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To the principal/staff/teachers of Two Rocks Primary School

Over the last five years I've had the opportunity to visit your school, observe the students in your school and to work with your teachers. In reflecting on those visits, I thought I'd drop you a note to let you now how much I appreciate the work you are doing to increase the life chances and learning chances of students in your care.

For a perspective on my comments, this is my 45th year of teaching, and for thirty-four of those years I've spent my professional career working with teachers on projects in three countries (Canada, Australia, and Ireland). As part of that, I've had the opportunity to be in hundreds of classrooms and to have conversations with thousands of teachers. In all those years, I'd put your efforts as a school team in the top 1% of schools with whom I've worked. For brevity, I'll mention three things that really jumped out that put you in that top 1%.

First, I have the upmost respect for your efforts to continually extend and refine the instructional practices of all teachers in the school. When observing Two Rocks teachers, I am always impressed that they are pushing themselves to improve; building on conversations we've had in previous years. The research is very clear; the number one predictor of student improvement (over which we have control) is refining and extending the instructional practices of teachers. That of course ties into the second most powerful factor...the extent to which the school administration supports teachers in the process of learning those instructional practices. You are exemplary in both of those areas.

Second, I seldom, if ever, see any classroom management issues; teachers focus their time on learning. Efficient use of time really stands out...as does students being actively involved in learning. Clearly students feel safe and that their voices are respected and valued. This maximizes the times students have for academic learning. Time is one of the only 'coins' we get to spend in education...you have a great 'budget' for time.

Third, I sense a collective sense of collegiality and cooperation among staff; not easy to have a large group of teachers be willing to work together to be creative (to play with their own ideas...to share) but to also have a thoughtful plan of what they all agree to work on. One gets a sense of your school team building both the students and teachers expertise over time.

In summary, I know that if I were a parent...I'd want my children in your school. Thank you for the time you give to me to see what a school staff can do when committed to making a difference for students.

Regards,

Barrie Bennett (Professor Emeritus, University of Toronto)