

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FOCUS FOR 2005-2006

Focus Area 1:

Vocabulary is the academic focus area for this year. The following descriptions illustrate how we have been and will continue to emphasize vocabulary at the various levels and in different subject areas.

Lower Elementary

Improving vocabulary in the kindergarten classroom is an ongoing process. Vocabulary is modeled and reinforced throughout the day. Vocabulary skills are incorporated into various class activities, and games are played to increase the students' understanding of the words. Students take part in large group discussions following stories. Upper elementary students act as "reading buddies" for lower elementary students, thereby increasing both oral and written vocabulary usage. Students take part in word building activities using the Animated Literacy program. These activities not only strengthen the students' use of words correctly in sentences, the activities also help students show understanding of what they are hearing and reading.

Upper Elementary

Every two weeks students are given a list of twenty-four words with corresponding definitions. The words are taken from books being read in class. Students receive the list by mid-week and are initially tested the following Monday. On the test, students are expected to match each list word as used in a sentence to the corresponding definition from the list of definitions on a separate sheet. Students who do not get a set number of definitions correct are required to do a rewrite on Friday. Once a month students get to play a game of 'Vocabo', a bingo-type game that uses words instead of numbers. The students cover the word on their card if it matches the definition given by the teacher. Students win points that can be traded in for prizes. Also, at the beginning of each new Social Studies unit, students are given a list of words from the glossary in their text. That list is used for the upcoming vocabulary test.

Junior & Senior High Mathematics

Students are regularly asked to rephrase answers using their own words to explain new or difficult concepts, both orally and on tests. Most tests include at least one question in which students must explain a concept in their own words, using complete sentences and good grammar. Spelling is evaluated on tests, usually to a maximum of 5% of the mark. Frequent discussions centre on the idea that some words can mean one thing in Language Arts or Social Studies class, but quite another in Math class. (For example, "bias" in statistics). Students must include in their vocabulary many directing words that frequently appear on tests or exams. Examples include "compare", "analyze" and "algebraically".

Junior & Senior High Science

Students are given a vocabulary at the start of each unit. They must write the definitions for the vocabulary by a specified date near the end of the unit. After the students submit their vocabulary for marking, they receive a vocabulary quiz. The vocabulary quiz consists of 10 matching and 10 written questions. Other activities include the use of vocabulary words within a scientific context.

Junior & Senior High Social Studies

Students receive a glossary of terms and are continuously encouraged to use the terms in their speech and writing, and to refer to the glossary. The teacher makes a definite point of using the terms in lectures and quizzing the students on them. Examples of terms are also given and elicited. Words typically found on Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma Examinations are emphasized.

Junior & Senior High Language Arts

Previous Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma Examinations are analyzed to develop a list of key vocabulary words. Using this list as a focal point, the teacher integrates three specific strategies into classroom teaching. The first is to include a series of weekly "mini-lessons" in course planning, using about twenty minutes per week to teach vocabulary and word usage. Second, to reinforce this new vocabulary, the teacher creates a vocabulary word wall, thereby giving the students a place of reference when they are working on assignments. The third strategy is integrating vocabulary into the assessment of student writing. Two separate and unique marks are generally given for assignment -- one based on content and one based on writing skills. In the writing component of the assessment the student is encouraged to use the vocabulary posted on the word wall providing that the vocabulary is appropriate for the assignment, and is used correctly.

Focus Area 2:

AISI Project Implementation

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) concept will be used for the implementation of a workable and comprehensive school-wide plan to improve learner outcomes, and to provide a safe and positive atmosphere at Worsley Central School. The vehicle for this initiative will be the School Improvement Plan.

Our teaching staff spent many days last year working on a plan to address this, and our initiatives for 2006-07 continue to lay out plans for improving student success, initially through work on attitudes.