

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 22, 2000

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dossdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Children's Forum Final Report

ORIGINATOR: A. McBeath, Department Head

RESOURCE

STAFF: Gloria Chalmers

INFORMATION

Background: In November 1998, the Government of Alberta released the "Alberta Children's Initiative: An Agenda for Joint Action," a document which provides a provincial framework for the integration of services to children. In May of 1999, the government announced the creation of the Ministry of Children's Services that blends the responsibilities of the former Minister without Portfolio Responsible for Children's Services with some of the responsibilities of the former Minister of Family and Social Services. This new ministry assumed responsibility for the children's forum concept and changed the scope from two days of facilitated discussion to a one-day open conference followed by a day of facilitated discussion. The purpose of the forum concept is to provide an opportunity on a yearly basis for governments and community members to meet to work towards the goal identified in the agenda for joint action, that is, "Alberta's children will be safe, well cared-for, successful at learning and healthy." To plan the first forum, a steering committee chaired by Colleen Klein was named. On October 5 and 6, 1999, the first forum, First Circle – Uniting for Children, was held in Edmonton. On October 5, participation was open to all Albertans, while on October 6 it was by invitation only. District staff were involved on both days as participants and as presenters.

Final Report: The final report of First Circle – Uniting for Children released on February 9, 2000, is a compilation of the diverse recommendations made by about 350 participants in the October 6 discussion groups. Copies of the report are provided in the Trustee reading room. The 128 recommendations have neither been screened nor been prioritized. They have, however, been usefully grouped into 14 themes. The themes are:

- put children first
- increase awareness and education
- involve youth
- provide early intervention and healthy beginnings
- accelerate the integration of services for children
- address funding issues
- enhance the role of schools
- stimulate community-driven initiatives
- address Aboriginal issues

- actively lead in health and wellness promotion
- create alternatives in the Youth Justice System
- support low-income families
- improve advocacy for children-in-care
- measure progress and success

The recommendations are virtually unanimous in suggesting more positive actions on behalf of Alberta's children. None of the recommendations are to do less.

With respect to the theme "enhance the role of schools," the preamble to the recommendations identifies schools as the obvious location for identifying children at risk and for coordinating services to respond to their needs. It acknowledges that service delivery should be in partnership with various service delivery agencies. It also identifies school fees as an issue. The theme and specific recommendations are provided in Appendix I. The final forum report also includes additional information provided by participants, such as suggested actions and resources, with regard to each recommendation.

Next Steps: The report itself does not include any response from the Alberta government. The report anticipates that the various government ministries involved will respond collectively to the recommendations in the report.

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APPENDIX I: Recommendations Under The Theme "Enhance the Role of Schools"

**RECOMMENDATIONS UNDER THE THEME
“ENHANCE THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS”**

Description of Core Theme

Schools were proposed as an obvious location for the identification of children-at-risk and the coordination of services to deal with those risks. Schools should work in partnership with various service delivery agencies for the identification and delivery of services to children. It should be noted that outside of their educational role and responsibility, teachers cannot be expected to solely administer these services to children. These services should be provided by trained personnel from outside the educational system working in cooperation with school staff. Introducing new programs into the school setting will yield increased positive results. Programs dealing with family issues, such as nutrition and parenting, can be delivered to parents and children alike in the school setting by all stakeholders.

Another issue is that some schools currently levy fees to finance an increasing number of programs and services. For many Albertans, these fees place a burden on family finances which may result in children experiencing difficulties in other areas. Elimination of uncontrolled and ungoverned fees would go a long way toward easing the financial burden of families, and removing a potential barrier for full participation in their education program.

Recommendations:

1. That schools will be community focus centres and community learning centres.
2. That life skills awareness and prevention-based curriculum be implemented in the educational system in early childhood.
3. That schools offer educational programs to teach students to express and deal with anger and problems in positive, non-violent ways.
4. That all neighborhood schools be responsible for meeting, within the school, the special/individual needs of all students in their catchment area.
5. That the School Act be changed so parents have the right to choose their child's educational placement within the Alberta public education system.
6. That a full-time, full-day kindergarten program be provided for all Alberta children.
7. That an assessment be carried out to determine those schools most in need; and that a meal program be provided immediately for the children in these schools.
8. That the provincial government mandate the development of comprehensive school health in all schools in Alberta.
9. That legislation be implemented to limit school class size, and the time student must spend on buses.
10. That an early intervention program be implemented in every school, staffed by paid, certified personnel.
11. That all schools have skilled resource people to address the diversity of children's needs.
12. That core class specialization be implemented at the high school level.
13. That there be mandated implementation of safe and caring schools; and that all schools have a safe school plan which includes environmental design, responding to crisis, and post-crisis intervention.

14. That safe and caring schools be promoted.
15. That curriculum design be modified to celebrate individuality.
16. That within the next year, additional costs for going to school be eliminated for all Alberta students.
17. That within the next year, full, free funding for public and separate schools be provided to ensure that no school-related fees will be charged to Alberta students.