

DATE: January 20, 2015

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Environmental and Social Justice Initiatives

ORIGINATOR: Dr. Lorne Parker, Acting Executive Director, Infrastructure

RESOURCE STAFF: Ken Erickson, Maegan Lukian, Larry Schwenneker

REFERENCE: [March 19, 2013 – Board Report – Motion re Social and Environmental Justice Initiatives Annual Event](#)

ISSUE

The Board of Trustees approved the following motion at the March 19, 2013 board meeting: *That beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, the District host an annual event to publicly showcase the social and environmental justice initiatives taking place in schools.*

RECOMMENDATION

That District recognition for environmental and social justice initiatives be incorporated into the District Awards program, by creating two distinct award categories for schools to apply for (one for environmental justice and one for social justice).

BACKGROUND

In response to the motion approved at the March 19, 2013 board meeting, the District's first *Environmental and Social Justice Initiatives Event* was held on October 20, 2014 at Queen Elizabeth School, in conjunction with the first day of *Waste Reduction Week in Canada*.

Approximately 150 guests attended the event, which featured six schools each presenting their current environmental and social justice initiatives in five-minute videos. The video screening was followed by a brief awards ceremony recognizing each school for their commendable efforts. Participating schools were each presented with a certificate of excellence and commitment to modeling best practices in the District.

Participating school videos, as well as the pictures taken on event day were made available online, via various social media platforms, for the general public and all district staff and students to view.

RELATED FACTS

The first *Environmental and Social Justice Initiatives Event* allowed Edmonton Public Schools to recognize social and environmental justice initiatives across the District and increase awareness of available programs and resources. The feedback collected from involved staff, students and departments is summarized below:

Positive Feedback:

- Students were the main focus of recognition and were at the forefront during the event (student presenters, student emcees, student choir, etc.).
- The event created a connection between schools and EnviroMatters staff as a resource and allowed Board of Trustees to connect with students and their schools.
- The event was a good way to recognize projects that are making a real difference in schools and student education, and also bring schools together to connect over similar issues.
- Videos are an interesting new way for schools to be recognized for their efforts; incorporating social media platforms for viewing allows students and schools to share the information and continue the recognition well after the event is over.

Challenges:

- Some groups had difficulty understanding the two concepts of environmental and social justice as one recognition event; they are two very different and distinct issues that would be better recognized independently.
- FOIP clearance for all students appearing in the videos was a hindering process.
- Getting some schools to dedicate staff and time to focus on the initiative was difficult at times. There proved to be a wide gap of engagement on the actual event day, with some bringing large groups of students and parents, and other schools failing to attend at all.
- Being a new recognition event, there is no existing process or designated staff support system and the smaller scale of the event left the media uninterested.

CONSIDERATIONS & ANALYSIS

It is recommended that EnviroMatters staff work with the committee established to review district awards to incorporate the recognition for district environmental and social justice initiatives into the District Awards program, by creating two distinct award categories for schools to apply for (one for environmental justice and one for social justice).

Going forward, this would serve to improve the initiative in the following ways:

- Recognition of schools is currently based on both categories; the initiative has better potential for longevity and variety of applicants if the two concepts of environmental and social justice are separated and recognized independently.
- The initiative would become a part of the District Awards program, a process that has existing support (award selection, event day, media support, formal awards, etc.).

NEXT STEPS

Pending approval of the recommendation, EnviroMatters staff will work with the committee established to review the District Awards program to develop two new award categories and assist where needed going forward. On an annual basis, EnviroMatters staff will promote the new categories to district schools, encourage them to apply and feature the winning schools on the EnviroMatters website.

ATTACHMENTS & APPENDICES

N/A

LP:kk