

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 11, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Responses to Trustee Requests for Information

ORIGINATOR: B. Holt, Executive Director, Instructional and Curricular Support Services
A. Habinski, Executive Director, School and District Services

RESOURCE
STAFF: Karen Bardy, Gloria Chalmers, Robert Craig

INFORMATION

TRUSTEE REQUEST #218, DECEMBER 10, 2002 (TRUSTEE ODYNSKI) PROVIDE INFORMATION AS TO WHETHER WE ARE PLANNING A SIMILAR DOCUMENT (CAN YOU SPOT THE GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE CLASSROOM) FOR THE UNIQUE LEARNING REQUIREMENTS OF GIRLS. WHAT KIND OF SUPPORTS RE PROVIDED TO TEACHERS TO ADDRESS CONCERNS REGARDING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LEARNING FOR BOTH GIRLS AND BOYS?

In undertaking a study in the fall of 2000 to determine the feasibility of an all boys program, it was determined that the issue of gender is complex and still not all that well understood. However, the research data reviewed appeared to suggest that the known issues regarding boys are systemic and not likely to be solved by an alternative program. Thus, a commitment was made to raise awareness of these issues through various communication vehicles of which the document *Can You Spot the Gender Differences in the Classroom* is a start.

Just prior to, and during, the time the Nellie McClung all girls alternative program was under consideration, a similar study was undertaken regarding girls. The research literature at that time suggested that girls were alienated from certain subjects, namely mathematics and science, and that they participated less in classroom discussions as these tended to be male dominated. Furthermore, it appeared that these differences were more predominant during adolescence. Given the research and the community support, the board approved the implementation of the Nellie McClung all girls junior high alternative program. Since that time, the research literature is suggesting that females have and are making great strides in the sciences.

Currently, with each gender having been a central consideration, the intent is to focus on gender more generally as one aspect in providing effective programming and not to develop another information and awareness raising document. The plan is to provide information on teacher practices that are responsive to both genders and to identify and make available current research articles on gender issues. Consultants in "Programming for Student Differences" provide support to teachers regarding individual differences, including those that are gender-based. (K. Bardy, 429-8247; G. Chalmers, 429-8398)

TRUSTEE REQUEST #229, JANUARY 14, 2003 (TRUSTEE MARTIN) PROVIDE AN ANALYSIS OF PRIVATE/PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD NEEDED INFRASTRUCTURE RECENTLY REFERRED TO BY THE PREMIER. ALSO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE EXPERIENCE OF NOVA SCOTIA WITH P3s:

Public/Private Partnerships use funds from the private sector to address facility construction needs in the public sector. The public sector leases a facility, constructed and owned by the private sector, based on pre-determined terms and conditions. Prior to engaging such a partnership, it is important that the district carefully consider the structure and intent of proposed partnerships to ensure that the agreement adheres to the district's values and principles and that the agreement represents true value for taxpayers. When these criteria are met, P3's may provide the district with the opportunity to secure much-needed school facilities since it does not require full payment by Alberta Infrastructure.

A common approach to public-private partnership with respect to schools is a model whereby a developer provides the up-front capital to build a school. The developer would then lease the facility back to a school district for a pre-determined period of time. The annual lease payments, from a practical point of view, are much the same as annual capital costs incurred to service debt. In the district's case, Alberta Infrastructure would have to commit to pay the lease costs for the agreed period.

Proponents of P3's suggest that under such arrangements the private sector could demonstrate creativity and innovation, reduce construction costs, provide capital quickly and ensure early project completion.

A number of issues related to the implementation of the P3 concept are being discussed. They will be briefly introduced in this response. Because government is able to access capital at a lower interest rate than private industry, there is a possibility that the private construction and lease-back arrangements could prove to be more costly to taxpayers. It should be noted that government guarantees and school districts as tenants would provide the private sector with competitive rates as well. The construction of schools in new neighbourhoods increases the attractiveness of developments to young families. The resulting increased demand for lots in a neighbourhood would theoretically allow developers to charge more for the lots. Profits from higher lot premiums may allow developers to offset the higher cost of capital by structuring lease arrangements that are competitive with the cost to government of borrowing capital and building the facility. Success in this model would depend on the developer providing an annual lease that is the same or lower than the cost of the public sector incurring debt to build a school.

The success of this model depends on the construction of the school early in the life cycle of a neighbourhood. This would be a departure from current practice whereby schools are built only when a student population threshold is reached. There are unresolved questions regarding established district priorities for new construction and possible concerns on the part of the public about queue-jumping. This could lead to a perception that district capital priorities might be opportunity-driven rather than being driven by the district's needs. On the other hand, it may be advantageous for the district to establish a presence early in the life-cycle of a neighbourhood to establish an advantage by attracting a majority of the students in the area.

Concerns have been raised regarding P3 and existing collective agreements between the district and unions. Organized labour has expressed reservations over the possibility that private ownership of buildings could involve non-union workers instead of the district's unionized

maintenance and custodial workers. P3 agreements would have to resolve the impact on existing collective agreements.

Building quality has also been an issue with public-private school partnerships in other jurisdictions. Because building maintenance is a significant component of the life-cycle cost of a school building, care must be taken to ensure that existing building quality standards are met in cases where the district would be responsible for operation and maintenance of privately owned facilities. In some jurisdictions, P3 have resulted in lower quality buildings and have introduced a liability on the part of the school district for increased maintenance costs. This issue could be solved by asserting the district's high standards for building quality.

Issues regarding the length of lease terms must also be considered prior to entering into P3 agreements. A recent report by MLA Jon Lord recommended building schools for a 25 year expected life span. The average age of the district's schools is 41 years. Based on the district's historical experience, it is more reasonable to expect that schools will be used for educational and community purposes for a longer time period than 25 years. There may be justifiable community expectation that the district would continue to operate the school beyond the term. If lease arrangements were only for 25 years, the district could be in the position of requiring the school space at the expiry of the term. If the lease were structured such that the district had no ownership claim after 25 years, the owner of the building could be in an extremely advantageous negotiating position. This suggests that a P3 agreement must ensure that ownership of the school facility would revert to the district after the term.

The current access to schools enjoyed by the public for community use is also an issue that must be addressed in P3 agreements. Privately provided school facilities may be difficult to access by the community, as private industry typically looks to recover costs with some margin for profit. Community accessibility to public facilities such as schools would need to be preserved in any possible future P3 agreements.

There are currently issues regarding P3 and the use of municipal reserve land. The Municipal Government Act does not allow for private enterprise to own interests in reserve land. This issue needs resolution or P3 projects would need either to be located on privately owned land or the "reserve" designation on school sites would have to be removed. Although under review at this time, there is strong resistance at the municipal level to allowing broader use and access to public lands, including private facility development, however, such projects may be possible if the "reserve" designation were to be removed. In addition, the cost of land would need to be recovered as part of the lease or purchase arrangements.

In Nova Scotia, the government announced on June 21, 2000 a departure from P3 as a means to facilitate school construction. Nova Scotia Finance Minister Neil LeBlanc said that P3's were a means to "push the costs of the new schools off-book, but they didn't fool our lenders or taxpayers. Debt is debt is debt, and we must account for it." The Nova Scotia P3 experience included cost-overruns due to last-minute design changes and unmanaged site development costs.

The administration is developing a set of criteria that must be met prior to the district entering into any future public-public or public-private agreements, and these will be presented to board for approval within the next three months. (R. Craig 429-8399)

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