

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 10, 2011

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Staff Group Budget Presentations

ORIGINATOR: D. Fraser, Executive Director

### INFORMATION

This report is provided in response to the budget presentations made to the Board of Trustees on February 22, 2011 by Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 representing teachers, on March 8, 2011 by CUPE Local 784 representing maintenance staff, CUPE Local 3550 representing support staff, CUPE Local 474 representing custodial staff, and on March 22, 2011 by the Exempt Staff. All Decision Unit Administrators and Principals will be provided with copies of this report and the written submissions provided by the staff groups.

As in previous years, there are common themes in the presentations regarding specific issues. Each staff group also identifies matters of particular concern for their individual Local.

The first of the common themes again relates to implications of the economic downturn, particularly the impact on our grants from the Province. Although funding for teachers' salaries is guaranteed through the grants for basic instruction, other grants were either eliminated or significantly reduced, resulting in an overall revenue reduction of \$4.7 million. The lack of adequate, stable and sustained funding from the Province continues to be an ongoing concern for the Board and Administration, who have lobbied the Government directly and in conjunction with other metro boards and provincial associations (e.g., ASBA, PSBAA, CASS, ASBOA, etc.). The Board acknowledges that lobbying for adequate, stable and sustained funding continues to be a primary objective of its advocacy committee and all trustees. While the Board and Administration are committed to minimizing the impact of the upcoming budget on staff and students, this will be extremely difficult given several factors: reduction in provincial revenue; impact of the salary increase guaranteed for teachers through the 2007 memorandum of agreement negotiated by the Province and ATA; lack of funding for other staff group salary increases over several years; and upcoming negotiations for new collective agreements with our three CUPE Locals.

Again this year, a second commonality in the briefs is the need for on-going district support for professional development for all employees. The District's staff demographics indicate that there will be a wave of impending retirements over the next four years and the District will once again be in the 'war for talent' across all staff groups. New staff members experience a steep learning curve as they strive to succeed in their occupations with Edmonton Public Schools. Seasoned staff members also benefit from opportunities to stay current with knowledge and practice in their fields. Such opportunities are seen as key to engagement and retention of all staff. The District concurs and continues to work actively in

the area of staff development to ensure availability, through a comprehensive professional learning framework, of appropriate learning opportunities for all employees. This work is in direct support of the fifth District Priority, *listen to staff, honour their contributions, and support their opportunities for collaboration, growth and professional development.*

As well, the District and staff groups share a focus on the need to promote good health and well-being. The District continues to pursue initiatives in this area and appreciates the collaborative efforts of the Locals to make these initiatives successful. The Administration has reinitiated discussions with the Alberta School Employee Benefit Program (ASEBP), the ATA and CUPE Locals regarding introduction of the voluntary Health Risk Assessment and Healthy Living Program. These programs have been piloted in two other school districts and have been well received by staff. The Board recognizes that this work is in direct support of the fourth District Priority, *promote health and wellness for all students and staff*, and the fifth District Priority, *listen to staff, honour their contributions, and support their opportunities for collaboration, growth and professional development.* The Board encourages the Administration to continue discussions with all of the Locals on this initiative as well as other potential initiatives to address organizational health.

The Board commends and thanks the staff groups for their interest in working collaboratively with Trustees and Administration on the many issues identified. It recognizes the important work accomplished through joint committees and the provision of input by the staff groups. The following sections outline the Board and Administration responses to the individual presentations, in order of presentation.

#### Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 of the ATA

The Board appreciates and values the strong relationship between the Local and the District to which the president of the Local referred. The collaborative manner in which the Board and the Local have approached a number of recent initiatives has yielded gratifying results and will continue to do so in the future.

In its presentation, Local 37 focused on several key issues where the Board and Administration could tangibly demonstrate improved working and learning conditions for staff and students.

The Local once again reiterated its belief in the development of maximum class size standards for each division, offering suggestions regarding optimal numbers. The Board recognizes the importance of class size to student achievement and well-being, and acknowledges that parents also see class size as an important issue. While the Board compliments the Administration for continuing to meet the Learning Commission's (ACOL) guidelines for class size for Divisions II, III and IV (grades four to twelve), it acknowledges the difficulty in continuing to meet these targets given reduced provincial revenue and the Government's decision to eliminate class size funding for Division II (grades four to six). The Board also recognizes that provincial guidelines for class size are jurisdictional averages, which do not take into account extreme situations which may occur in some schools, as outlined in the Local's annual survey on class size. The Board encourages the Administration to continue to explore options for addressing class size, especially at Division I (kindergarten to grade three), and to develop metrics for the Board to use in monitoring the situation. The Board supports the actions of Administration at the District and school levels,

e.g., increased allocations for addressing Division I class size and the use of part-time teachers to address class size for certain subject areas. The Board will continue to lobby for adequate, stable and sustained funding to address class size through its advocacy committee and all Trustees.

The Local expressed concern about the annual staff satisfaction survey question and the confirmation surveys that ask teachers to evaluate their principal. The Board acknowledges and supports that the Administration's practice related to the two surveys does provide guidance to teachers regarding their obligations under the ATA Code of Professional Conduct. The Board is encouraged by the Administration's decision to review the need for the annual staff satisfaction survey in light of the three-year comprehensive employee engagement survey, and the proposed review of the principal confirmation survey. The Board encourages the Administration to invite staff group representatives to participate in the review. The Board also reiterates that the quality of school instructional leaders, especially in the principalship, is paramount to the District achieving its vision, mission and priorities. The Board therefore needs regular assurance that school leaders are meeting the Principal Quality Practice Standard (PQPS).

The Local continues to question the inequity between schools and in learning opportunities for students, and notes that technology resource costs are a huge drain on every location. However, whether or not a school has a strong parent group raising extra funds through casinos or other fund-raising initiatives, it is important to provide proper technology and training as well as release time for teachers to take this training. The Local urges the Board to work to influence the Government for greater funding in this area. The Board and Administration assure the Local that dialogue with Alberta Education ministry officials regarding adequate, stable and sustained funding for technology and associated professional development is on-going.

The Local reiterated its position that the jointly developed *Framework for Involvement in Site-based Decision Making* be fully implemented. The Board acknowledges and supports the good work that has been accomplished through the joint committee on site-based decision-making. This work is in direct support of the fifth District Priority, *listen to staff, honour their contributions, and support their opportunities for collaboration, growth and professional development*. While it was noted that more needs to be done if all staff are to feel trusted and be provided with opportunities for meaningful input into decisions affecting their work, it was also acknowledged that the future plans of the Committee to identify exemplars where involvement is present and flourishing will enable the District to address this priority. The Board is also pleased that the Committee will provide input and feedback on where the Framework can be aligned with the PQPS and leadership development for new and existing principals. While it is acknowledged that the joint Committee does present annually at a Public Board meeting, the Board requests that there be more regular updates regarding the identification and application of exemplars of involvement in site-based decision making.

The Local requested increased supports for substitute teachers, particularly in the areas of adequate funding for substitute teacher coverage in every school, access to resources and increased professional development. The Board is pleased that Administration representatives meet regularly with substitute teachers and their representatives through the Local. The Board and Administration acknowledge the importance of substitute teacher

coverage, as it provides opportunities for classroom teachers to collaborate and participate in professional development activities. The District's ability to continue to provide adequate substitute teacher coverage will be greatly hampered by the Government's decision to reduce by 50 per cent the funding provided through the Alberta Initiative on School Improvement (AISI). The Board will continue lobbying efforts to restore and enhance this funding, as it has a direct correlation to enhanced teaching practices and improved student achievement. The Board supports the Administration's decision to provide access to *StaffZone* to all substitute teachers and encourages the Administration to examine ways in which substitute teacher access to online resources and two-way communication with schools and classroom teachers can be enhanced.

The Local requested improved access to professional development and funding for professional development activities, especially as it relates to teacher-initiated professional development. The Board recognizes the importance of ongoing professional development for all classroom teachers and is pleased with the ongoing work of the joint committee and its annual reports to the trustees at Public Board meetings. Once again, this work is in direct support of the fifth District Priority, *listen to staff, honour their contributions, and support their opportunities for collaboration, growth and professional development*. The Board supports the decisions by the Administration through their core services review, particularly the elimination of charges to schools for professional development activities. The Board is also pleased that schools will have greater flexibility to expend funds on professional development activities from sources other than Student Learning Services, e.g., Regional Consortia, ATA Specialist Councils, etc.

The Local also requested that the Board ensure continued support for new teacher induction. The Board acknowledges that the District's New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) is recognized as a best-in-class program within the province. In light of the reduction in overall government funding and the anticipated reduction in the number of new teachers for 2011-12, the staff of NTIP will focus their efforts on continuing and enhancing support for beginning teachers hired over the past two years. The Board will continue to lobby the provincial government for adequate, stable and sustained funding for public education, including emphasis on the need to build capacity for districts and the teaching profession through attracting, hiring and developing beginning teachers. This will be especially important as the District examines its changing demographics over the next four years and the anticipated number of teacher retirements.

Finally, the Board appreciates the Local's commitment to working collaboratively to resolve issues and to nurturing a relationship based on trust and respect.

#### CUPE 784 (Maintenance Staff)

The Board relies on the members of Local 784 Maintenance Workers for the maintenance of buildings in our inventory. We very much appreciate this important contribution to the success of the District and particularly wish to recognize the Local as it recently celebrated fifty years of service.

The Local once again strongly reiterated its position that the maintenance budget be centralized. The Local stressed that students and teachers in smaller schools deserve to have their schools maintained to the same standard as that received by larger schools with higher

enrolments. The Board acknowledges the position of the Local and supports the decisions by the Administration through their core services review, particularly the recentralization of the maintenance budget and the identification of maintenance services as a core service. This decision will enable principals to concentrate on their core work of instructional leadership, while ensuring greater effectiveness, efficiency and equity across the system. The Board encourages the Administration to involve the Local as a stakeholder in the review of the next-level design of Facilities Services as part of the review of Finance and Infrastructure.

#### CUPE Local 3550 (Support Staff)

The Board acknowledges and values the important contribution that support staff make to Edmonton Public Schools through their work in offices, classrooms, cafeterias, libraries and labs.

The Board and Administration share the Local's frustration regarding the Government's decision to only increase the funding that supports the cost of living increase granted to teaching staff. This situation has persisted for several years. The Board continues to lobby the Government for adequate, stable and sustained funding. This will enable the Board to provide fair compensation to support staff members, protect them from changes in their employment status, and continue to attract and retain top-quality employees.

Specific to the Local's request for sustained professional development funding is the identification of continued financial support for in-house professional development opportunities. The Board recognizes that on-going professional development will provide the knowledge that enables support staff to meet successfully the daily challenge of a huge multi-tasking workload. The Board is pleased with the ongoing work of the joint committee in this area. Once again, this work is in direct support of the fifth District Priority, *listen to staff, honour their contributions, and support their opportunities for collaboration, growth and professional development*. The Board acknowledges that over the past six years funding has been provided to: hire four support staff mentors for administrative support staff and educational assistants; develop and implement annual professional development days for administrative support staff, educational assistants and science technicians; standardize software training for administrative support staff; and, provide support for job-family specific networks. The Board encourages the Administration to continue to work with support staff and Local representatives to maintain and enhance professional development opportunities. This will be consistent with the District's Plan's core strategy of enhancing staff capacity.

In the section on professional development in their budget brief, the Local posed a number of questions regarding the demographics of support staff and how these had changed over the past six years. The Administration examined these questions and provides the following feedback. Since 2005, educational assistants have comprised over 50 per cent of support staff positions, from a low of 51.7 per cent in 2005 to a high of 56.31 per cent in 2009. During that same period, the percentage of administrative positions, i.e., administrative assistants, secretaries and clerks, has fluctuated from a low of 25.42 per cent in 2009 to a high of 27.22 per cent in 2005. It should be noted that while the overall group size is relatively stable, the trend is towards increasing numbers of administrative assistants and clerks, and decreasing numbers of secretaries. The group which is showing a consistent downward trend is library technicians, from a high of 115 in 2007 to a low of 101 in 2010.

The numbers of food preparers and technicians have been relatively stable over the past six years.

Work-life balance and staff wellness are issues that both the Board and the Local take very seriously. The Local requested that the Board provide additional resources to assist its membership in becoming more familiar with worker wellness and work-life balance. As indicated previously, the Administration has reinitiated discussions with the Alberta School Employee Benefit Program (ASEBP), the ATA and other Locals regarding introduction of the voluntary Health Risk Assessment and Healthy Living Program. These programs have been piloted in two other school districts and have been well received by staff.

The Local once again reiterated its position that the District develop a support staff staffing ratio formula to assist in forecasting annual needs and in addressing work-load issues. The Local believes such a formula would assist principals, and could be reviewed and up-dated as procedures, technologies and dynamics change. The Board acknowledges that overall decisions regarding the staffing of schools rest with the principal. The Board also recognizes that requests of this nature are normally brought forward during bargaining for a new collective agreement. The Board will continue to lobby the Government for adequate, stable and sustained funding, including the need to have adequate, sustained numbers of support staff to meet the needs of students, schools and the District.

CUPE 3550 continues to question what works well under the site-based decision-making model. Its current contention is that it is a mystery as to why data entry for bill payment has to be done at the school level. The Local believes this work would be effectively and efficiently completed by its members in Central Services who are specialists in such data entry in an expanded accounts payable department. They request the Administration review this practice. The Board and Administration agree that it is important to examine on a continuing basis the best way to do our work, including the use of new technologies and processes. This is a fundamental given in the continuing review of central services' functions. The Administration commits to reviewing this issue next year as part of the next-level design of Finance and Infrastructure.

With funding for current new school construction delivered in the form of Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement (ASAP), the Local looks forward to continued financial reporting to Trustees, providing information comparing operating and maintenance costs of the new ASAP schools to similar District sites. While the Board recognizes the Local's concern regarding this type of funding for new construction, these are decisions that have been made by the provincial government. The Administration will provide regular updates to the Board regarding the effectiveness of the ASAP model for operation of the new schools under ASAP I and II. The Board and Administration commit to sharing these updates with Alberta Education ministry officials.

The Board acknowledges the Local's concern regarding the use of volunteers in schools, especially in light of the reduced provincial funding. The Board and Administration commit to the Local that CUPE 3550 members will experience no reduction in positions or time worked due to the addition of volunteers working with students during the regular school day. It is the belief of the Board and Administration that adherence to Board Policy and application of principles outlined in the Volunteer Handbook document will alleviate these

concerns. The Administration commits to reiterating this message with school principals and to investigating and resolving any issues that may arise.

The Board acknowledges and appreciates the Local's recognition of the important role that Trustees play in the collective bargaining process. The Board commits to ensuring that Trustees will attend upcoming negotiation meetings, except in instances where there is a scheduling conflict that cannot be changed.

#### CUPE Local 474 (Custodial Staff)

The Board relies on the work of the members of Local 474 Custodial Workers to keep our buildings clean and safe for students and staff. We very much appreciate this important contribution to the success of the District.

In its presentation, the Local expressed their belief that in order to meet the need for clean and healthy schools which will meet the health and safety needs of students and staff as well as being environmentally responsible, a comprehensive reorganization of custodial services for the District is needed. The Administration, through the 2010 central services review, has committed to establishing a centralized Custodial Support Services function to support principals and custodial staff in schools. While principals expressed a strong desire during the review to see maintenance services become a core service with the maintenance allocations recentralized, there was no indication that school-based custodial services should be reviewed and the custodial services allocation recentralized.

The Administration is in the process of establishing the centralized Custodial Support Services function and has recently hired the former President of the Local as the supervisor of the function. As the function becomes established and embedded in the organization over the next three years, it is the belief of the Administration that many of the issues raised by the Local will be resolved. The Board acknowledges and commends the Administration for establishing this important function and recognizes that time is needed to address some of the issues outlined in the Local's budget brief. The Board expects annual updates with built-in measures from the Administration regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of the Custodial Support Services function.

The Local's presentation also focused on several specific areas where they are requesting action from the Board and Administration.

The Local once again recommended the District provide standardized purchase of custodial equipment for all sites. The Administration notes that the Purchasing Department negotiates the best possible prices for equipment, and that schools and decision units are required to make any major purchase through that department. The Administration commits to further reviewing this issue over the next year as it establishes the Custodial Support Services function.

The Local also requested that the District improve hiring practices to attract qualified applicants, including students, for custodial positions. The Administration commits to reviewing this issue in the upcoming school year. The Supervisor of Custodial Support Services will be located in the Human Resources department for the 2011-2012 school year and will be an active participant in this review.

The Local reiterated its position that cleaning procedures be standardized across the District. The Administration believes that one of the key deliverables from the establishment of the central Custodial Support Services function is the standardization of practices. Functions that were spread across several departments are now centralized under one unit. This should alleviate some of the issues which occurred around advice and assistance, leading to ineffective and inefficient practices in some schools.

The Board commends the Administration for reviewing these issues and encourages Administration staff to involve the Local and custodial staff in this review, as part of the commitment to listen to staff under the fifth District Priority.

### Exempt Staff

The Board acknowledges the varied and valuable service provided by the exempt staff; it concurs that it is through this group's diversity that the intricate, unique and essential service needs of the District can be fully achieved.

The Exempt staff group expressed a specific concern regarding access to professional development opportunities. It is their hope that professional development funds continue to be supported and distributed equitably among staff groups and Decision Units. The Board and Administration concur that professional development is an important component of the District's efforts to attract, engage and retain staff. The 2011-2014 District Plan has several goals related to enhancing staff capacity, including exempt central leaders, healthcare professional staff, business managers, etc. Although exempt staff can apply for professional improvement leaves and tuition support through the professional improvement program decision unit (DU363), they are considered under the process used for teaching staff. The Administration commits to creating a staff development program for the Exempt staff group under DU363, which will be specifically utilized for professional improvement leaves and tuition support. The Board recognizes that this work is in direct support of the fifth District Priority, *listen to staff, honour their contributions, and support their opportunities for collaboration, growth and professional development.*

Committed to providing the highest quality of service in their respective disciplines, the Exempt staff group identified a need to carefully consider workload commitments, in order to ensure that workloads are realistic and manageable. They again cited, as a possible solution, the creation of an option where school-based staff can extend their work year beyond the current 10 months. The Board continues to acknowledge that some exempt staff currently on 10-month contracts would prefer to work 12 months. This group of professionals typically works with students, doing assessments, providing suggestions for programming, meeting with teachers and parents, and in some cases, providing direct service to students. District practice has been to have these staff members work during the period of time when students are in school. While recognizing merit of both 10-month and 12-month assignments, the District reiterates its responsibility to balance needs of students and financial realities with a desire to attract and retain qualified staff. The Administration commits to examining this issue in light of the core strategy related to enhancing staff capacity and the implementation of the next-level design of Student Learning Services. The Board commends the Administration for reviewing this situation and encourages Administration staff to involve front-line exempt staff in this review, as part of the commitment to listen to staff under the fifth District Priority.



The exempt staff requested that the Board and Administration undertake a review of the total compensation philosophy and strategy for exempt staff. This review is needed in light of the diversity and multiple generations (i.e., veterans, baby boomers, generation X and Y) of exempt staff in the District. The Board and Administration recognize that such a review is needed and concur that this is an important component of the District's efforts to attract, engage and retain exempt staff. This review will be completed during the 2011-2012 school year and the Administration will bring a report with recommendations to the Board for their review and consideration. The Board commends the Administration for reviewing this situation and encourages Administration staff to involve exempt staff in this review, as part of the commitment to listen to staff under the fifth District Priority.

The exempt staff requested that the Board and Administration examine ways to improve exempt staff connections and recognition. The Administration commits to exploring this issue through discussions at the Exempt Staff Liaison Committee and reporting back to the Board. The Board commends the Administration for reviewing this situation and encourages Administration to involve exempt staff in this review, as part of the commitment to listen to staff under the fifth District Priority.

ES/dmf