

# School Project Showcase



## Project: Working Towards an Idle-Free District - Our Approach

For the past two years, the Richmond School District has promoted the idle-free message with a number of elementary and secondary schools in the district, with the long-term vision of becoming an idle-free district. Rather than providing all schools with an idle-free kit or mandating that all schools install idle-free signs at their sites, our approach to spreading the idle-free message has been to “go with the goers”. We are grounded in a strong belief that knowledge about the idling issue and an understanding of the factors that support behavioural change are needed along with the provision of materials and resources in order to see a reduction in idling behaviour on school grounds.



### Getting Started

The Richmond School District first began conversations about an anti-idling initiative in the fall of 2005. A partnership with the City of Richmond, the Richmond School Board, and the Vancouver International Airport Authority had been formed for the One Tonne Challenge initiative. That year, the City of Richmond had already implemented an idle free program at the City works yard that educated staff about the impacts of idling and asked individuals to be idle-free by turning off their engines.

In the fall of 2005, the Richmond School Board worked with the City of Richmond to pilot an idle-free project in two Richmond high schools, McMath and McRoberts. As part of the program, both schools received idle-free signs that were installed in highly visible areas and the students received training as idle-free ambassadors. During the training sessions, students learned about the health and environmental implications of vehicle idling, the myths associated with idling, and the benefits of taking action to reduce idling around schools and their community. The students then created action plans for school-wide idle-free campaigns that were implemented at their schools in the spring of 2006.



In the fall of 2006, the Richmond School Board and City of Richmond continued their partnership and the One-Tonne Challenge evolved into the Richmond Community Challenge (RCC), an initiative that encourages every Richmond resident to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Because of the success of the pilot projects in the spring, the Richmond School Board continued to work with the City of Richmond on the Idle-Free Ambassador Training program for high school students and thus, the focus of the RCC became idle-free campaigns in schools.

As part of their work together, the City of Richmond received a grant from TD Friends of the Environment to create an electronic teaching tool to support students in sharing information about idling with others. That fall, a district training session was advertised to all secondary schools and a new group of ambassadors from McMath, McNair and McRoberts participated in a 3-part training session, including a session on fuel-efficient driving presented by the Environmental Youth Alliance. As part of McNair’s campaign, signage was installed in prominent places around their school.

In March 2007, students in the Incentive Program at MacNeill Secondary also received training, this time in the form of two one and a half hour workshop sessions from a district teacher consultant. The students in the Incentive Program were enrolled in a directed studies course with a focus on environmental studies for the term. As part of the course content, they learned about the impacts of idling on our health, cars and the environment.

As a result of the sessions, a group of students in the class initiated an idle-free campaign at their school. As part of their work, the students organized the installation of signage in the parking lots, conducted an awareness campaign using student-created posters, approached drivers with information about idling, and invited students and staff to learn about idling using the electronic teaching tool mentioned above, which they nicknamed “ELVIS” for ELectronic Vehicle Information System. With the addition of MacNeill Secondary, a total of four high schools out of 11 in Richmond currently have trained ambassadors and idle-free signage on site.



After implementing campaigns at their own schools, the secondary student ambassadors were encouraged to pass on their knowledge and skills to elementary-aged students. In January 2007, information was sent to all elementary schools in the district inviting them to participate in a student leadership opportunity involving implementing Idle-Free Campaigns. Elementary schools were offered free materials and resources, installation of signage on school grounds, and two one-hour training sessions for students that would take place at their own school.

From January to April of 2007, three elementary schools: Byng, Debeck and Maple Lane received training from secondary students. During the interactive sessions, the elementary students learned the definition of idling and how idling negatively impacts their health and the environment. The high school ambassadors

supported the elementary students in developing campaigns for their schools, including modeling how to approach drivers and teaching the students how to collect data for their campaigns. The elementary students were given the opportunity to apply their newly learned skills by role-playing scenarios with their peers. Two elementary schools, Debeck and Maple Lane, have had signage installed and have implemented idle-free campaigns since their training sessions. Byng Elementary will be implementing their campaign in the fall of 2007.

The four high school students who led the training sessions were recognized for their amazing work as idle-free ambassadors at the City of Richmond’s U-ROC award ceremony in May 2007.

## Barriers and Solutions

In coordinating district training for secondary students, communication between the students and district staff was, at times, difficult to initiate and maintain and it was challenging to know whether information about the training opportunities was reaching the students. We found that having a staff contact person at each school was crucial to enabling good communication between the students and district staff. Ensuring that a staff sponsor was available to connect with the students allowed the students to have access to an adult on-site to ask questions and to help communicate with district staff about their progress with their campaigns.



Each school site had different challenges in the implementation of their idle-free campaigns. Some concerns were: safety issues for elementary students, traffic flow issues in the parking lots, and drivers' reactions to students approaching them in their cars. To address these issues, all key stakeholders were invited to the training sessions to learn along with the students. In the schools where the principal or vice-principal, a representative from the PAC (parent advisory committee), and/or other staff members were present, these issues could be discussed openly and solutions formed as a group.

For elementary teachers, bringing students to attend a workshop off school grounds required a lot of advance preparation since parents needed to be contacted and rides needed to be arranged. By offering the training sessions at their own schools and having the secondary students come to the elementary school themselves, we avoided the barrier of lack of transportation, and thus enabled elementary students to attend the sessions offered.

Because of the cultural make-up of Richmond residents, language was sometimes a barrier when approaching drivers with the idle-free message. To overcome this barrier, students at McMath created their own version of an idle-free brochure that was translated into Chinese. The District has also created a Chinese version of a one page flyer that can be used to convey the idle-free message to Chinese-speaking drivers.



## Results

The data on idling was coordinated at each individual site, therefore, there was not a standard method to collecting and analyzing the data. Students and staff also modified the methods of data collection depending on what they found to be the most effective. We continue to work on collecting data that will show the impact of our work from our campaigns.

Although there are no concrete numbers to report, from the feedback we have received from the schools, we are pleased to share some of the intangible results from the campaigns:

- an increase in awareness of the impact of idling on health, the environment and vehicles for students, staff, and the parent community
- the creation of a shared goal for promoting social responsibility within the school community
- curriculum connections for science and environmental studies
- possible solutions to traffic and safety issues in school parking lots
- opportunities for students to practice presentation skills and interact with others

We continue to promote the idle-free message because we believe that behavioural change begins with small steps. With each small step that we take, we move closer to becoming an idle-free district!

The learning from the implementation of our idle free campaigns will provide input into the design of future idle-free training sessions, campaigns and a systemic plan for our school district. Watching our students in action reaffirmed for us the importance of giving our students opportunities to lead, learn and, ultimately, make a difference in our community.