



ST. PAUL'S INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

5 Magee Road, Gander, NL. A1V 1W1
Telephone (709) 256-8404 Fax (709) 256-8793

Principal Ms. Julia Webb

Vice-Principal Ms. Jennifer Parsons

WE
339 Queen St East
Toronto, ON
M5A 1S9

Dear WE Schools,

One of the things that people often don't realize about teaching is that it can be a very isolating profession. Teachers are in their own little box for most of their day, one adult with a large number of young people, trying really hard to meet a set of guidelines that, at times, can seem like an impossible task. We're curriculum focused, keeping students on task and moving towards outcomes, and when we can, we try to squeeze in those bonus "teachable" moments, where we help students become well-rounded people. It's hard sometimes, to walk away at the end of the day and feel like you've done the "big picture" teaching – which is, for most of us, the reason we became teachers. It's hard, when you're buried under a huge pile of marking, with 32 students in your classroom, all of who have their own issues and concerns, and no chance to grab a coffee or go to the washroom, to feel like you're making headway with the bigger picture.

But working with WE helps us get that bigger picture to come into focus.

In my school, our Student Parliament group runs a number of social action projects throughout the year. We do food drives, collect money for the local children's hospital, and make donations to other causes that students deem important. Students have chosen all of these projects, and since we became a WE school in 2013, they've begun working on projects that are much farther reaching than just our local community. Now we run a We Create Change challenge each year, with funds going to whichever projects students choose. It changes each year; we've put money towards education, clean drinking water, and sustainable economy – the students love the idea that they can buy goats and give people a chance to be independent. The students learn about the project they've chosen and promote the activity to their classes. The last time we raised money for clean drinking water, for example, students wanted to make a promotional video to be shown in classes. They planned the video, researched the topic, and wrote the scripts – I simply made the video available on my YouTube channel and sent the link to teachers to play in class. But suddenly, our students had taken ownership of this issue and wanted to see things change. The enthusiasm spilled over into other projects, like our "St. Paul's Cares" Christmas project, where each class choose their own project. Some chose local actions, like donating used clothes to organizations that distribute them to people in need, while others loved the WE projects and wanted to raise money for one of the five pillars. The big picture was starting to get pretty clear.

This year, when we start working on some of our projects, I'll be looking at them with a different perspective. I was part of an Educator's Tour this summer, and we spent time at the Minga Lodge in Ecuador. While I was passionate about our projects before, now I'm looking at them with a more experienced eye. I knew WE was all about sustainable projects, but I didn't realize how that would work until we stood in Bella Vista and saw their water system. Finding out that it had been built by

community members, who had learned how to keep the system running, made me feel so good about the work WE is doing. Charity shouldn't mean throwing money at a problem and hoping it goes away; it should be a way to help people find their own solutions that are sustainable. Seeing how things worked in Bella Vista sharpened my view of the big picture, as did meeting with Don Vargas and the ladies of Sumak Warmi. Meeting the people in the communities and seeing how much ownership they have of the projects makes me even more certain that WE is an organization that I want to support. This year, when my students and I discuss the pillars and choose our goals, I'll be able to share with them a lot more information about how the people in WE-supported communities will access the funds that we raise and share with them. I'll be using the pictures and the videos that I took in Ecuador, along with those our group has since shared, to offer my students just a little bit of the perspective I gained on my trip. And eventually, if I'm lucky, I'll get to bring students on a WE trip someday, and they'll get the chance to see that big picture for themselves.

I can't say enough good things about the WE program. I've encouraged many of my teacher friends to become WE schools, to sign up for the lovely free resources, to talk to someone at WE about a program, and to look at how the things they already do can be complimented by the way the people at WE think. I like that WE lets me get out of my little box and help my students (and my co-workers) get involved in a world that's much bigger than my school or my community. When I see my students getting interested in a project like We Create Change, or have a co-worker ask me about how much clean water we can buy with the money we raised, or whenever someone asks me about my trip to Ecuador, any sense of isolation disappears and I can see the big picture, as clear as the skies above the rainforest after the rain.

Thank you for your time – and for sharing the WE program with all of us. Ashka pakrachu.



Valerie Abbott, B.A., B.Ed., M.A.
English & Home Economics
Student Parliament Supervisor
St. Paul's Intermediate