

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 13, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Aboriginal Art Project 2003: "The Shield Project: *Kwanahikun* (Protector)"

ORIGINATOR: Bob Holt, Executive Director Instructional and Curricular Support Services

RESOURCE STAFF: Sharon Busby, Donna Leask

INFORMATION

As part of the district's commitment to strengthen program delivery for Aboriginal students, Aboriginal Education sponsored a third highly successful art workshop for selected junior high Aboriginal students. The art teachers from district junior high schools nominated the students.

This year's workshop, "The Shield Project: *Kwanahikun* (Protector)," was led by Suzanne McLeod, an Anishinabe from Sagkeeng First Nation, Manitoba. Ms. McLeod is completing her Masters in Art and Art History: Native American at the University of New Mexico. This is the second year that Ms. McLeod has worked with us to develop and provide this workshop. She strongly believes that in the learning and understanding of our unique Aboriginal heritages and the richness of our cultural pasts, the strength of the Aboriginal community is enhanced.

The workshop explored the physical, spiritual, cultural and decorative traditions of the shield and the significant role these items played in historical societies. The students focused on the First Peoples of Canada, but also examined other Native American nations as well as other indigenous cultures and European uses of the shield. Students created their own contemporary "helper" or shield, using the materials at hand in the context of what is considered important and spiritual to today's Aboriginal youth.

The selected students worked for three days with Ms. McLeod. Their art teachers then participated with Ms. McLeod in a one-day workshop.

This workshop was an opportunity for junior high Aboriginal students, who are enthusiastic about art making, to create a work of art, to learn more about themselves as artists, and to learn about themselves as Aboriginal persons. At the same time, students acquired knowledge about the tradition of using the power of the Shield, particularly in Aboriginal cultures.

So impressive was the work produced by our students that many people and organizations have recognized their superior achievements. The Edmonton Police Service, which last year made a four-year commitment in support of this project, has again purchased three student works. A representative of the Edmonton Police Force will present the purchase awards to the artists.

The efforts of all involved district staff and, in particular, those of the students must be celebrated and further encouraged.

DL:wb