

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 13, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Responses to Board Requests for Information

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent  
J. Bidulock, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE  
STAFF: John Edey, Sandy Forster, David Piercey, Corrie Ziegler

INFORMATION

**BOARD REQUEST #206 APRIL 14, 2009: PROVIDE INFORMATION BY THE END OF SEPTEMBER 2009 ON DISTRICT AND EXTERNAL PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE VOLUNTEERISM IN STUDENTS.** The K-12 Social Studies curriculum emphasizes the positive and enduring attitudes of citizenship and social participation. There are also a wide variety of practices and expectations intrinsic to student life that promotes volunteerism across the District. Volunteerism is often expected of students within their programs or their school culture, and students are often awarded some form of school or district recognition for exemplary service and participation. Such activities support the 2008-2011 District Priority #2 – “To instill in each student the attributes of citizenship and good character in a learning environment that promotes health, well-being, and positive relationships”.

**District and External Practices**

District Awards: The M.A. Strembitsky Award of Excellence entails a volunteer service criterion, and the District Recognition Program for Service, Team and Merit includes a student category. Externally-sponsored awards for district students, like the Kinsmen Club of Edmonton Achievement Award for Community Service, the Soroptimist Foundation Youth Citizenship Award, and the Servus Credit Union Suzanne Mah bursaries are given specifically in recognition of significant community service. A number of service clubs have developed partnerships with specific schools to promote general citizenship.

**School Level Practices**

A stratified random sample of 40 school principals (10 elementary, 10 elementary/junior high, 10 junior high, and 10 senior high) were surveyed in September 2009. The questions and their results were as follows:

Question	Positive Responses
<p><b>Which of the following volunteer activities do you offer at your school?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection drives for an organized charity (e.g., Food Bank, Santa’s Anonymous, United Way, etc.)</li> <li>• Community clean up drives</li> <li>• Extra-curricular volunteer opportunities through school clubs</li> <li>• In-school student volunteer activities (e.g., intramurals coaching, lunch hour telephone relief, event set-up, paired reading, etc.)</li> <li>• Charity run/walk/bike/hike (e.g., Terry Fox Run) etc.</li> </ul>	<p>95%</p> <p>60%</p> <p>97%</p> <p>97%</p> <p>87%</p>
<p><b>Do you have one or more student awards that recognize volunteerism?</b></p>	<p>78%</p>
<p><b>Do you offer one or more courses/programs that FORMALLY require volunteer service hours? (e.g., IB)</b></p>	<p>51%</p>
<p><b>Is volunteerism referenced in your student handbook or on your school website?</b></p>	<p>51%</p>
<p><b>Please describe any other examples of student volunteerism at your school</b></p> <p>Answers to this question included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• our leadership students and our Academic Challenge students are required to provide volunteer services throughout the year (junior high)</li> <li>• each student is expected to provide 75 hours of service to Church/School/Community each year they attend (senior high)</li> <li>• our students shovel our neighbours’ walks and rake their leaves (two junior highs)</li> <li>• Fruit for a Friend for an inner city school and Back Packs of Luck for the homeless (elementary)</li> <li>• we have included student leadership/volunteerism as one of our initiatives for Priority #2 in our school plan (elementary)</li> <li>• provide Track Meet volunteers for feeder elementary schools ( junior high)</li> <li>• raise funds to support educational programs in third world countries; raise funds to provide clean drinking water to third world villages (junior high)</li> <li>• EVERY student is expected to complete one school based and one community based volunteer project in each of their three years of high school. Students must present the volunteering they have done during their advisor class and track it onto our data base designed solely for exit projects. (senior high)</li> <li>• all students are required to provide service in their communities on an individual basis outside of instructional time (elementary/junior high)</li> </ul>	

Volunteerism is evident across our schools, and its practices are enhancing character development in students, by teaching skills in citizenship, community awareness, and social responsibility.

**BOARD REQUEST #226 SEPTEMBER 22, 2009: PRIOR TO THE TOWN HALL MEETING, PROVIDE EXAMPLES OF WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING IN SCHOOLS WITH RESPECT TO TEACHING CREATIVITY, CRITICAL THINKING AND ADAPTABILITY SKILLS.** One of the primary vehicles through which district students develop creativity, critical thinking and adaptability is in completing the expectations of the Alberta programs of study, which are identified in the philosophy and rationale and in the general and/or specific outcomes of each Program of Studies. The following are some examples (\*key words related to these concepts are in italics).

## **ALBERTA PROGRAMS OF STUDY**

### **Social Studies**

The social studies curriculum addresses the core concepts of citizenship and responsibility. Students are expected to demonstrate a critical understanding of individual and collective rights. For example, in Social Studies 20-1 the skills and process outcomes require students to:

- engage in active inquiry and *critical and creative thinking*
- engage in *problem solving* and conflict resolution with *an awareness of the ethical consequences of decision making*
- apply historical and geographic skills to *bring meaning to* issues and events
- use and manage information and communication technologies *critically*
- conduct research ethically using varied methods and sources; *organize, interpret and present their findings; and defend their opinions*
- apply skills of metacognition, *reflecting upon what they have learned and what they need to learn*
- recognize and responsibly address injustices as they occur in their schools, communities, Canada and the world

### **Arts Education**

The K-12 Arts Education Curriculum Framework (June 2009 Draft) focuses on updating the 1985-1991 arts programs of study to address the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. Of the four suggested General Learning Outcomes, one is *Creating and Expressing*. Within this context, critical thinking is developed in tandem with creative thinking. Adaptability is required to work successfully through the expectations of the arts programs of study.

#### Drama (1989)

Through drama there is a focus on exploring and *expressing, developing and exercising imagination and divergent and convergent thinking*. There are stated expectations to *adapt through role play, making the abstract concrete and learning to respond to stimuli*.

#### Music (Junior High, 1988)

Two goals of the secondary music programs of study are:

- To enable students to understand, *evaluate* and appreciate a variety of music.
- To provide experiences that will foster the *development of self-expression, creativity and communication through music*.

A sense of meaning in music is developed by the student as performer, listener, evaluator, consumer, historian and composer. For example, the stated goals of the junior high choral music program are:

Singing - To discover, develop and *evaluate* their talents and abilities relative to singing, and to establish and reinforce correct vocal techniques and skills.

Reading - To *interpret* rhythm, melody, harmony, form and expression as they appear in musical notation through both *cognitive and psychomotor* responses.

Listening - To develop the ability to *make aesthetic judgments based on critical listening and analysis of music*.

Creating - To *develop an additional avenue of self-expression by composing, improvising and interpreting music*.

### **Language Arts (2000)**

Students use language to examine and reflect on new experiences and knowledge in relation to their prior knowledge, experiences and beliefs. Critical and creative thinking and learning through language occur as they reflect, speculate create, analyze and synthesize. Language learning facilitates development of metacognitive awareness, enabling students to consider, control and adapt their own thinking and learning processes. All this frames the Alberta English Language Arts Program of Studies, which requires that students read, listen, and view critically and respond to input in a variety of ways. Students are expected to demonstrate their competency to produce texts that demonstrate analysis and creativity of thought. These expectations are embedded in the language arts outcome statements:

***General Outcome 1: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences.***

1.1 *Discover and explore*

1.2 *Clarify and extend*

***General Outcome 2: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts.***

2.1 *Use strategies and cues*

2.2 *Respond to texts*

2.3 *Understand forms, elements and techniques*

2.4 *Create original text*

***General Outcome 3: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to manage ideas and information.***

3.1 *Plan and focus*

3.2 *Select and process*

3.3 *Organize, record and evaluate*

3.4 *Share and review*

***General Outcome 4: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to enhance the clarity and artistry of communication.***

4.1 *Enhance and improve*

4.2 *Attend to conventions*

4.3 *Present and share*

***General Outcome 5: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to respect, support and collaborate with others.***

5.1 *Respect others and strengthen community*

5.2 *Work within a group*

## **Mathematics (2007)**

With its focus on problem solving, reasoning and connections, the Mathematics Program of Studies requires students to use prior learning in new ways and contexts. “Problem solving is a powerful teacher tool that fosters multiple, creative and innovative solutions” (p. 8 Alberta K-9 Mathematics Program of Studies, 2007). Mathematics is used to describe and explain relationships and as such mathematics students hone their critical thinking skills.

In the K-9 Mathematics Program of Studies, specific outcomes are often stated in formats that enable critical thinking and creative thinking responses, e.g., *demonstrate an understanding of; represent and describe; compare and order; illustrate the meaning of; relate \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_; apply mental math strategies to \_\_\_\_\_*. The specific outcomes are open-ended enough to allow for a range of responses involving creativity and critical thinking

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) outcomes are embedded in the mathematics programs of study. Students adapt what they learn, with and without technology, to apply their mathematical understanding in problem solving situations.

## **CYCLE 4 ALBERTA INITIATIVE FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT (AIS I)**

Cycle 4 AISI will involve district staff in action research related to the following question: How does a focus on student engagement through the teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies across the curriculum positively impact student learning? The ultimate goal for education is that all students are successful in school and in life. In order to be successful students will need to demonstrate competency in 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies, which include but are not limited to creativity, critical thinking and adaptability skills. Examples of how teachers are currently teaching these skills include:

### **Creativity:**

- Posing and solving problems – the inquiry focus of the new social studies and math curriculum supports the teaching of creativity and openness to several approaches to solving problems

### **Critical Thinking**

- Teaching students to ask “why” questions and/or ask “is that reasonable?” (evaluation and making judgments) when viewing research from the internet, or making estimations in math, or decoding and comprehending literature
- Assessment for learning practices support critical thinking – for example, students are asked to set criteria and measure progress in relation to the criteria

### **Adaptability**

- Engaging students in authentic learning opportunities to assist them in hearing/understanding others’ points of view, finding new alternatives to challenges, etc. Examples include community service, volunteering, and cooperative learning activities.

## SCHOOL SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

### **Child Study Centre, Laboratory School**

At the Child Study Centre, Garneau School, the emphasis is on inquiry learning and integration of curriculum around project work, letting children learn from first-hand experience and represent their ideas in many different ways. This approach capitalizes on familiar experiences of the children; it provides a learning environment where children learn through investigation, observation and discussion.

Problem solving and critical thinking are integral components of learning and daily interactions. Children are encouraged to wonder, discuss, ask questions and take risks in their learning. The Centre is a place where intrinsic, rather than extrinsic motivation is highly regarded. Children are viewed as competent learners who are developing creativity, originality, and intellectual rigor, as well as skills and knowledge.

*A very visual way to describe the work we do at the centre is to imagine building a house. We lay the foundation based on curriculum, support and scaffold with walls, and leave the roof off, for learning to soar as high as the children can take it.*

### **Vernon Barford Junior High School**

This junior high has been adapting to change by talking about the Old Basics vs. The New Basics in education that reflect an ever changing set of skills students need in a global economy

Old Basics in education (not that there is anything wrong with them but they do represent a traditional approach to education)

- literacy
- numeracy
- obedience
- punctuality

New Basics in Education (in an emerging global economy)

- Multiliteracy
- Creativity
- Communication
- IT (Information Technology)
- Team work
- Lifelong learning
- Adaptation and change
- Environmental responsibility

Additionally, staff have been talking about Daniel Pink's book *A Whole New Mind* that mentions how students need to become "high touch" (creating a personal angle for any product or service being offered in the new economy) and "high concept" (creating crossover or complementary ideas that meet the needs of people with value added).

Students at Vernon Barford will soon be learning in a "New Basics" environment by working digitally, (full student laptop learning is on the way) working collaboratively with each other (character education and how to work with others) and encouraging creative thought in all subject areas. Students will take on project based work where they collectively problem solve solutions to situations being presented.

**Elmwood Elementary School**

Elmwood School approaches these elements in several ways. Teachers utilize Thinking Maps (cognitive maps) to encourage students to plan and organize their thoughts and work. They use questioning strategies that challenge students to use critical thinking to ask questions, make a claim about topics and provide evidence for their claims. This model (questions, claims and evidence) assists students in responding to their environment. Where claims are not supported by evidence, students are encouraged to modify their claims, thus exercising adaptability.

DB:JB:ja