

Students Taking Action Today Conference

About the project ...

A District School Board of Niagara volunteer committee of teachers and students organized and facilitated a *Students Taking Action Today* (STAT) conference to build on the energy and enthusiasm for student engagement and service learning that was motivated by a board event featuring an inspirational speaker from *Free the Children*. Approximately 1,000 students from over forty elementary and secondary schools attended the STAT conference to hear presentations from a guest speaker and from peers who had been engaged in projects such as Habitat for Humanity Global Village, One World Youth project and the Sierra Leone School Build. At the conclusion of the conference, students were challenged to participate in a board-wide service learning initiative to support their local food banks and to initiate service learning projects within their own school, local and global communities. Each participant received a take-away bag filled with materials to support their civic engagement journey.

Impact on student learning and school culture ...

- Participation was welcomed and valued from students across a wide range of educational experiences. Students who attended non-traditional classrooms such as alternative education programs reported particularly high engagement in and enthusiasm for the school-based service learning projects.
- Students were highly inspired and motivated as they came together for a united purpose and worked with others for common causes as follow-up to the conference.
- When asked to identify the lessons their students learned during the conference, teacher responses included the following statements:
 - *My students learned they can do anything if they set their minds to it. They are learning to speak up, reach out and give back.*
 - *It gave my students a sense of purpose to try and do the right thing on a regular basis and help others rather than focusing on what they want.*
 - *My students learned to network with staff and other students - they learned that when you have a mission and are prepared to help, anything is possible.*
 - *My students learned that small groups can inspire others to change their views on things and that one person can make a difference.*

Lessons learned for moving forward ...

- Students have a powerful voice and, when given the right tools, can make a significant difference in their local, school and global communities.
- Civic engagement is the key to embedding character development in the classroom and school. Character traits cannot be taught in isolation – students need opportunities to observe and demonstrate them through real-life experiences.
- Providing an opportunity for students and teachers to come together once a year at a *Students Taking Action Today* conference allows them to experience "the possible." They learn from one another, share ideas and join a network of "world changers."
- There is overwhelming support to continue to host an annual event of this nature to deepen the focus on character development and further expand system capacity.