

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 24, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Improving Student Achievement: Engaging Students through Volunteerism

ORIGINATOR: J. Bidulock, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

Students across grade levels in schools throughout the District are involved in a variety of volunteer projects and events. Volunteerism supports the District's work to ensure every student is successful in their program of studies, instills in each student the attributes of citizenship and good character, promotes health, well being and positive relationships.

Volunteerism supports the work of AISI Cycle 4 in relation to student engagement and 21st century literacies. The 21st century working world is a place where collaboration, effective communication, problem solving and critical thinking skills are essential for success. As a volunteer, students are called upon to use these skills in a very practical sense. Research (Brewster and Fager, 2000) indicates that volunteerism promotes and supports students by:

- putting into practice what they have learned in theory
- applying newly learned knowledge and skills to real life situations
- seeing schoolwork as significant, valuable, and worthy of their efforts
- experiencing some degree of control over their learning
- being actively involved in challenging but achievable tasks
- stimulating their curiosity about the topic being studied and
- designing projects that allow them to share new knowledge with others.

Direct links can be made between volunteerism and curricular outcomes at various grade levels and across subject areas in the Program of Studies. Examples include:

- “Service learning is explored and experienced at each grade level. These experiences provide students with opportunities to learn, practice and refine skills while making meaningful contributions to their families, schools and communities.” (*Health and Wellness, Life Learning Choices Health and Life Skills (K-9) /page 21*)
- “...develop age-appropriate behavior for social involvement as responsible citizens contributing to their community:
 - demonstrate leadership by engaging in actions that will enhance the well-being of self and others in the community” (*Social Studies 10 – 1, page.18 Social Studies 10-2 page 30*)

As well, some district alternative programs have volunteerism and community service as part of their program description.

Volunteerism looks as varied as the teachers and students who participate in these activities across the District. A variety of factors influence the “who, what, where, when and how” of volunteerism. Schools choose volunteer projects based on learner needs, school context, community needs, connections to broader societal and world needs, as well as student interests and passion.

The principal’s role in volunteerism includes examining, in collaboration with staff and the school community, the links and alignment between curriculum, school and district priorities and the volunteer work being undertaken in the school and community. The principal also must consider a balance between volunteerism and the many other initiatives in which the school may be involved.

In planning for student engagement, teachers use the act of volunteerism as a way to build choice, affirmation, novelty and variety into students’ learning. Teachers use community resources through volunteerism to make learning meaningful and relevant so that students understand and experience the connection between what they learn (the curriculum) and ‘real world’ application.

Although direct links between volunteerism and increased student achievement are difficult to make, the three presentations to the Board accompanying this report provide examples of how this form of learning prepares students for life beyond school. Active participation in volunteer work assists in creating bright futures for students, staff and the larger community.