collaboratively designed by Grades 6 to 10 teachers, are currently under development to support literacy skills outside of the classroom. These resources will support both students and their parents.
  - The app for parents, EPSB Together, which is frequently updated with new K-12 literacy activities.
  - The "More Topics For Parents" section on the District website provides information and resources for parents, such as literacy tips sheets.

New Provincial Curriculum
- District resources and professional learning sessions to support literacy integration across subject areas are under development and will soon be available. These resources and sessions will include high-impact instructional approaches, strategies, resources and assessment practices that support literacy across curricular subjects.

NEXT STEPS

The District's work in support of literacy learning is a continuous journey as we strive to meet the diverse and varied literacy needs of all our students. Critical to the success of these efforts is the confidence and capacity of our staff. Professional learning that is anchored in evidence-based practices reflects the District's intentional efforts in support of quality teaching and learning. The following highlight some of the ongoing strategic work undertaken in support of student success in the area of literacy:
- Focus on building staff capacity in literacy instruction across all grades and subject areas.
  - Continue to provide Literacy Foundations, with intentional efforts to engage new teachers.
  - Continue to provide professional learning focused on literacy interventions.
- Continue to provide targeted support for junior high schools in their work to identify and program for struggling readers and confidently assess whether students are at, above or below grade level in reading.
  - In May 2019, teachers will be required to report the grade level of reading for Grade 8 students.
  - In May 2020, teachers will be required to report the grade level of reading for Grade 9 students.
- Develop the English Language Arts Junior High Online Resources to support students and parents to practice their classroom learning at home.
- Continue to build further capacity in high school to identify and program for struggling readers and writers.
  - Continue to develop Literacy Foundations for high school teachers.
  - Provide opportunities for high school level literacy intervention training.
- Develop and provide professional learning sessions to support Language Arts and the literacy components of the new curriculum.

Alberta Education Accountability Pillar	Results (in percentages)					Evaluation		
	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	Achievement	Improvement	Overall
LITERACY								
Overall percentage of students in Grade 6 who achieved the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence in Language Arts on Provincial Achievement Tests (overall cohort results).	84.1 (n= 5,952)	83.8 (n= 6,324)	85.4 (n= 6,390)	83.3 (n= 6,604)	84.4 (n= 7,070)	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
	19.6 (n= 5,952)	22.5 (n= 6,324)	23.7 (n= 6,390)	21.0 (n= 6,604)	20.9 (n= 7,070)	High	Declined Significantly	Issue
Overall percentage of students in Grade 9 who achieved the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence in Language Arts on Provincial Achievement Tests (overall cohort results).	77.8 (n= 5,735)	78.1 (n= 5,979)	78.7 (n= 5,993)	77.9 (n= 6,160)	75.4 (n= 6,536)	Low	Declined Significantly	Concern
	18.4 (n= 5,735)	16.8 (n= 5,979)	18.9 (n= 5,993)	17.6 (n= 6,160)	17.3 (n= 6,536)	High	Maintained	Good
Overall percentage of students who achieved the acceptable standard on English 30-1 diploma examinations (overall results).	82.0 (n= 5,029)	80.1 (n= 5,072)	81.8 (n= 5,248)	81.9 (n= 5,113)	84.4 (n= 5,318)	Low	Improved Significantly	Good
Overall percentage of students who achieved the acceptable standard on English 30-2 diploma examinations (overall results).	83.0 (n= 2,393)	80.4 (n= 2,394)	82.2 (n= 2,463)	83.1 (n= 2,390)	83.1 (n= 2,411)	Low	Improved	Acceptable
Overall percentage of students who achieved the standard of excellence on English 30-1 diploma examinations (overall results).	11.2 (n= 5,029)	10.1 (n= 5,072)	10.2 (n= 5,248)	11.6 (n= 5,113)	12.8 (n= 5,318)	High	Improved Significantly	Good
Overall percentage of students who achieved the standard of excellence on English 30-2 diploma examinations (overall results).	8.7 (n= 2,393)	7.0 (n= 2,394)	7.6 (n= 2,463)	7.9 (n= 2,390)	9.1 (n= 2,411)	Intermediate	Improved Significantly	Good
INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS								
Percentage of students in Grades 4-12 reporting they get help with reading and writing when they need it.[10]	n/a	87 (n= 20,528)	86 (n= 20,034)	87 (n= 21,233)	86 (n= 21,929)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Percentage of parents satisfied with special support their child has received at school.	86 (n= 829)	86 (n= 739)	83 (n= 769)	86 (n= 820)	85 (n= 936)	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes

10. Percentage of students in Grades 4-12 reporting they get help with reading and writing when they need it results were derived from Accountability Pillar data.

District Indicators - Achievement HLAT and Grade Level in Reading	Results (in percentages)				
	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Percentage of students in Grades 1-9 demonstrating at or above grade level in writing in the Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT)	82.4	79.2	79.3	74.6	74.7
Percentage of students in Grades 1-6 demonstrating at or above grade level in reading.	n/a	n/a	74.8	73.3	72.3
					72.5+

+Reading level results for Grades 1-7 students. Grade 7 reporting became compulsory in 2017-2018.