

Taft Tiger Pride Camp “Pays it Forward”



ViOLEtha Habonimana and Olive Tuyisenga were part of the Tiger Pride Leadership Diversity Camp held at Taft Elementary in June.

Many Wm. H. Taft Elementary School students kicked off summer vacation with a special invitation to attend a leadership camp. The Tiger Pride Leadership Diversity Summer Camp ran two weeks during June for first through fifth grade students selected by staff for demonstrating leadership potential throughout the school year. The 60 Taft students attending the two-week camp enjoyed art, science, music and physical activities—all in the name of fun and team building. The Tiger Pride Camp helped students

develop social responsibility, interdependent thinking and problem solving skills—abilities students will utilize throughout the 2009-2010 school year as they serve as role models to other Taft students.

The camp came together with the assistance of Taft staff and volunteers. Four coordinators each led one group of students, assisted by sixth grade Taft students with proven leadership skills. Other community volunteers gave time and effort to make the

camp successful, including master gardener **Peggy Staggs**.

Students planned and implemented a community project where they had to ‘pay it forward’ with service projects for their neighborhood or community. One group worked at the Good Samaritan Home. Another group provided service for an elderly woman’s home in the Taft neighborhood. The remaining groups did their projects at Taft Elementary. One group tackled the atrium, which they weeded,

provided a rock path and planted new trees and flowers.

As students wrapped up their camp experience with a reflection piece, it was apparent that the service projects had made a big impact on them. “Students commented again and again about helping out the members of our community or working on our school,” said Dr. **Susan Williamson**, Taft Principal. “The concept of ‘pay it forward,’ really hit home when they saw the before and after pictures of their hard work.”

“It was truly an awesome experience for our camp coordinators, community adult and student volunteers and the 60 Taft students,” Williamson said. “We have created a cadre of student leaders at Taft that will definitely have an impact on other students, especially those that will be new to our school.”

Funding for the camp was provided through an Idaho 2009 LEP Program of Excellence Award, a grant from the Rotary Club, Title 1 funding, individual donations, and a student led bake sale and car wash. Though this was the first year the camp was held with a focus on leadership and team building; Taft plans to run the camp again next summer.