

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

December 12, 2000

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dossdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Edmonton Public Schools' Alliance with the YMCA of Edmonton

ORIGINATOR: Angus McBeath, Department Head

RESOURCE

STAFF: Ann Calverley, Gloria Chalmers, Faye Parker

INFORMATION

Background

In February of 1998, Edmonton Public Schools and the YMCA of Edmonton signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) creating an alliance between the two organizations for the purpose of pursuing common areas of interest. This report provides an update on the activities of the alliance over the past two and one-half years.

The vision for the alliance is stated as follows: "The Edmonton Public Schools/YMCA alliance is a model for community/education collaboration based on respect, trust, and mutual benefit. Through openness and innovation, we will have a greater impact on the lives of children, youth, families, volunteers, staff and the community." The alliance activities have focused on three main areas which were identified in the MOU:

- "Enhancing success for children and youth" as it relates to the promotion of healthy lifestyles, the provision of child care programs, and the development of program alternatives for children and youth in need.
- "Providing support to parents, youth and children" as it relates to the collective efforts of home, school and community organizations.
- "Creating organizational synergy" as it relates to the sharing of knowledge, expertise, facilities and resources.

In order to carry out the work of the alliance, a steering committee was formed consisting of staff from both organizations. This group has met regularly since the signing of the MOU to exchange information, plan projects and monitor activities. Both groups of staff believe that their efforts have led to positive results for children, youth and families, as well as an excellent working relationship between the two organizations.

Specific Initiatives of the Alliance

Over the term of the alliance, a number of initiatives have been developed and implemented. Following are brief descriptions of the various initiatives.

LearnNet at the Y: The YMCA Enterprise Centre is a location for the district's LearnNet program. It has also been designated as a junior high outreach site. The YMCA provides a location, access to computers and a variety of counselling and other support services for

youth who enrol in the program. Argyll Home Education Centre administers the program and provides instructional services. The program serves both junior and senior high students.

Time Out: Time Out is a program organized by the Enterprise Centre in response to a request from a group of junior high schools to provide an alternative to out-of-school suspensions. The program currently involves 16 district junior high schools, each of which contributes to the operation of the program in return for the ability to refer students who would otherwise be suspended from school. When a student is referred to Time Out, the school sends work for the student to do and the YMCA provides staff, life skills and anger management counselling, and recreational opportunities.

Training of student tutors: The YMCA has for many years trained adults to be volunteer tutors in schools. Through the alliance, a program has been established with the Nellie McClung program at Oliver School whereby junior high students receive this training and subsequently work with elementary students as reading tutors.

Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth Coalition: The YMCA is working within its own organization and with other community organizations, including Edmonton Public Schools, to expand awareness and application of the “Asset Building” approach to working with youth. To this end, a coalition has recently been established and the district has a representative on the steering committee. The “Asset Building” approach identifies those characteristics or ‘assets’ which appear to help youth be successful in life and attempts to help individuals and community build assets.

Child Care Centres: The YMCA currently provides child care in a number of district schools. It is committed to working in partnership with any district school that believes such a program would assist parents in the school. The YMCA takes responsibility for determining the level of need and, if sufficient demand exists, for developing and operating the program. Because day cares in district schools are often perceived by parents and the community as being endorsed by the district, it is a clear advantage to the district to have a YMCA run program as it guarantees a quality day care program. The YMCA established a new child care centre in Elmwood school this year in support of school’s new Cogito program.

Distribution Centre: A meeting was held between staff of the YMCA and the district’s Distribution Centre, and procedures were put in place to enable the YMCA to utilize the services of the Distribution Centre.

Indoor Gardening: The YMCA and the district’s Continuing Education Services have developed a joint proposal to seek funds to operate a skill training program focused on an indoor gardening business using hydroponic equipment that would be donated by the Edmonton Police Service.

Outward Bound

The members of the steering committee have discussed the potential for creating a joint program based on the ‘Outward Bound’ concept. This idea will be further explored.

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