

PARENT INFORMATION

How does teacher professional development benefit your child?

Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools places a high priority on keeping parents informed on progress in the division. This handout addresses the topic of teacher professional development and more specifically addresses what benefits exist for students and parents. A division committee including parent, school board trustees, teachers, administrators and central office representatives has been meeting throughout the fall and exploring the best professional development options to optimize improvements to teacher instruction to positively impact student learning. This committee will forward a recommendation to the Board of Trustees to inform planning for future embedded teacher professional development.

I. What is embedded teacher professional development (PD)?

Embedded PD includes the early dismissal of students each Monday (Friday for Rocky Mountain House schools – due to collaborative bussing issues with other school jurisdictions). During embedded professional development time all teachers are expected to attend learning activities that are determined by the school professional development committee in collaboration with school administration. Division guidelines, based on the educational research on effective professional development, guide the planning of school embedded PD plans to ensure that this time is utilized as effectively as possible. Each school must develop a comprehensive PD plan that is generated by the teachers in the school to best address areas of growth that could improve school success. These growth areas form part of the school education plan and reflect the highest area of needs identified in each school. These embedded PD sessions can include a variety of activities but all activities must directly link to “*strategies that improve student learning*.” Embedded professional development is the term given for teacher professional development that is mandatory and is part of the teacher assigned duties during the operational school day.

Schools have flexibility in identification of how to best use embedded PD time which is used for:

a) Collaborative Time:

These are scheduled opportunities for teachers to meet in grade groups and/or subject groups to discuss student needs, review student work samples share best practices discuss standards in performance and assessment, as well as identification of interventions for students to remediate learning problems as they arise. This practice is one of the strongest forms of professional development because it focuses directly on specific learning for the students taught by the group of teachers who are collaborating.

Collaborative time is identified in educational research as the strongest strategy for improving teaching and student learning and our school division values the rich learning opportunities that occur during teacher collaborative sessions. Feedback from teachers and administrators indicates that this strategy has been very effective in improving student learning in the past three years.

b) Other uses include:

Lead/expert teacher presentations on effective teaching (planning, assessment, dealing with special student needs), meetings, report card discussions on achievement and student program placements

2. How do we know embedded PD is a good practice?

Educational research has proven that embedded PD, (when there is a highly structured and accountable system in place) has direct positive results in growth in student learning. There is an obligation of school principals to ensure that a strong PD is developed in each school and that school staff are accountable to the plan. During the past three years all schools in the division have participated in embedded PD and have learned considerably about how to best optimize this valuable learning time for teachers. In the past three years some very convincing changes have occurred which are supported by annual data that the school division collects. *Good news includes:*

A. Consistent *upward trend in provincial student achievement* in all subject areas in grades 3, 6, and 9 (provincial achievement test years). This trend significantly exceeds the provincial average.

B. *Significant gains* in the percentage of division students who are *attaining excellence levels* of achievement (generally over 80%). This trend also exceeds in the provincial average in most areas of achievement.

C. Consistent and significant *gains in teacher satisfaction* with: a) the quality of professional development in schools, b) the opportunities to share expertise with their colleagues, c) the extent to which school PD assists teachers in improving instructional practice

This data points to some strong improvement trends in student learning in our division. We thought you may want to know what has been happening. We are excited about continuing the good news and strengthening our embedded PD practices which we believe have been a strong contributor to improvements in student learning.

3. How can teacher PD activities help me as a parent?

There are many ways that the quality work being done in teacher PD can be shared with parents to help in assisting parents to help their children with their studies. Several schools include summaries of the PD activities in newsletters. Parents are encouraged to talk to teachers and school administration if they want more information on specific strategies that teachers are learning about. The division PD committee includes one PD teacher representative from each school and is a resource person for teachers as well as parents. The division committee is embarking on a new initiative to strengthen and expand the communication to parents on the content of teacher professional development to ensure parents are aware of teacher learning activities and the way in which embedded PD time is being efficiently utilized.

4. What are other ways in which teachers participate in professional development?

This takes many forms including teacher individual choices to attend in services, conferences and workshops that may be offered in Red Deer or in other locations. These costs are generally the

responsibility of teachers who have a modest fund for personal professional development. Other voluntary professional development is provided by the school division as needed (eg. New curriculum). The embedded PD in each school is at no cost to teachers and is a very cost effective way to enrich teaching.

5. How does effective embedded professional development help your child and you as the parent?

When teachers are committed to on going learning about effective teaching student are the benefactors in increased learning. When parents are aware of how teachers are improving practice they are more aware of strategies used in classrooms and can tap into these strategies when helping their children learn at home.

6. Does my child lose any teacher instruction time as a result of embedded professional development?

No. The school division mandates that each grade K – 9 students has a minimal annual allocation of 960 hours of instruction and that high school students receive at least 1010 hours of instruction. Embedded PD time involves adjustments to the start and dismissal times of the day. But does not reduce any direct contact time between students and teachers.

7. Next steps:

Parent Councils will be reviewing recommendations about professional development and will be seeking your input. This input will be collected and discussed by the division committee before a recommendation is sent to the School Board. You will have opportunity to give feedback on two recommendations and to provide insight into ways to deal with any challenges either recommendation poses for stakeholders.

Two recommendations are coming forward for the 2010 – 2011 school year:

1. Embedded professional development each Monday (Friday in Rocky Mountain House) with a student dismissal of 70 minutes prior to regular dismissal time providing one hour weekly of teacher professional development.
2. Embedded professional development each Thursday with a student dismissal time 70 minutes prior to regular dismissal providing one hour of weekly teacher professional development.

Do you foresee any challenges with these recommendations and do you have any suggestions about how these challenges could be addressed? Your input is valuable to our committee.

If you have questions about professional development please contact your school principal or any members of the committee. Each committee member, as well as school principals has the complete documentation and data that supports embedded PD.

Parent Reps on Committee:

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