



Sarah McGinnis, Calgary Herald

University School Grade 6 students Nathaniel Bly, left, Regan Wright and Eric Smith hold up a power meter they've used to measure electricity use in their school.

Environmental projects urged for schoolchildren

Shift in science curriculum recommended

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As Alberta Education reviews its elementary science curriculum, a group is calling for a shift in how science is taught, with an eye on giving students more hands-on experience with solving environmental problems.

This call to move science beyond the classroom comes as an Ipsos Reid poll released Friday found 75 per cent of Albertans think schools should give top priority to providing students with opportunities to be engaged in environmental projects.

"Students who go through these experiences feel they've helped make a difference," said Gareth Thomson, executive director of the Alberta Council for Environmental Education, a non-profit lobby group.

"They feel they're part of the solution, not part of the problem."

Some Calgary schools are already offering students opportunities to lead environmental projects.

At University School in the northwest, students formed a group called Kids Can Conserve and tested the power consumption of various devices at the school.

They discovered simple changes, such as running laptops from batteries instead of keeping them plugged

in, can create power savings.

The students say conducting experiments on how to save energy or conserve water leads to a greater understanding of science.

"When you are just learning about something it is like, you have it in your brain and you're going to forget about it," said Eric Smith, 11.

"But when you are physically doing something, you're helping the planet at the same time. The memory is going to stay there for much longer."

Eleven-year-old Regan Wright recalled a project she did three years ago when her class dropped tablets in the Bow River to determine how clean the water was and how much life it could support.

"By doing something, you can make a better connection to what they are saying," she said.

Even if kids in kindergarten or Grade 1 are too young to find solutions to environmental issues on their own, giving them the chance to see problems and talk about them will help them take action later, said Nathaniel Bly, 10.

University School principal Brant Parker says he's impressed with the ability his students have to grasp real-world issues and how creative they are in finding ways to address environmental concerns.

"We often think we have to have cute little pictures and dumb things down for kids. But they want to understand the complexity of the issues and why there's controversy," he said.

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