

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 25, 2003

TO: Trustee D. Fleming, ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee  
Trustee S. Hansen, ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee  
Trustee L. Odynski, ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Issues for the 2003 ASBA Fall General Meeting

RESOURCE  
STAFF: Jenise Bidulock, Mike Falk, Avi Habinski, Bob Holt, Ann Mulgrew, Anne Sherwood

RECOMMENDATION

That the following items, as detailed in Appendix I, for submission to the ASBA for policy development and consideration at the 2003 Fall General Meeting, be approved:

1. Directive for Action: That the Alberta School Boards Association urge Alberta Learning to provide, as part of its services to Albertans, Grade 9 transcripts in addition to its official high school transcript.
2. Policy Position: The Alberta School Boards Association believes that the design of provincial diploma examinations should provide for a balance of multiple choice and open-ended questions in all subject areas tested.
3. Directive for Action: That the Alberta School Boards Association establish a committee to review and develop recommendations for the consideration of the Minister of Infrastructure regarding proposed amendments to the *School Act* and provincial regulations on school closure such that the process of closing schools provides more flexibility for school boards.

4. Policy (Directive for Action) Amendment: That policy 6.D.02. be amended by adding the following to the end of the policy statement: “so that the rated capacity of a school reflects its actual capacity to deliver necessary programming to students.”

The new policy would read: That the Alberta School Boards Association request the Minister of Infrastructure to review the current Area, Capacity, and Utilization Guidelines with a view to changing the utilization formula with respect to school facilities built prior to 1980 so that the rated capacity of a school facility reflects its actual capacity to accommodate suitable classroom instruction.

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The administration and trustees were asked to submit suggested issues for the ASBA Fall General Meeting. The above four policy issues were submitted and considered by the board’s ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee. If approved, these issues will be forwarded to ASBA Zone 23 for consideration. Zone 23 can submit up to six issues to the ASBA Policy Development Advisory Committee to review. The resulting policy positions will be circulated back to the zones for review in the fall. Following additional input received at the zones, final wording of the policy positions will be presented for consideration at the ASBA Fall General Meeting in November.

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APPENDIX I – Background material supporting recommended amendment and policy issue.

**Directive for Action: Alberta Learning High School Transcripts**

That the Alberta School Boards Association urge Alberta Learning to provide, as part of its services to Albertans, Grade 9 transcripts in addition to its official high school transcript.

**Rationale:**

Alberta is one of the few provinces or states that does not include Grade 9 as part of a student's high school transcript. School jurisdictions receive numerous requests for Grade 9 marks from student and former students who move to another province or to the United States for schooling or to seek employment. It would be helpful to students to be able to get all of the information they require for transcripts with one request to Alberta Learning.

**Policy Position: Diploma Examinations**

The Alberta School Boards Association believes that the design of provincial diploma examinations should provide for a balance of multiple choice and open-ended questions in all subject areas tested.

**Rationale:**

The grade 12 Diploma Examination Program, established in 1984, has three main purposes:

- to certify the level of student achievement in selected grade 12 courses
- to ensure that province-wide standards of achievement are maintained
- to report individual and group results

A student's final mark in the selected courses is determined by averaging the teacher marks and the diploma examination marks. This process is called blending.

Diploma examinations in the province of Alberta are a high stakes experience for students, and play an important role in monitoring curriculum implementation in school districts. Therefore, it is imperative that the examinations be of high quality and reflects the curriculum to the greatest extent possible. Although large-scale examinations cannot assess all-important outcomes of the curriculum, when open-ended as well as multiple-choice questions are included, the reflection of curriculum is more comprehensive.

Maintaining a balance of multiple-choice and open-ended items on diploma examinations also ensures that student achievement results are more accurate and equitable. Statistical correlations consistently show that some students do better on multiple-choice items, and other students do better on open-ended. Eliminating written response items would disadvantage those who do better with this mode, and further advantage those who do better with multiple-choice. It is imperative that open-ended items be retained on diploma examinations so that the tests

have curriculum integrity and the results are fair measures of student learning. NOTE 1: See ASBA Policy Handbook 8.P.15 Curriculum (Provincial Diploma Examinations)

## **Directive for Action: School Closure Regulations**

That the Alberta School Boards Association establish a committee to review and develop recommendations for the consideration of the Minister of Infrastructure regarding proposed amendments to the School Act and provincial regulations on school closure such that the process of closing schools provides more flexibility for school boards.

### **Rationale:**

Clearly the goal of the existing regulation is to ensure that any school closure process meets several requirements: that it is not arbitrary, that it is open, that it involves consultation with stakeholders, and that the feasibility of closure is given full consideration. These requirements are important and they should be met. However, a more flexible process could in some cases allow for more creative solutions, and it would give boards more options when dealing with issues related to space utilization and capital needs. For example, it would be beneficial if the closure of 3 consecutive grades and the temporary relocation of students were not considered a closure, if the requirement for closure within one school year were reconsidered, and if requirements for public meetings and notifications were simplified.

Based on experience with school closures in recent years, the following suggestions are made:

### **Definition of School Closure**

It would be beneficial if several types of situations were not defined as a school closure:

1. Closure of three consecutive grades in an elementary school is currently defined as a closure. In some situations it may be desirable to combine students from two or more schools in ways that increase program effectiveness, reduce operating costs, or free up surplus space for demolition. An example would be a situation where an elementary school and an elementary-junior high school are rearranged to create a K-3 school and a grades 4-9 school.
2. Temporary relocation of students from one school to another is problematic. We have encountered situations where enrolment in a school declined to a point where stakeholders agreed that effective programming could no longer be provided, and that temporary relocation was the best solution. Our board has taken the position that this does not constitute a closure, but the *School Act* and the regulation are not clear on this. Usually these situations arise at short notice, making it impossible to comply with the regulation.

3. Another kind of situation which should not be considered a school closure is one where regular program enrolment in a school declines to a point where it is no longer feasible to continue and the students are relocated, but an alternative or special needs program continues to operate in the school. This would avoid the kind of uncertainty that currently exists at Queen Alexandra School where the Logos alternative program is thriving and parents of regular program students from the neighbourhood are satisfied with their accommodation at nearby Garneau School.
4. Relocation or closure of an alternative program as defined in the *School Act* should not be defined as a closure, even when it is the only program in a school, because alternative programs are programs of choice and boards are not required to offer them.
5. Closure of a program that operates in a facility not owned by the district should not be defined as a closure because the length and nature of the tenancy are beyond the district's control. This would apply to situations where, for example, the district leases space from a non-profit organization such as a religion-based group or a non-profit society, or from a private landlord for the operation of an outreach program in a mall or similar location.

#### Closure Within School Year

Section 7 of the regulation states that “school closure procedures shall be initiated and completed within the school year in which the decision to close the school is made.” This section should be modified so that the actual closure does not need to take place in the year when the decision was made, and can be implemented over more than one year.

This would enable boards to close schools and relocate students in a phased manner. For example, a school could close a year or two after the board makes its decision, or a closure could be implemented by closing several grades in the first year and the remaining grades in the second year. Approaches of this kind could increase public acceptance of closure, contribute to smoother transitions for students and parents, and mitigate impacts on communities.

#### Public Meetings

Requirements for advertising the public meeting attended by trustees could be simplified by requiring that boards do what is reasonable and necessary to inform the public.

In addition, the requirement to consult the municipality should be removed. Such consultation would take place in any event, but removing this requirement from the regulation would eliminate community perceptions that the municipality must and will take a position for or against the closure.

#### Notification of Proposed Closure

Section 4 of the regulation spells out in detail the information that must be communicated to parents when a board is considering closing a school. Such detailed requirements are not necessary and could be aggregated into the following two points:

- The time and date of the public meeting; and

- Information about the closure and the implications of the closure for the students, for the community and for the school system.

Note that this wording is similar to that in the existing Section 5, which deals with public meetings.

Currently Section 4 requires that the following be communicated:

- (a) how the closure would affect the attendance area defined for that school;
- (b) how the closure would affect the attendance at other schools;
- (c) the number of students who would need to be relocated as a result of the closure;
- (d) the need for, and extent of, bussing;
- (e) program implications for other schools and for the students when they are attending other schools;
- (f) the educational and financial impact of closing the school, including the effect on operational costs and capital implications;
- (g) the educational and financial impact if the school were to remain open;
- (h) the capital needs of the schools that may have increased enrolment as a result of the closure;
- (i) if the entire school is to be closed, the proposed use of the school building;
- (j) the time and location of the public meeting referred to in section 5(1)(a).

The proposed changes would facilitate the school closure process while still meeting the goals of the existing regulation.

## **Policy (Directive for Action) Amendment - Space Utilization**

That policy 6.D.02. be amended by adding the following to the end of the policy statement: “so that the rated capacity of a school reflects its actual capacity to deliver necessary programming to students”.

The new Directive for Action would read: That the Alberta School Boards Association request the Minister of Infrastructure to review the current Area, Capacity, and Utilization Guidelines with a view to changing the utilization formula with respect to school facilities built prior to 1980 so that the rated capacity of a school reflects its actual capacity to deliver necessary programming to students.

### **Rationale:**

The current utilization formula uses a building standard based on the current architecture of the most recently built school buildings. It does not take into consideration that buildings built during certain time periods have much larger classrooms, hallways, stairwells and common spaces. Many of these spaces cannot be made suitable for classroom instruction. In many cases, schools with a low utilization rate have every conceivable classroom space occupied by students 100% of the time. This flaw in the utilization formula recently penalized school districts on the allocation of Plant Operations and Maintenance funds, and as well provides an unrealistic district and sector target (85% utilization) for the granting of funds from Alberta Infrastructure for new construction and modernization. Maintenance of school space used to accommodate functions involving other government departments (e.g. early intervention) should be supported by Alberta Infrastructure through Plant Operation and Maintenance Grant.