

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 24, 2001

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dosdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Inquiring Minds Program - Classrooms in the Community

ORIGINATOR: D. Watson, Acting for Principal, Westbrook School

### RESOURCE

STAFF: Susan Adam, Joanne Cameron, Judy Demers, Terry Gietz, Katherine Gachnang, Jacqueline Tessier, Thelma Voegtlin, Leigh Welsh, Karen Ludbrook-Young,

### INFORMATION

Westbrook School, located in southwest Edmonton, is a kindergarten to grade six school serving 491 students. It is a district center for Academic Challenge and accommodates students with a variety of learning needs. Westbrook enjoys high regard in the community as a strong academic school, and our results consistently affirm our reputation. At Westbrook School, we are committed to seeking ways to increase achievement and improve upon excellence.

Inquiring Minds Program - Classrooms in the Community (formerly: The Museum School Program) provides weeklong, in-depth learning experiences through which students explore curricular concepts in resource rich, real world environments. It is a collaborative educational project which has arisen out of partnership with corporate and private sponsors, Edmonton Public Schools, and sites such as the Valley Zoo, Fort Edmonton, the Telephone Historical Centre, Provincial Museum and Legislature.

We believe that participating in the Inquiring Minds Program has provided our students and staff with an excellent opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of curriculum content through hands-on experiences. One class visited the Petro Canada Valley Zoo school during the 1999-2000 school year. One of our staff members was seconded as a teacher at the zoo. This school year, eight classes participated in museum school experiences. Grade one and three students took advantage of the program offered at Petro Canada Zoo School, grade fives explored historic Edmonton at Fort Edmonton Park School, and our grade six students spent a week attending School-at-the-Legislature.

The teachers of each grade worked together with on-site resource people to design and implement a long-term interdisciplinary study directly related to curriculum that

provided students with a weeklong opportunity to collect data, research, question, practice, observe, experience and reflect on what they were learning. By making connections between curricular concepts and the real world, students experienced first-hand the variety and wonder of living things, the challenges of living in Edmonton in the early days, and the thrill of debating important issues in the legislative assembly. Each study included all subject areas, and students were actively engaged in many writing and math activities, and in furthering their understanding of the social studies and science curricula. For example, the grade ones collected data and shared findings as they studied the features of living things. The grade three class produced reference material for the grade one classes and served as learning mentors for follow-up activities. The grade six students practiced public speaking skills as they prepared and conducted debates. The grade fives wrote an edition of the Edmonton Bulletin which captured what they learned about life in Fort Edmonton.

The Inquiring Minds experience allowed our students to explore concepts in great depth and to engage their attention in a vivid environment. These experiences were well supported by parents as valuable extensions of classroom learning. Achievement was enhanced through active participation, hands-on experiences and a tremendously rich resource base. One staff member commented that the experiential component of this program made concepts that are traditionally difficult to teach, such as government, come alive for students. The program provided a context for interpreting abstract concepts and helped students frame their understanding within real life situations. Students, parents and teachers agreed that our experience of Inquiring Minds Program- Classrooms in the Community was extremely positive as a learning opportunity to advance achievement for all students. Our instructional focus is on developing student attention as a means to improve already high achievement scores. The engaging atmosphere of museum school has linked head, heart and hands of students in learning, and the result has been enthusiastic learners demonstrating a deeper understanding of curricular concepts and a further commitment to learning.

Westbrook School will be seeking more opportunities to participate in this program, and we are appreciative of the work and commitment put forth by all contributors to provide this experience for young people.

DW:jc