

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 18, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Acting Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Staff Group Budget Presentations

ORIGINATOR: B. Holt, Executive Director

RESOURCE

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INFORMATION

This report is provided in response to budget presentations made to the board of trustees on February 28, 2006 by three of the five district staff groups: Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 of the ATA, CUPE Local 3550 representing support staff, and CUPE Local 784 representing construction and maintenance staff. CUPE Local 474 representing custodial staff, and Exempt Staff presented at the March 14th board meeting. All principals and decision unit administrators will be provided with copies of this report and the written submissions provided by the staff groups.

As in previous years, there was a recurrent theme in all five presentations about the inadequacy of funding for public education in a province that had just reported a \$7.4 billion surplus. Each staff group representative talked about the long-term effects that insufficient funding has had upon their members, our staff. Concerns were expressed about workload and impact on health and families, job security, interpersonal conflicts resulting from limited resources, and the on-going sustainability of present models and processes. Several presenters spoke about how some of their members regarded decisions related to funding in terms of feelings of value and respect from the district.

Each presenter made suggestions about how the district could address these concerns, whether in the form of staffing formulas, continuing to address class size issues, meeting the provincial 4% administrative cap, eliminating or reducing the download of functions and work from central services, or centralizing maintenance budgets. While the administration understands and shares similar concerns about the long-term impacts of insufficient funding and workloads, the challenge remains that we must address these concerns in the context of fixed and limited funding, as well as the realization that positively addressing a suggestion from one staff group may have a negative impact on one or several of the other staff groups.

There was also universal concern expressed about the long-term impact of inadequate funding on the future of the province, i.e., our children, our students. There was a sense of weariness that this is an ongoing issue in the richest province in the country, one that has repeatedly larger and larger surpluses. There was also a heightened sense of urgency related

to plant operations and maintenance (PO&M) funding, as our buildings become another year older and more difficult to clean and maintain to the standard our staff, students and parents expect. This is especially difficult for our custodial and maintenance staff who have the knowledge and expertise to address the identified concerns.

There was also a renewed call from several presenters for the board to increase their advocacy for adequate funding of public education. The board remains committed to private and public advocacy as part of their legacy statement and is pleased to see that other school boards and the ASBA have decided to join the district in openly advocating for increased funding. The Board Chair has met with the Ministers of Education and Infrastructure on several occasions to put forward a public education agenda that stresses the need for adequate funding to support teaching and learning. The board also approved a motion at the March 14th meeting regarding the urgent need for increased funding from Alberta Infrastructure. In the days following the board meeting, a letter was sent to the Premier, a press release was issued and a press conference was held.

Edmonton Public Teachers, Local 37 of the ATA

This year's presentation by the Local highlighted several issues. The Local referenced the outstanding recommendations from the Learning Commission and indicated that again it would be up to local boards and their employees to create optimum learning conditions for the students and families in local school jurisdictions. This comment proved prescient when the Minister announced on March 29th that full-day kindergarten would not be directly funded by the province and the district then committed in April to find the funds to preserve full day programming for kindergarten aged students in eighteen identified schools for 2006-2007.

The Local also referenced the need to enhance the use of the *Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making* in conjunction with the available research and literature on professional learning communities (PLC's). The board commends the collaborative approach taken by both parties several years ago to develop the *Framework* document. This collaborative approach has been extended through the joint committee on PLC's. The administration recognizes the importance of considering the *Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making* in relation to any revisions to the district's framework for supporting teaching and learning. The integrated relationship between the two documents will continue to assist principals and their staff as they develop and enhance their professional learning community within each school.

Several concerns were raised by the Local regarding professional development, the use of AISI funding and a belief that professional development appeared to be more centrally directed, which results in uniformity and standardization. The administration believes there is a wide range of options open to teachers in pursuing professional development activities. Many of these activities are teacher initiated, e.g., accessing inservices through Consulting Services, application for professional improvement leave and/or tuition support, participation in out-of-district conferences, accessing university courses to upgrade subject content knowledge and application for leader (LED) or principal (PED) education and development. Some professional development activities are jointly planned with colleagues at school or across schools, e.g., professional development days, study groups, retreats, PLC related

development. The final category of professional development activities may be directed, funded and/or coordinated at the district level. Examples of these activities include mandatory training related to health and safety (i.e., WHMIS, First Aid, TDG, non-violent crisis intervention) and those activities funded through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). AISI funding is targeted and comes to the district with expectations (i.e., to continuously improve student learning and performance related to *district* needs and priorities) and criteria from Alberta Education. While it may enhance school professional development for teachers, AISI funding is structured to build the school's collective capacity to achieve school wide goals and must be accounted for separately from professional development funded through a school's allocation. The administration is committed to striking a balance between meeting the requirements of Alberta Education and allowing schools and staff choice within these requirements to meet their professional development needs.

The Local shared their Class Size Census data with the board and administration. While the Local was appreciative of the progress taken by the district to meet the targets set by the Learning Commission, concern was expressed that there has been an increase in class size in some areas. The Local is fearful that this may indicate an upward trend for the future, especially in light of the level of provincial funding. The board and administration recognize the importance of the Local undertaking this census each year and share the concern about the upward trend in some areas. While the district will continue to target its resources on the work in the classroom, the board recognizes the challenges faced by principals in continuing to meet current class size levels in light of the recent funding announcement.

The presentation was concluded by acknowledging the historical and mutually respectful relationship between the Local, the board and the district's administration. The board also appreciates and values the strong relationship between the Local and the district, as well as the continued commitment to support classroom teachers and enhance learning.

CUPE Local 3550 (Support Staff)

The board recognizes and appreciates that each day over two thousand support staff have a valuable and complex role in supporting teaching and learning, either directly in the classroom or in administrative and operational support functions.

The board understands that professional development is important to all support staff. The Joint Support Staff Development Committee recently commenced its work, and one of the first steps undertaken is the survey of all support staff requesting their input regarding the training they need to perform their responsibilities. The results of this survey, including input from principals and central services administrators, will help guide the work of the Committee as they develop qualification targets, identify mandatory and discretionary training requirements and make overall recommendations regarding development, delivery methods and the resources necessary to meet these needs. The board approved additional resources for the 2005-2006 school year – the Spare Administrative Assistant Mentor in Supply Services. This position was identified as a priority by principals and the Local, as there was an expressed need to assist new school administrative assistants to be fully trained in district processes as soon as possible. While the administration acknowledges that similar consulting and mentoring support is needed and desirable for teacher assistants, the context

and composition of resources will not be clear until the Committee analyzes the results of the survey and undertakes the development of qualification targets and training requirements.

The board and administration recognize there is a need to examine the impact of workloads and overwork for administrative staff in schools and central services. As was indicated last year, over the past number of years, the district has invested almost all of the new funding it has received from Alberta Education in the schools, particularly in the classroom. While this practice has had a very positive impact on teaching and learning, it has also meant that school operations have not seen increased funding and that central services continues to operate significantly below the government's administrative cap of 4%. This lack of funding for operations has occurred during the same time period when many central services decision units made significant changes to improve process effectiveness and efficiency, usually through technology enhancements. While these changes might convey the perception that more work is being downloaded to schools, it is intended that the long-term impact will result in more efficient and effective processes. The board and administration will consider several factors, including workload issues, when determining the basis of allocation and in preparing individual school and central decision unit budgets. The administration is committed to undertaking a review of all the new duties that have been assigned to administrative assistants in the last three years. In addition to sharing the information with the board, the administration believes this information needs to be considered in reviewing the appropriate class specifications for these positions.

The district is aware of the problems that have arisen with Public Private Partnerships (P3's) in other areas, and will be cautious in responding to any new directions that may come from the provincial government.

The board acknowledges and appreciates the recognition expressed by the Local for the role school trustees have in being present during upcoming negotiations to hear and understand issues of support staff.

CUPE Local 474 (Custodial Staff)

The members of Local 474 continue to ensure that our schools provide safe, clean and appropriate learning environments for our students, families and communities. The board acknowledges and values this important contribution to the fabric of the district.

The board and administration understand the impact that space utilization rates have had over the past few years on the level of PO&M funding we receive. While it was hoped that the government's change in basis of funding to per pupil grants would translate into more overall funding, the reality was that the increase did not even cover inflationary increases for utilities, supplies, equipment and services. The board and administration recognize and appreciate the strong work ethic exhibited by the custodial staff in trying to meet all of the demands from staff, students, parents and community. It is also recognized that custodial staff provide the optimal level of service and quality they can under the circumstances because of their dedication to having each school be in a condition that supports student achievement, health and safety. While the board strongly commends these staff for their current efforts, it must be recognized that there is insufficient funding to meet this desire, whether through establishment of minimal staffing levels or some other means. The

administration has taken several steps to address excess space issues throughout the district and the consultation process on the 10 year facilities plan is almost completed. The board and administration believe these steps should have a positive impact on the PO&M funding we will receive in the next few years. The board encourages the administration and the Local to continue discussions to address common issues and interests associated with PO&M funding, including strategies to reduce school utility expenditures.

The board understands the issues raised by the Local concerning community use of schools. Through the consultation process on the joint use agreement, the board and administration are hearing from a variety of stakeholders regarding issues and problems related to the agreement. The administration is committed to ongoing discussions with stakeholders, including the Local, to develop an action plan to resolve these issues.

The board and administration are supportive of ongoing professional development for all custodial staff. There have been a number of steps taken in the past year that demonstrate this commitment, including the enhancement of the 5th Level Power Engineering Course, the development and implementation of the Building Operator Certificate and the coordination of training for a group of employees wishing to obtain the 4th Level Power Engineering Certificate. The Joint Custodial Staff Development Committee was established in the past six months and the administration looks forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations in the near future.

The board encourages the administration and the Local to continue discussions about a potential Green Cleaning Policy and standardized cleaning equipment and supplies, either through the joint Custodial Health and Safety Committee or directly with representatives of Facilities Services.

The number of schools accessing the carpet cleaning service does not warrant the purchase of a second truck, but consideration is being given to hiring a second custodial technician, dependent on need and revenues received.

CUPE Local 784 (Maintenance Staff)

The board recognizes the significant contributions that maintenance staff make in creating and maintaining safe and healthy learning environments for students, staff and the community. The perspective and views expressed by the Local are valued.

The board remains firmly committed to the concept of site-based decision-making and views its challenge in the context of insufficient funding for plant operations and maintenance rather than how the money is distributed. Most recently, the board publicly expressed its concern regarding this funding deficit through the media and in direct communication to the provincial government.

Maintenance staff are recognized for their skill and expertise and the district encourages schools to access this expertise through the use of maintenance service agreements. Currently, 129 schools have signed three-year maintenance agreements with Facilities Services and it is anticipated that more schools will do so in 2006-2007. Schools budgets

reflect that monies for plant operation and maintenance have been fully allocated for custodial services, maintenance and utilities.

The board shares the Local's concern regarding attraction and retention of skilled trade's personnel and the administration looks forward to working collaboratively with the Local to seek ways of expanding apprenticeship and RAP student opportunities.

Exempt Staff

The board recognizes the broad range of skills and expertise represented by the various disciplines that make up the exempt staff group and their contribution to the effective and efficient operation of the district. The board also appreciates the focus exempt staff place on the classroom and the commitment to aligning resources in support of teaching and learning.

The board appreciates receiving information on the survey sent to all exempt staff, as well as the acknowledgement that staff appreciate the professional development opportunities and the minor increase in central services expenditures. The board and administration recognize that central services continues to function well below the administrative cap set by the provincial government. The board was concerned to hear about the issues related to health and safety and general decline in the condition of their workplaces.

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