

Raising Student Voice and Action for Equity and Justice

About the project ...

The purpose of the *Raising Student Voice and Action for Equity and Justice* project was to embed academic achievement, character development, citizenship development and respect for diversity in a board-wide plan, uniting all staff and students. The board's commitment to this ideal was anchored in a 2009–10 Board Improvement Plan SMART goal, which stated that “100% of our students will participate in a social justice project during the current school year”. A board-wide committee provided ideas and strategies to enable students and teachers to live out their faith more deeply by committing to and carrying out social justice projects linked to the Teaching Learning Critical Pathways (TLCPs) and the Character Development Forum held in May 2010 for Grade 7–12 students. The purposes and goals of the project were:

- To improve academic achievement through student involvement in compelling issues affecting people of the world today
- To improve interpersonal relationships through collaboration and work on the project
- To improve students' awareness of local and global issues and that one voice or action can make a difference, thereby improving life preparation
- To develop cultures of compassion, equity and fairness through deep understanding and articulation of goals and actions by students and teachers
- To promote responsible citizenship through the involvement of all students, inclusiveness measures and the direction of caring adults – Faith Ambassadors – within the schools

Prior to and throughout the projects, teachers investigated and ensured the infusion of social justice issues into their TLCPs, planned for the launch of the initiatives and supported students in carrying them out.

Impact on student learning and school culture ...

- Involvement in the projects contributed to improved learning and achievement for all students.
- 100% of students took part in a social justice initiative at the school level. Initiatives were as simple as bringing in pennies for children in Peru and as elaborate as staging a drama production to benefit charities in Thunder Bay. This encouraged student engagement because a variety of different types of learners could participate in ways that felt safe and were accessible for them.
- The project increased teacher alignment of initiatives by drawing the concepts of inclusion and equity into TLCPs. Students, staff and community members developed and used common language and set clear goals for everyone involved in the projects.
- Participation in the Regional Character Education Symposium increased understanding, motivation and engagement for students, as well as teachers and parent volunteer attendees.

Lessons learned for moving forward ...

- Teachers will continue to deeply embed the tenets of character education into TLCP processes to motivate, engage and encourage students.
- The projects will be sustained and extended by inviting a wider range of students to attend the symposium, increasing student opportunities to interact with motivational speakers at the symposium and providing more time for students to develop plans for their social justice projects.