



**Edmonton Public Teachers Local No. 37
of the Alberta Teachers' Association**

**Budget Presentation to the
Edmonton Public Board of Trustees**

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Mark Ramsankar, President
Edmonton Public Teachers Local No. 37

Madam Chair, Trustees, Mr. Superintendent,

I am here this evening to present our Locals' input to this 2008-2009 budget. It was approximately one year ago that I did the same...have times changed? Recently the catch phrase that has surfaced is, "We are in a new era in education." With the negotiations between the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Provincial Government resolving the unfunded liability of our pension fund and a four-year window of labour peace, this statement may be true. We have the opportunity to usher in this new era. A time for us to focus on educational endeavours unfettered by the bargaining process.. And so...I stand here tonight to participate in our budget process.

My voice is only one of the five that you will hear over the next two Public Board meetings. Representatives from all of our staff groups will be here to present the issues that you will consider as our budget priorities are set for the upcoming school year. I liken this to visiting Santa at Christmas time. We come to you with a wish list and then wait to see what will be under the tree when the budget is presented. We know that all items cannot be delivered so we will put only one big item on our list this year...and we hope to find it under the tree...a focus on district staff!

We believe that a hard line investment in our most important asset would help our district in the present and in the future. The 2008-2009 budget should focus on district staff. Previous budgets introduce initiatives, programs and projects that focus on things we can do to improve student achievement. The issue with this approach generally leaves the impression that we are a top-down organization that continually places more and more expectations on our district staff. We believe the time has come to focus on supporting our staff in getting the job done!

We have identified that "wellness" is important to our organization. What are the five areas of individual health that define wellness? From the Calm 20 curriculum, I taught high school students to focus on personal wellbeing in five areas and I encourage you to do the same. They are (1) emotional health, (2) physical health, (3) social health, (4) psychological health and (5) intellectual health. Putting this in context means that the balancing act for a healthy lifestyle does not just focus on physical wellbeing. Is it possible to help support our staff in all these areas through the budget process where can we begin?

I believe it is possible...and the starting point is here. We have a long-standing tradition of speaking of the strength of our employer-employee relationship. This relationship has

served us well, even during very trying times. We believe at this time, that we will be testing our relationship-building by addressing the elephants in the room without the interference of bargaining. I speak on behalf of the teachers' staff group...but is our group being heard? We challenge you to put forward, in this budget, tangible programs that reflect consideration of all the staff group presentations.

The time of thinking outside the box or being creative within it are over. We need to seriously consider and redefine the box! Meaningful discourse on this topic will lead to more questions than answers in this regard and cannot possibly be addressed in a 15 minute presentation. Ongoing talks in the area of process must continue with the goal of bringing about meaningful change. I am not suggesting that we change for the sake of change... but we can seriously evaluate the process of gathering information and the forums we use, and then act on what we hear. This speaks to the value that the district places on us as its employees. We are an important asset to this district, not just a group that is in place to carry out policy, fads or the latest trends in education. Forums to address sensitive and regular issues need to be efficient and maximized. What considerations will be given to the dissenting views from such forums?

Tonight, you have heard the report resulting from our joint Site-Based Decision Making Committee. Tough issues have surfaced through this survey for all of our staff groups. These are issues that have direct impact on our teaching staff's emotional and psychological wellbeing. The resulting challenge is to implement initiatives through the new joint committee that will address the recommendations in a meaningful way, not just addressing them with paper policies. The example set through the work of this committee speaks to our ability to communicate and develop plans. We want to be part of the policy development that comes from the recommendations and not just settling at the input stage. This too addresses the psychological wellbeing of staff. Results can truly be our policy; not one that is simply generated by process.

Decentralized budgeting and site-based decision making at the school level is paramount and plausible when funds are available, but is complete decentralization always beneficial when funding is inadequate? When schools are forced to pay for assistance from maintenance and/or consulting services, two cost-recovery units within the district, inequities are the result. We are creating haves and have-nots among the schools within the district. Our schools are struggling to decide what services they can afford for children. Consideration to move cost recovery service and/or support units to centralized budgets would ease this pressure on our schools. We know however, that a simple shift is not possible and recognize that this is a complex issue. But gathering meaningful input and working together towards a solution is possible.

The notion of making Edmonton Public Schools the district of choice among young teachers is challenging in today's Alberta labour market. What can be done? In 2006, the Local and District joint committee on Mentorship laid the foundation for the concept of a Comprehensive New Teacher Induction Program. The cost to our district would be in the neighborhood of 5 million dollars. A staggering number one might suggest. We would say no. A 5 million dollar investment in teachers that would potentially work in our district for 25 to 30 years is small, considering that 5 million is less than ½ of 1% of our overall budget. There is sound wisdom in putting dollars into comprehensive, ongoing orientation programs for all staff new to our district. Young teachers, however, in Alberta's ever-changing demographic landscape need district support as they embark on their educational careers. If we are serious about attracting, supporting and retaining

new teachers; serious about the well-being of our district's staff, consideration must be given to the recommendation that comes from the work of the proposed Joint Committee on New Teacher Induction.

We believe that our students will flourish if they have teachers and other staff who are confident, and share the visions of our schools. We will continue to do our part by putting the best professionals in our classrooms. You do your part by supporting our work. We urge you to support this initiative as it comes forward. A program such as this would address the emotional and psychological wellbeing of our teaching staff when they are most vulnerable.

The need to address the intellectual wellbeing of our teaching staff is now a priority for our Local. The major issue revolves around the accessibility for personal professional development. Professional Development funding and AISI have become synonymous. Although I raised this issue last year, I still have discussions with teachers who suggest that their schools do not have PD budgets outside of their AISI projects. Teachers, through their personal professional growth plans, continue to identify areas of need for personal professional growth. It is a professional responsibility that we take seriously. We need to have access to funding that will afford opportunities for personal growth. We also believe that the heavy reliance on AISI funding for the professional development of teachers, at the expense of a teacher's access to personal PD funds, puts our district in a vulnerable position as AISI funding may not be continued in the future. If the future for PD funding will be under the umbrella of AISI, then what are the plans to address our teachers' personal PD needs under this model? There is still more that can be done to put the Professional Development of teachers back into their own hands. Support for the initiatives arising from our latest Collective Agreement should be given serious consideration.

Over the past year, we have demonstrated a strong desire and commitment to developing stronger relationships with our community, within our Local and with this Board. Our participation in the Healthy Workplace initiative and the Occupational Health and Safety committee suggest our commitment to supporting the wellbeing of the members we represent. We recognize, however, that education is a very expensive venture. The work we do is complex and costs money. We will continue to remind this Board, that we can only press our staff group so far...before the quality of education we provide begins to diminish. The focus on support for our district staff must continue to evolve.

The opportunity for input from the Teachers of Edmonton Public Schools and our colleagues in Support, Custodial, Maintenance and Exempt is an integral step in the budgeting process. It is very important to our Local, that we are part of this planning process. Each of us has a part to play and our Local is proud to be working alongside our colleagues from the other staff groups ensuring that each child in our district has the opportunity to excel and realize their potential! We appreciate the Board's role as an advocate for Public Education and encourage you to continue on this quest... loudly... vigorously and to continue to lobby the provincial government for the funds necessary to address our educational issues!

Once again I will close this budget presentation, on behalf of the Edmonton Public Teachers, suggesting that together we continue to explore the challenges of our future in this new era. I would urge you to continue to develop a trusting relationship with our

Local, and have the courage to look to the expertise within our district to resolve the issues presented here tonight. Work with us to maintain the standards we have set and support us as we surpass our own expectations.

Thank you for inviting me here this evening and offering me this opportunity to speak on behalf of the teachers of Edmonton Public Local No 37.

Madam Chair.

