



Students of Captain Nichola Goddard School meet to walk to school, part of the school's Green Commuting Hubs project.

Eco-conscious Teacher Inspires Pollution Solution

CALGARY, Alberta - Two years ago, Debbie Rheinstein, a Grade 9 Science and Outdoor Education teacher at Captain Nichola Goddard School, was enjoying a summer hike with her husband. While surrounded by nature, their conversation turned to an environmental concern facing her school. "Many schools are faced with vehicle congestion and idling problems around pick-up and drop-off points," she says. "It not only has a negative impact on the environment, but also affects the school's air quality."

In the previous year, Captain Nichola Goddard School had challenged their students with a six-week green commuting challenge, but engagement was low. With the help of students and her co-teacher Maureen Brinker, Rheinstein applied student and teacher feedback to develop the challenge's concept into the Green Commuting Hubs project. Students now meet in various established hubs and walk to school together. When enrolment increased from 80 to 200, Rheinstein knew she was on the right path. Today, the project includes, hub locations, an individual commute option, and parent drop-off locations which have increased registration to include more than half of the school's students. "A lot of students are encouraging their friends to join in the project," says Rheinstein. "It's amazing to watch peers encourage each other to make more environmentally sustainable choices."

About her environmental passion, Rheinstein says, "It comes naturally. Everyone on the planet has a responsibility to protect what we have. As an educator, I have the opportunity to teach my students how to have a good life while protecting our natural world."

The Green Commuting Hubs project was recently named an Emerald Award Finalist in the Education category. The Emerald Awards, a uniquely-Albertan award presented by the Alberta Emerald Foundation, recognize and celebrate environmental stewardship in our province. “I was blown away to hear that we were not only nominated, but named a finalist,” says Rheinstein. “The Green Commuting Hubs project is dear to my heart. It’s really humbling to know someone believes in us so highly and wants to promote our project. It’s a great way to share the project with other schools.” The Emerald Awards will be presented at Edmonton’s Citadel Theatre on June 4.

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