

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 24, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee G. Rice, Conference Committee Chair

SUBJECT: Report #9 of the Conference Committee (From the Meeting Held March 17, 2009)

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Report #9 of the Conference Committee from the meeting held March 17, 2009 be received and considered.
2. That the Administration, Cambridge Strategies Inc. and Johnston Research present at public board the overview of the processes used in their research and a summary of the key findings of research.
3. That the Board provide an invitation, where possible, to those stakeholders who participated in the processes to attend the Board meeting where presentations are made and recommendations reviewed.
4. That the administration communicate the completion of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Sustainability and School Closure Processes internally and externally.
5. That processes that encourage two - way communication between stakeholders and the Board during the sustainability/school closure processes be enhanced.
6. That the work of sustainability and school closure reviews be done on a sector analysis basis.
7. That support for the smooth transition of students and staff in the case of a school closure be enhanced.
8. That a process to monitor and record student success post transition be developed and implemented.

9. That support for the school principals and staff as first point of contact for parents and community be formalized.
10. That the Board enter into advocacy related to removing the financial barriers, such as Plant Operation and Maintenance (PO&M) Funding currently in place as they relate to the use of school space for educational related lease holders.
11. That the Board engage with the community to gain a deeper understanding of the following three attributes from the Discrete Choice Measure (DCM) survey:
 - Focus on creativity, critical thinking and adaptability in schools (through Community Relations Committee)
 - Use of schools to serve broader community needs (through sector review process)
 - Community input into facility use once a school is closed (through sector review process)
12. That a Sector Review Advisory Committee comprised of a representative group of stakeholders outside the school district be developed.
13. That the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Sustainability and School Closure Processes now be dissolved.

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In March 2008, the Board approved the “Terms of Reference” that would frame the work of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review Sustainability and School Closure Processes. (Appendix I).

The intent of the Review was two-fold; to gather information from those involved in school closures and sustainability reviews to improve the processes, and to gather perceptions from the greater community about schools and space. One year after the approval of the terms of reference the work is completed and both outcomes have been met.

The recommendations are a synthesis of the key findings from both processes and a review of the literature related to school closure procedures in Canada

AS:mmf

APPENDIX I – Ad Hoc Committee Terms of Reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE

With regard to outcomes, consensus was achieved. The steering committee agreed that two separate yet related outcomes would be achieved through the review process. First, input gathered from stakeholders that were impacted by Sustainability and School Closure would be used to inform changes that would improve the processes. Secondly, the review would gather information about the greater community's awareness of the challenges the district faces related to schools and school space and possible solutions to these challenges. This would facilitate the board's understanding of the values that the community places on schools and it would provide input for a re-visioning of schools for the future.

Process Related to Outcome 1: Input on Sustainability and School Closure Reviews

The purpose of reviewing the process with stakeholders is to gather input on the impact the reviews had, and on suggested improvements to the process. To achieve this end, the steering committee recommends that focus group consultations based on the model used to gather input related to district priorities be established. The use of a focus group is one technique identified by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as a way to effectively consult with the public to gain feedback.

The focus group model will allow trustees the opportunity to hear from parents, community, staff and where appropriate, students, about how they were impacted by the process and how the process could be improved. It is suggested that these focus groups be held prior to the end of May 2008 to allow the input to be included in the planning for the subsequent year and that the findings and recommendations be brought to public board for discussion and approval by Trustees before being implemented by the Administration.

Process Related to Outcome 2: Understanding the Greater Community

The purpose of this review would be to gather information about the greater community's awareness of the challenges the district faces related to schools and school space and possible solutions to challenges. The review would facilitate the board's understanding of the values that the community places on schools and it would gather input into re-visioning of schools for the future. Information gained from this review would assist in direction-setting that is reflective of broad community values as related to the effective, efficient and ideal use of school spaces and buildings.

The steering committee recommends a three part process for gathering this information.

Part One: It is proposed that a large scale discrete choice survey be designed and distributed widely across Edmonton. This type of survey would help to determine the core values of the issue.

Part Two: Synthesis of the data from this survey would then be used to create workbooks. These workbooks would contain statements to which individuals or groups would respond. The responses to the statements would provide input related to the issue. These techniques, deliberative polling and workshops, are referred to in the IAP2's *Planning for Effective Public Participation* student manual (Appendix II – *IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum*, attached as information) as being effective strategies to involve the public.

Part Three: Simultaneously, a review of current best practices related to school space would be undertaken to provide additional perspectives.

Timelines

The committee recommends the following timeline for these processes. A Request for Proposal (RFP) would be created and sent out to survey firms by the end of April 2008. The survey would be distributed in June 2008. Synthesis of the data and creation of the workbooks could occur from June to September 2008 and then be distributed to school councils, community leagues, and other stakeholders in October and November. Final synthesis of this information and articulation with the research information would be completed in December and January.

The committee recommends that one public board meeting be set aside in January 2009 and celebrate the findings of the reviews. As was done with the release of information from the Aboriginal task force, it is also recommended that key stakeholders be invited to this meeting to be recognized and hear the outcomes.

Working Committee Recommendation

Given the depth and breadth of work that must be undertaken over the ten months, it is recommended that under the full committee, a working committee be established whose role would be to provide direction and support in the establishment of the focus groups and related questions, choice of vendor for the survey, etc. All key decisions would come back to the committee of the whole, but the working committee would ensure that the work progresses on schedule. The steering committee recommends that this working committee consist of three trustees and staff assigned at the discretion of the Superintendent.

Approved - March 25, 2008 Board Meeting