

Richmond: Enough for All, Forever

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The Richmond School District first began considering environmental sustainability an important issue in 1998, creating a policy for environmental stewardship. In 2000, under the leadership of the Secretary-Treasurer and Manager of Facilities, the district invested in an energy and natural resource conservation initiative involving fifty-five schools at a cost of \$5.5 million. It delivered significant energy savings to the district.

Five years ago, district staff from Facilities and Learning Services met to discuss how we might integrate some of the concepts we knew about staff development and student leadership into the district's energy conservation and sustainability initiatives.

➤ **Education for sustainable development**

At that point, we brought our students, custodians, teachers, administrators, and parents to planning meetings and professional development sessions, so they could become the people organizing and designing the programs for our schools. Over the years, we've grown eight major initiatives.

1) Sustainability professional development opportunities for school teams. Introduced in October 2001, our Richmond School District Teacher Consultants and community organizations have provided training on a variety of topics such as recycling, energy reduction, waste management, greening, composting, and eco-clubs.

2) School-based environmental sustainability projects. This year, there are thirty-two proposals requesting funds to support schools in environmental projects that the students, teachers, parents, and administrators are passionate about. From four years of funding school projects, we've recognized that we have groups of schools interested in different key initiatives including energy reduction, greening, composting and gardening, and eco-club development.

We have been offering \$1,000 grants to school teams in the last four years. It's not much, but it goes a long way. When the schools make their proposals, they have to describe what they will do, who is involved to make it happen, and what evidence they'll use to evaluate their project's success. The evidence is key: what data will you use to show you're really making a difference in your school and moving people's behaviour forward? If the schools need to rework their assessment tools, we send the proposals back and help them identify tools that might be used to collect their evidence of behaviour change. The school teams that receive grants present their findings at one of two public events—the Green Gala or Earth Day celebrations.

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Since October of 2004, our district's sustainability teacher consultant presents environmental-type workshops to support our school-based project teams. In addition, we have many experts within our schools for initiatives like composting, reducing, recycling, and even green buildings. The students at one of our elementary schools were really excited when there was no waste pickup for three weeks—their cans never filled up. Data like this is compelling. When reports of findings are presented they are done by students: they are the ones telling their stories and posing the questions.

3) *Sustainability showcases.* We start the beginning of the school year with a sustainability showcase at which various environmental groups in the community showcase their resources and materials available to our school teams. The showcases are like mini tradeshows and provide opportunities for our staff, students, and parents to connect with the community's environmental program resources and contacts.

4) *Sustainability network.* In the Richmond School District, an important professional development structure is our afterschool district-wide study groups where staff come together on a regular basis to learn, share, and discuss key areas such as leadership, curriculum, effective practice, and current issues. About four years ago, we started the after-school Sustainability Network. Students, parents, teachers, CUPE members, administrators, trustees, city councillors, and members of the Richmond Sustainability Action Team Richmond Sustainability Action Team (RSAT) all participate in the network.

5) *Ecofest/Earth Day Celebrations.* Five years ago, fifty kids in one of our secondary school's environmental club and their sponsor teacher, held our district's very first Earth Day celebration on a Saturday in their school gym. For the first couple of years, there was low attendance at this club-sponsored event. Three years ago, our district sustainability teacher consultant began working with the students and sponsor teacher to coordinate the celebration. As a result of this collaboration,

more than one thousand students, teachers and parents have been attending annually. We have school buses and field trips for this all-day event. It all started with these high school eco-students and their inspirational teacher.

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6) *Richmond Student Sustainability Action Team (RSSAT).* In March 2005, with help from a federal grant, we began training secondary students to become community One-Tonne Challenge ambassadors as part of the Richmond Community One-Tonne Challenge. Later the program evolved into the Richmond Community Idle-Free Challenge, which we've been growing for the past two years. The capacity-building aspect of this initiative occurs when the secondary Idle-Free experts train the elementary students who are from their feeder schools. Since the training started three years ago, we've had seven training sessions for over 160 student ambassadors. We have nine schools with active, student-led Idle-Free campaigns.

In the training, the students learn about climate change, environmental sustainability, social responsibility, ethical decision-making, behavioural change, as well as how to make presentations. The students then participate in school and community events to

challenge the people of Richmond not to idle, to learn more about climate change and greenhouse gasses, and to participate in the One-Tonne Challenge.

This is really about kids telling stories and leading. Two of our grade seven students went to a Saturday District Student Leadership Conference last year and heard two RSSAT ambassadors talk about implementing an idle-free program in their school. They went back to their own school, recruited their father to help, approached a teacher to sponsor, and founded the Forever Green club. They presented at this year's District Student Leadership Conference and inspired a whole new group of grade six and seven kids to go and do the same thing in their own schools.

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7) *Environmental Sustainability Grade 11 Distributed Learning course "Take Action."* During the spring of 2007, we started developing a four-credit distributed learning course that would cover environmental ethics, environment and ecosystems, fossil fuel and climate change, ecological footprint, and action plans. In October we received board approval to offer the course. The first lesson was given in January 2008 to twenty-one students, representing five different high schools.

8) *Richmond Sustainability Action Team (RSAT)*. In October 2004, an informal group began meeting to monitor and coordinate the sustainability activities in our district. It met four times a year to share ideas, plan activities and discussed ways to support school-based environmental projects and student leadership development. RSAT presents summary year-end reports to the school board. RSAT has now evolved into a more formal structure called the Sustainability Secretariat.

➤ **Leading the way**

Richmond School District has become a leader for other districts in promoting environmental sustainability. We have fostered community partnerships with BC Hydro, Evergreen, GVRD/Metro Vancouver, the City of Richmond, YVR/Airport Authority, Natural Resources Canada, Environment Canada, and Passion for Action. We sponsor a UBC Green Cohort of student teachers and we're working with York University on a case study, to share with others our learning journey in the Richmond School District.

We're growing the green, in buildings and in people. Our leadership capacity exists in our organization—educators, administrators, support staff, parents, and students. Through the school-based sustainability projects and student leadership development, we're ensuring ownership of the initiatives by our educators and students.

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