DATE: June 9, 2020

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Strategic Plan Update: Student Leadership and Citizenship

ORIGINATOR: Nancy Petersen, Managing Director, Strategic District Supports

RESOURCE STAFF: Marnie Beaudoin, Soleil Surette

ISSUE

The purpose of this Strategic Plan Update report is to provide the Board of Trustees with a more comprehensive look at areas of the Division's efforts in support of Student Leadership and Citizenship.

BACKGROUND

In 2018, Edmonton Public Schools formally reaffirmed the District Strategic Plan for the 2018-2022 term. The District Strategic Plan has three priority areas with supporting goals and outcomes. The plan provides common direction and alignment between the work of the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent of Schools and Division staff. The plan serves as the foundation for the organization's culture of evidence-based decision making, assurance and accountability.

To demonstrate the Division's commitment to transparency and accountability, Strategic Plan Update reports were introduced in 2016–2017 as an extension of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR). The reports are intended to provide the Board of Trustees with detailed progress towards the goals and outcomes of our Strategic Plan.

CURRENT SITUATION

This Strategic Plan Update report reflects the work in support of high quality teaching and learning for Student Leadership and Citizenship and is in direct response to Priority 2, Goal 1 of the 2018-2022 District Strategic Plan, Priority 2, Goal 1: A Focus on Well-being and Student Citizenship.

KEY POINTS

This Strategic Plan Update report is taking a deeper look at the development and benefits of student leadership and citizenship capacities at Edmonton Public Schools.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I   Strategic Plan Update: Student Leadership and Citizenship

NP:mh

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Strategic Plan Update:

Student Leadership and Citizenship

June 9, 2020

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INTRODUCTION

This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an insight into the importance of student leadership and citizenship as a component of public education and reflects alignment with Priority Two - Goal One, *A Focus on Well-being and Student Citizenship.*

As we strive towards the Board's vision of *Success, one student at a time*, we acknowledge that the concept of success is broad and extends beyond that of academic achievement. While academic success is of critical importance and a primary focus for teachers in the instruction and assessment of student learning, research has also demonstrated that students achieve lifelong success through the development of their leadership and citizenship capacities as well. This aspect of a student's development leverages the energy and power of youth voice; the benefits of this leadership and citizenship are extended to students, the overall culture of the school and the broader community.

> *"Most importantly, working with many other individuals who are usually students like me has shown me that there is no age to being a leader, and that we are never too young to make a difference."*
> (Edmonton Public high school student)

BENEFITS OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND CITIZENSHIP

Student leadership development and student citizenship development are inherently linked, as each provide youth with the opportunity to grow as individuals, gain skills and contribute to both their school community and the broader community. There is an emerging body of research looking at the impact and role of youth leadership and citizenship for the overall well-being of students, school culture, the organization and the community. The following are key concepts within this area of research:

- Students will be more successful when they have had the opportunity to provide voice or feedback towards aspects of their learning. The opportunity to inform decisions or to be partners in their own learning has a positive impact on student success that carries forward to life beyond K to 12 schooling.
- When schools or school authorities find ways to solicit student perspective—"to partner with students, 'as stakeholders in their own learning', especially at the secondary level - they do more than equip students with tools for lifelong success", (Giving Students a Voice, Harvard Education, August 18, 2016). They also create learning environments and policies that are more effective at supporting the school in meeting the overall goals for the success of their students. Additionally, this Harvard research identified:
  - The importance of authentically engaging youth and listening to youth voice— "that when schools give students the agency and the tools to speak out, the effects can resonate across students' lives. The process of becoming engaged as active partners can give young people a set of strategies they can use to create positive change in future classrooms or communities".
  - Youth voice brings a unique perspective to a topic or concept - genuine youth engagement and the seeking of youth voice, "means recognizing that young people have a perspective on the world that adults can't share, and that their perspective should be welcomed alongside the wisdom that adult perspectives bring".
- The OECD's Youth Stocktaking Report highlights the importance of youth participation in various aspects of public life, such as student governments, extracurricular and community service activities, as an important component in the acquisition of the knowledge and skills youth need to engage in public life as adults. Research cited in the report found that "citizenship education activities which take place beyond the classroom are widely recognized to have a high impact on learners…".

In alignment with the emerging research emphasizing the positive impact of contributions students make within their schools and communities, examples of youth engagement and the valuing of youth voice as a critical part of responding to the needs of a diverse society, can be found at all levels of government and within many organizations. International, national and local examples of this engagement include the following:

- The United Nations supports a variety of youth initiatives, including the [Youth Delegate Programme](), where youth from around the world come together to provide input on international issues related to youth.
- The OECD developed the resource [Engaging Young People in Open Governments: a communication guide]() to provide concrete strategies for all levels of government to leverage the assets offered by the youth population when establishing public policy.
- The [Prime Minister's Youth Council]() in Canada was established in 2016. Drawing from youth across Canada, members of this youth council provide advice to the Prime Minister on issues of importance to young Canadians and to Canadians as a whole. The Canadian government held the first Canada Youth Summit in May 2019.
- Alberta Health Services established a number of youth engagement councils to strengthen the overall health care system through youth perspective, including: the [Stollery Youth Network](), the [Child and Youth Advisory Council]() for Alberta's Children's Hospital, and the [Nutrition Youth Advisory Panel]().
- The [City of Edmonton Youth Council]() is celebrating its 25th year and provides information and advice to Edmonton's City Council in relation to issues involving or affecting youth in Edmonton.

Specific to the context of education in Alberta, the [Minister's Youth Council]() was established in 2017. The Youth Council is made up of approximately 40 students 14-19 years of age from across the province, who provide input to the Minister of Education and the Alberta government on provincial education initiatives. Additionally, Alberta Education's [The Heart of the Matter: Character and Citizenship Education in Alberta Schools]() further reinforces the importance of being intentional around the enabling of student leadership, with many resulting benefits, including, but not limited to:
- A climate of respect for self and others
- The attributes of active citizenship
- Improved interpersonal relationships
- Greater self-discipline
- A continued focus on safe schools
- A positive school culture
- Enhanced employability skills

"I experienced change by not only thinking about myself but everyone as a whole. Being a leader is not about telling a person what to do, it's about democracy and getting everyone's point of view and everyone's opinion being heard."
(Edmonton Public high school student)

STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND CITIZENSHIP IN EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

LEADERSHIP IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND

The empowering element of student leadership and citizenship is fostered within the Division through the direction of our Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan as well as through the intent of our Cornerstone Values: Accountability, Collaboration, Equity and Integrity. Furthermore, the Division has a set of Board policies and administrative regulations that lay the foundation for welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy school environments that ultimately foster leadership and citizenship within students.

Across Division schools, staff work to support the development of students' leadership and citizenship. The K to 12 learning environment inherently builds students' skills, with a focus on personal development and contributing positively to the school and community and many aspects of learning in school supporting the development of lifelong leadership and citizenship skills. Content across subject areas, such as Social Studies, Language Arts, Health and Life Skills and Physical Education exposes students to concepts and information that demonstrate leadership and citizenship within the context of society. Learning experiences like working in a group, developing a presentation or speaking to the class all provide students with opportunities that challenge them to grow and develop in their own personal leadership and citizenship skills.

Looking beyond the K to 12 classroom context, the development of student leadership and citizenship skills is facilitated through a range of school experiences, including scheduled leadership classes, elected student councils and both in-school and extracurricular volunteer opportunities. Collectively these opportunities and experiences have a positive impact on the school, the community and on the students themselves. Additionally, students use their individual and collective energy to generate opportunities to contribute to their schools and local community through a range of activities. The following is a high level look at the range and nature of events, activities and initiatives that reflect, promote or enhance student leadership and citizenship within a school environment.

- Activating youth voice through such means as students advocating for change or improvement in the community with a letter writing campaign, students submitting stories to their school or local community paper, or students participating in surveys or focus groups to provide youth voice to a topic.
- Contributing to community-led initiatives such as Hockey Helps Kids, Festival of Trees or Rotary Youth Leadership.
- Initiating and leading school-level volunteer efforts such as making sandwiches for the Mustard Seed, organizing food bank drives, undertaking Random Acts of Kindness, surprising neighbourhood seniors with complimentary lawn raking or snow shoveling and writing letters to seniors during COVID-19.
- Volunteering to take on leadership roles to benefit other students, such as serving on the school safety patrol; providing playground leadership; facilitating a conflict resolution process; running mock elections during civic, provincial and national elections; and providing mentorship to younger students.
- Planning and participating in annual school events that raise funds for causes both in and outside of the school (e.g., Bike-A-Thon, Terry Fox Run, wake-a-thon, Relay for Life, Walk for Water, school dances, carnivals, field trips, disaster relief).
- Participating in structured leadership development opportunities offered in schools, such as leadership courses, school student council, extracurricular clubs and activities, and serving in leadership roles through athletics (e.g., team captain).
  - The Division's locally developed course Leadership, Character and Social Responsibility saw 2,066 high school students registered for the 2019-2020 school year.

Each of these experiences help our students to grow and foster the lifelong skills and values that will serve them as individuals and as contributing members of their community.

> *"It changed the way I saw my school because I realized I play an immense role in making the school a better place and also my community."*
> (Edmonton Public high school student)

STUDENT GOVERNANCE

While student leadership and citizenship happens daily across Division schools through a diverse set of opportunities and initiatives, the Board of Trustees also shaped the direction of student leadership in the Division through their establishment of a student governance model. On November 25, 2014, the Board of Trustees introduced Alberta's first Student Trustee. This was a significant moment in student governance and demonstrated the Board's commitment to youth voice.

To further strengthen the role of youth governance within the Division, in April 2016, the Board of Trustees supported the establishment of the Student Senate model, composed of high school aged students from across the Division. Currently, the Student Senate is made up of 33 student senators and meets monthly to fulfill their annual work plan. Members of the senate select three Student Trustees to represent their voice with the Board of Trustees by reporting the work and progress of the senate at three Board meetings throughout the year. Since November 2014, many school divisions across Alberta have followed the vision and leadership set out by our Board of Trustees, and have established an approach or structure to support student engagement for their jurisdiction.

THE VOICE OF OUR STUDENTS

To help inform the development of this report, high school students from across the Division were invited to share their unique individual perspective to a set of questions exploring the role that school played in their growth as leaders. The Student Senate initiated engaging with peers from across their school community, with 172 students from 16 high schools participating*. The student respondents provided comments and feedback about the influence of school on their personal growth and development in the area of leadership. While the student participants indicated a wide range of personal experience with leadership from minimal to extensive, their responses consistently revealed a number of common outcomes consistent with the research supporting student leadership. Three themes that strongly emerged from the collective voice of Division students were:
- A sense of belonging within the school
- A sense of accomplishment
- A sense of personal growth

*Student Senators engaged with their school community just as learning had transitioned from in-class to online distance learning due to COVID-19.

A Sense of Belonging

Students shared that participating in leadership activities provided them with a sense of community among their peers that resulted in a number of benefits, including recognizing the importance of being engaged and involved, working with like-minded people and generating excitement around a common goal, collaborating with others and working as a team, and strengthening and deepening relationships with others at their school.

Our Students' Voices: A Sense of Belonging
- *"This experience helped me to realize that I am not only part of [my club] at my school, but part of the larger global community."*
- *"It was a lot of fun and it made me feel included. Now I want others to feel that way as well."*
- *"The best part was working with an amazing group of students on something we were passionate about."*
- *"Being surrounded by passionate people who are willing to advocate for what they believe motivates me to do the same."*
- *"I love bonding with people and making connections as it makes me feel connected."*
- *"For me, the idea of my leadership helping others is important because it makes me feel like I have a purpose and a reason to belong to my community."*

A Sense of Accomplishment

Students who responded to the questionnaire expressed pride in contributing to their school and broader community. This sense of accomplishment was evident for students whether they were reflecting on their volunteerism as an individual, or their work as part of a team. In particular, students expressed valuing making a difference for others, bringing happiness to others and being a part of something bigger than themselves. In short, students indicated they felt more connected to their school.

Our Students' Voices: A Sense of Accomplishment
- *"I have enjoyed being part of this community and have felt valued in it. I have also enjoyed contributing to this community through my leadership position, as I feel as though I am giving back."*
- *"It is quite a nice feeling seeing your work pay off, even if it's just making the lines at lunch and the clean up after more efficient, it pays off."*
- *"For me, the best part about leadership has always been make[ing] a positive impact on others, whether it's the community, the school or just a student."*
- *"Getting to help others and inform them, it feels good!"*
- *"My favourite parts of being a leader are the ability to grow as a person by learning new skills and also knowing that I can make a difference in my community."*

- *"Although this event was cancelled because of the current pandemic, students at my school still raised money through the online fundraising website. To see my school community show leadership by raising money for an event they can't participate in made me very optimistic for our future."*

A Sense of Personal Growth
Students shared that they had benefited as individuals from participating in leadership activities. Students expressed a range of growth experiences, including the development of personal attributes such as resiliency, self-knowledge or risk-taking. Students also observed that they had gained transferable skills such as communication, collaboration and time management. In particular, students shared that they felt they developed public speaking skills, became more effective at expressing their opinion, learned collaboration and conflict resolution skills and became more confident and courageous overall.

Our Students' Voices: A Sense of Personal Growth:
- *"It made me think outside of my box and I learned how to cooperate with others."*
- *"Confidence. I believe everyone needs confidence in their life, too much self doubt and insecurity can be detrimental when faced with hard decisions or even simple ones."*
- *"The experience has empowered me to speak up about issues that I feel passionate about."*
- *"Communication, organization, supporting community, responsibility, awareness and participation in community. Basic skills that help you no matter where you are in your life."*
- *"I learned a wide variety of new skills, however, I think that three that I developed the most were time management, problem solving, and adaptability...Since these skills are required for so many other opportunities, I think these skills will definitely help in a professional capacity, but also in my daily life to help avoid and overcome challenges I will face."*
- *"I have found that there is no "right" method to being a successful leader, you have to understand yourself first and what you want through leadership."*

The opportunity and intent for student leadership and citizenship development are supported by the efforts of Division staff and it is through the enthusiasm and passion of our students that these many initiatives come to life across Division schools.

WHAT THE DATA TELLS

Data from the Division Feedback Survey and the provincial Accountability Survey relative to student leadership and citizenship indicates that within student, parent and staff feedback there are areas of strength and areas where there is the opportunity for growth. Typically, younger students provided a more positive response than their older peers and school staff were often the most confirming around the areas of citizenship and leadership within the school community. Additionally, Appendix 1 provides data from both surveys related to questions that address more broadly the area of student well-being.

Division Feedback Survey		2017		2018		2019	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
I have chances to be a leader at school (students)	Grades 3 + 5	12,456	83.6	13,210	80.4	13,506	77.5
	Grades 8 + 11	9,340	74	9,088	74.8	9,772	72.7
My child's school encourages students to demonstrate leadership	Families	3,873	86.5	4,313	86	5,183	83.7
All students are welcome to participate in extracurricular school activities (e.g., clubs teams)	Grades 8 + 11	9,340	89	9,088	89.6	9,772	89.3

My school helps me learn how to help others	Grades 3 + 5	12,456	92.3	13,210	88.1	13,506	90.9
	Grades 8 + 11	9,340	72	9,088	72	9,772	75.1
My child's school encourages students to demonstrate citizenship (being involved in your community and respecting other people)	Families	3,873	90.1	4,313	90.1	5,183	88.8
My school encourages students to demonstrate citizenship	Staff	4,338	96.6	4,357	96.6	4,627	95.5
I feel I belong in my school	Grades 3 + 5	12,456	89.6	13,208	86.9	13,506	87
	Grades 8 + 11	9,340	77.4	9,088	6.1	9,772	83.2

Accountability Pillar Survey		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Percentage of teachers, parents and students who are satisfied that students model the characteristics of active citizenship	Overall	28,314	85.3	27,962	84.9	29,529	84 .9	30,631	83.7	31,396	83.2
	Parent	3,459	82.7	3,783	82.7	3,942	82.5	4,061	81.6	3,645	81.8
	Student	20,639	79.1	20,191	77.1	21,357	78	22,095	75.8	23,166	74.2
	Teacher	4,036	94.2	3,988	94.8	4,230	94.3	4,475	93.7	4,585	93.6

Accountability Pillar Survey		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
Students		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
At school, I am encouraged to get involved in activities that help people in my community	Grades 7-9	5,393	82	5,763	79	5,861	81	5,986	80	6,405	79
	Grades 10-12	6,160	77	5,292	76	5,665	77	5,780	75	5,934	72
Parents											
Your child is encouraged at school to be involved in activities that help the community	All parents	3,410	79	3,744	79	3,912	79	4,015	78	3,618	78
	Grades 4-6	1,631	82	1,765	83	1,979	82	1,987	82	1,755	81
	Grades 7-9	960	78	1,057	75	1,046	76	1,114	74	1,071	75
	Grades 10-12	819	74	922	76	887	75	914	73	792	76
Teachers											
Students are encouraged at your school to be involved in activities that help the community	Grades 4	626	90	615	90	682	91	720	89	715	91
	Grades 7	725	90	709	88	771	89	865	87	876	89
	Grades 10	734	90	715	91	784	92	775	90	787	90

NEXT STEPS

As we prepare for the 2020-2021 school year, the voice of Division students is critical. More than 44,000 students responded to the Division's re-entry survey, sharing their thoughts, concerns and enthusiasm around the return to school in the fall. Student perspective is key as we prepare for both quality teaching and learning experiences and school facilities where students will feel safe.

The Board of Trustees and senior administration will continue to value and seek youth voice, whether it is through working with the Student Senate, seeking student perspective in the development of a Board policy or holding student focus groups to inform key educational topics.

Across Division classrooms and school communities, teachers and school staff will engage with students with the intention to help them develop as leaders and grow as positive, contributing citizens within their community.

"I realized that leaders act to bring positive change and infuse confidence….In the past, I believed that leaders were the ones to give out tasks to others, but in actuality, it is to influence and become a role model for your peers."
(Edmonton Public high school student)

APPENDIX

Accountability Pillar Survey		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
Students		**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
At school do most students respect each other	Grades 4-6	8,984	73	9,008	70	9,762	72	10,208	71	10,699	71
	Grades 7-9	5,392	73	5,769	69	5,824	69	5,987	67	6,406	63
	Grades 10-12	6,142	76	5,288	73	5,666	74	5,787	70	5,946	66
Parents											
Students at your child's school respect each other	Grades 4-6	1,634	83	1,757	84	1,976	81	1,983	83	1,755	81
	Grades 7-9	961	78	1,057	81	1,041	80	1,116	77	1,068	79
	Grades 10-12	825	78	923	78	889	77	914	77	798	76
Teachers											
Students at your school respect each other	Grades 4	625	93	625	93	687	93	720	89	717	90
	Grades 7	728	93	712	90	780	90	2,018	91	883	89
	Grades 10	735	94	719	96	799	95	781	93	788	92

Accountability Pillar Survey		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
Students		**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Do other students treat you well	Grades 4-6	9,008	76	8,993	74	9,732	75	10,181	73	10,665	75
Other students treat me well	Grades 7-9	5,394	83	5,770	80	5,822	81	5,988	79	6,411	78
	Grades 10-12	6,167	86	5,291	86	5,657	87	5,776	84	5,934	84
Parents											
Students treat each other well at your child's school	Grades 4-6	1,632	85	1,761	83	1,960	82	1,983	83	1,748	82
	Grades 7-9	960	79	1,064	81	1,046	81	1,102	78	1,063	81
	Grades 10-12	823	78	919	78	882	77	915	74	794	76
Teachers											
Students treat each other well at your school	Grades 4	626	93	622	92	687	94	719	90	718	91
	Grades 7	721	93	708	91	777	91	865	91	880	89
	Grades 10	731	96	714	96	794	95	774	94	788	92

Accountability Pillar Survey		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
Students		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
At school, do most students help each other	Grades 4-6	9,024	80	9,023	77	9,766	78	10,222	76	10,714	77
At school, students help each other	Grades 7-9	5,399	81	5,770	79	5,827	79	5,992	78	6,405	75
	Grades 10-12	6,167	79	5,304	76	5,673	79	5,780	79	5,938	73
Parents											
Students at your child's school help each other when they can	Grades 4-6	1,633	82	1,765	83	1,978	83	1,987	82	1,755	81
	Grades 7-9	963	77	1,066	77	1,050	79	1,115	76	1,068	79
	Grades 10-12	820	73	926	75	888	73	919	73	793	73
Teachers											
Students at your school help each other when they can	Grades 4	624	96	625	97	684	97	726	96	723	97
	Grades 7	727	95	709	94	779	95	866	95	885	94
	Grades 10	735	95	717	96	793	96	778	95	790	95

Division Feedback Survey		2017		2018		2019	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
My school helps me develop resiliency (not giving up)	Grades 3 + 5	12,456	91.8	13,210	88.6	13,506	84.8
	Grades 8 + 11	9,340	71.2	9,088	68.4	9,772	65.9
My school helps students develop resiliency	Staff	4,338	92	4,357	90.4	4,627	92.9
My child feels included at school	Families	3,873	91.9	4,313	92	5,183	87.7