

RENFREW COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

MEDIA RELEASE

“Poverty Is a Values Problem, Not a Money Problem - Kielburger Tells Educators”

Poverty, AIDS, and child labour can all be eradicated if we can engage young people to care about these issues, to change their priorities, and to find creative ways to work on the problems. Educators need to spend as much time on encouraging compassion and commitment in children as they do on developing academic and intellectual skills.

This was the message delivered by Marc Kielburger, Chief Executive Director of Free the Children and Leaders Today, in his keynote address to an audience of 1000 educators in Pembroke last Friday. Brothers Craig and Marc Kielburger jointly direct the world's largest network of children helping children through education, which works with over 300,000 children every year.

“I come from a family of teachers, and I thank you for being teachers, because you are the most powerful influence on the young, and must never forget why you became teachers. As educators, what kind of legacy do you want to leave?”

“We spend so much time programming heads, and not enough programming hearts,” said Kielburger, as he quoted studies showing that we spend more money on make-up, pet food and ice cream than the amount it would take to eradicate poverty from the world. Meanwhile, 250 million children are child labourers working in appalling conditions, and 30,000 people die of poverty every day.

All the teachers, administrators, and support staff of the Renfrew County District School Board spent the Friday PA Day at Conference 2007, the Board's biggest professional development event of the year.

One of the themes of the Conference was Character Education, and Kielburger cited research at the University of Virginia to support his call for teens to become socially engaged. “Students who volunteer get better grades and have lower incidences of dropping out and of teen pregnancy.”

Kielburger's tips on how to raise socially caring and engaged youngsters include: lead by example - make volunteering a priority; foster empathy and teach compassion in schools; celebrate caring people like Mother Theresa as heroes; don't shelter children from difficult issues; and link the global perspective to domestic realities.

Kielburger received a standing ovation for his speech and visual presentation. Comments made as educators went off to their professional workshops included “inspiring”, “very motivating that we can each make a difference” and “I had been looking forward to hearing him live and he did not disappoint”.

Participants could select from more than 80 workshops during the rest of the day, most presented by Board staff, some by invited experts in specialized fields. All offered a fresh perspective, which was appreciated by a teacher who said, “I got some great ideas and resources. I'll be trying out some new activities next week”.

So sharpen up your minds and hearts, all you students! Your teachers are coming to you newly inspired, motivated and itching to bring you new ideas - should be a blast!

For more information, please contact:

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