

## **HAVE WE FAILED THEM?**

*Tony Reeves, Principal, Parkview Adventist Academy, Lacombe, AB*

As a teacher and administrator, I have found that some students seem to fall through the cracks. When I was teaching my Grade 12 classes, I found it frustrating, and so did the students, that they were unable to cope with the work that was expected from them. How can a student with learning challenges pass through eleven years of educational experience without receiving the help they need to succeed in life?



In one of my Grade 12 socials classes, some students were having difficulties, so I reviewed their student records to find out what other teachers had done to help them in the past. There was nothing in the records except the usual comments that they were not spending enough time in their studies and therefore were not doing well, or that they were lazy. Believing there was more to this situation than those comments suggested, I made arrangements to have the students tested. This testing revealed learning challenges which required. Implementing these accommodations helped the students do better, not only in my course, but in their other subject areas as well. The students thanked me for helping them realize that there was a reason why they found it more difficult to do their school work and that there were ways to help them cope and be successful. It was great that they were able to find out what their difficulties were, but would it not have been better for them to have this diagnosis years before?

The question that has to be asked is why this testing wasn't initiated years ago by some teacher, somewhere, to evaluate the students and give suggestions for how they could be successful? We have all received training in our educational studies as to what various learning challenges can look like and what can be done to help these students succeed. Do we take the time to diagnose their unusual behaviors which are frequently a call for help? The workloads of teachers and numbers of students often dictate how much time can be given to the student who has special needs. But is it not our responsibility to know our students? How much time do we spend with our students outside of academics? Do we have a moral responsibility to our students to help them be successful? I believe that if we see students who are struggling, we have an obligation to advocate for them and to work with their parents.

When we begin a new school year, do we, as teachers, take the time to read up on our students from their student record files, call the parents, or better still, visit the family and introduce ourselves so as to begin a relationship? We need to take the time so that we have a better understanding of our students and their individual needs. If we discover that there is a challenge, then we need to take the time to read materials that would help us better understand these students and their needs. Plenty of books and computer sites are available to give us the information that we need. If we need to know what accommodations would be helpful, an educational assessment may need to be done. Do we step up to the plate or do we generalize and label? We must involve the parents in order to make this a successful program. Some parents are very reluctant to have their children labeled and therefore do not want to work with us. That is when we, as teachers, need to work with the parents to help them recognize that their focus should be, not on the label, but on the assistance and accommodations that are out there to help their children to be successful. The earlier the child can be diagnosed, the sooner s/he can be helped.

In summary, many interventions can be carried out to ensure that students do not fall through the cracks:

- Professional testing
- Early diagnosis
- Communication with parents, students, teachers and other staff what so that everybody is on board
- Implementation of accommodations
- Accurate recording of this information in the student's record so that future teachers will be able to continue the accommodations that have been used to assist the student.

Every child is entitled to be successful in his/her school experience and it is up to us as teachers, parents and administrators to make sure that this success happens. What will you do in the future to make sure you have done all you can to help that student who is experiencing difficulty to experience success?