

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 8, 2002

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Education Commission – Discussion Paper

ORIGINATOR: A. Habinski, Executive Director School and District Services

RESOURCE

STAFF: Donna Barrett, Jenise Bidulock, Gloria Chalmers, Elaine Decker, Norm Diemert, Bob Holt, Faye Parker, Dean Power, Alva Shewchuk, Victor Tanti, Stuart Wachowicz

INFORMATION

Attached for trustee information is a discussion paper that is intended to form the basis of the board's submission to the Education Commission.

The discussion paper will be used to gather feedback from stakeholders. Input meetings are planned with school council representatives, students, community members, business leaders and staff representatives.

The paper was posted on the district website with a general invitation to provide input. It is located at <http://lookingateducation.epsb.ca>.

The input received will be considered in finalizing the board's submission to the Education Commission. The Board was invited to make a brief presentation to Alberta's Commission on Learning on Friday, November 15, 2002 at which time the document will be presented.

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Appendix I: Education Commission – Discussion Paper

**EDUCATION COMMISSION  
DISCUSSION PAPER**

**VISION AND PHILOSOPHY**

Edmonton Public Schools, an educational institution providing for the diverse needs and interests of 82,000 students, is pleased to provide a perspective for consideration by the Education Commission. Our perspective, grounded in the belief that public education plays a critical role in a democratic society and requires the stewardship of a publicly elected board of trustees, has been informed by the views of staff, students, parents and the broader community, including business, labour and arts representatives.

“What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon it destroys our democracy. All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members. All its better thoughts of itself it hopes to realize through the new possibilities thus opened to its future self....Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself.” (John Dewey, in Schlechty, 1997)

Public education in Canada has been central to the evolution of an industrialized economy and democratic politics. Public education is crucial to the realization of a post-industrial, knowledge and information-based economy and of an inclusive, tolerant political consensus.

In addition to its most obvious purpose of delivering curriculum, public education is simultaneously the strongest single influence for teaching young people, formally and informally, about our shared society, culture and values. This always has been an essential role of public education: to promote the values that define a society. In Canadian society, these are reflected in our democratic institutions, our individual rights and freedoms, and the rule of law. These legal and institutional forms depend upon a strong fabric of embraced values such as regard for diversity, celebration of differences and respect for consensus. These values are not cherished in all societies but they are cherished in Canada, and they are practiced, demonstrated, taught and learned in our public schools. Not coincidentally, the very nature of public schools – open to all, irrespective of religious creed, social position or economic means – exemplifies the core Canadian values that they impart.

Our society requires superb results from all students. Parents play a critical role in helping their children and the education system achieve these results. Achieving superb results also has broad implications for the critical components of the education system which are addressed in this submission. Edmonton Public Schools’ submission is predicated upon a provincial context in which Alberta Learning’s role is to provide the legislative, financial, curriculum and accountability frameworks that guarantee consistency and equity of opportunity across the province.

The submission is organized in according to six main topics, and expresses a basic position on each topic, as follows:

- governance should reflect the values we espouse
- the curriculum should enable our students to compete globally
- all students should be provided with optimal conditions for learning
- staff should have access to quality pre-service and ongoing professional development
- public and private sectors should work in consort to provide for the broad range of needs
- funding should be sufficient and sustained, recognizing that superb results from all students is an investment in our community's and country's future.

Recommendations, rationale and background information are provided in each of the aforementioned areas.

## **GOVERNANCE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION**

### **Recommendations**

1. *Retain all locally elected School Boards as they are in the best position to represent the interests of parents and community members in the governance of schools.*
2. *Ensure that large urban school boards are proportionately represented in decision-making at the provincial level.*
3. *Recognize the issues of large urban boards in provincial policies and funding.*
4. *Describe clearly the mandate and authority of school boards.*
5. *Recognize the critical role of parents as partners in education and create conditions that facilitate increased involvement and collaboration for parents.*

### **Recommendation 1**

*Retain all locally elected School Boards as they are in the best position to represent the interests of parents and community members in the governance of schools.*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

Locally elected school trustees represent parents and community members directly through the electoral process. Local school trustees understand the unique context of their communities and the issues and concerns of constituents. In order to ensure that they have a thorough understanding of local issues and concerns, trustees interact with parents and community on a regular basis in Edmonton Public Schools. For example, trustees regularly meet with Key Communicators representing school councils in their wards to gather input and advice.

Because local school boards have a direct responsibility to the electorate, they are able to serve as advocates for the community. Local boards allow for community participation in policy development and provide problem solving functions at the local level. They are able to do this because of an in-depth understanding of the local context of the communities that they serve. The board also provides the route of appeal for parents and community wishing to appeal administrative decisions.

## **Recommendation 2**

*Ensure that large urban school boards are proportionately represented in decision-making at the provincial level.*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

Alberta Learning typically seeks input and involvement from a number of provincial associations including the Alberta School Boards' Association (ASBA), the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA), the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association (ACSTA), the Council of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA) and the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association (AHSCA).

Each of these associations is organized to be broadly inclusive – but not proportionally representative. The four large urban districts – Edmonton and Calgary public and Catholic – collectively serve more than 40 per cent of Alberta students, yet have only 7 per cent of the representation in those associations, with only one official representative to each of ASBA, PSBAA, CASS and ASBOA. (Note: ASBA and PSBAA have provision for a weighted ballot if the issue involves a levy or expenditure of money.)

Because of this structure, the students, parents and taxpayers served by urban boards are not appropriately represented in the results of provincial consultations. The same comment applies to the AHSCA, an organization which represents a small minority of parents across the province.

Edmonton Public Schools recognizes that many concerns are shared by all districts across the province, regardless of size or location. However, some issues are more specific to large urban districts, while others may particularly affect smaller or rural districts. There is a need to ensure adequate representation of the urban voice at the provincial level. This has been an on-going concern.

## **Recommendation 3**

*Recognize the issues of large urban boards in provincial policies and funding.*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

Historically, the governance of education in Alberta has been based on an agrarian model which is no longer appropriate because it over-represents the interests of rural school boards. Large urban boards increasingly have unique governance challenges that need to be considered in any re-tooling of education in Alberta.

Increased immigration to urban areas adds diversity to the Edmonton community. While this diversity is valued in Edmonton, it results in an increased demand in urban school jurisdictions for alternative schools and programs and English as a second language.

Because of the medical and other support services available in Edmonton and Calgary, many families with special needs children relocate to one of the two urban centres. Thus, urban school boards are required to meet a wide range of student needs and provide a variety of special needs settings ranging from segregated schools and classes to full inclusion in community schools.

The Aboriginal population in Edmonton is increasing rapidly. An important focus for Edmonton Public Schools is the provision of culturally rich and appropriate programming that will increase achievement among Aboriginal students, and improve graduation rates.

#### **Recommendation 4**

*Describe clearly the mandate and authority of school boards.*

##### **Rationale, issues, context**

School boards have increasingly been the victims of “mandate creep”. Because services that we believe are needed by children are increasingly unavailable, schools and school districts often provide services that should fall within the mandate of other agencies and departments such as Health and Wellness, Children’s Services and Justice. The educational mandate must be clearly defined, and school jurisdictions need to be able to focus their resources tightly on teaching, learning, and increasing student achievement and graduation rates. At the same time, other departments and agencies with responsibilities related to children and families must receive sufficient resources to provide services that are supportive of educational success.

School boards have been given the authority to operate school systems. The loss of the ability to levy local taxes has undermined this authority because local boards are totally dependent on provincial funding. If boards were given access to an additional revenue source that was not controlled by the government, they would be better able to fulfill their mandate.

The lack of a non-government revenue source also hampers boards’ ability to meet their capital needs, as they must compete with all capital needs province-wide and have no ability to undertake projects of high local priority.

In order that school boards may focus on a clear mandate, services for children must be integrated and legislation must enable school jurisdiction to partner both internally and externally with other government agencies, organizations or service providers that meet the needs of students, support lifelong learning, and make efficient and effective use of what is a public infrastructure.

#### **Recommendation 5**

*Recognize the critical role of parents as partners in education and create conditions that facilitate increased involvement and collaboration for parents.*

##### **Rationale, issues, context**

School Councils are currently the main vehicle for parent involvement in the education system. When the province undertook a review of the role of school councils in governance in Alberta, school councils across the province were surveyed regarding appropriate governance authority. School councils generally rejected the notion that they should be granted decision-making authority at the local school level. They believed that school-based decisions were best made by school staff in consultation with School Councils.

At the local school level, School Councils are involved in providing advice and input to school staff and the school principal in decisions made at the school. These may include

hiring of staff, budget and expenditures, curriculum implementation, programs of choice, and school wide conduct policies.

Students also have a voice in how schools are organized and operated through student government and, at the senior high level, through representation on the school council.

As effective as School Councils are, there is still a need to create conditions that will result in ever-increasing numbers of parents becoming involved in their own child's education and in the issues that affect public education. Schools and parents need to become knowledgeable and comfortable in working collaboratively for the good of all students.

## **CURRICULUM IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT**

### **A. Recommendations: Curriculum Development Process**

6. *Create a standing advisory body to provide advice to the Assistant Deputy Minister Basic Learning on matters of curriculum, development, design and implementation.*
7. *Create advisory bodies composed of discipline specialists from post-secondary institutions, as well as appropriate experts from industry, business and trades.*
8. *Ensure that curriculum development timelines allow for advisory bodies, teachers and parents, to provide constructive critical appraisals of curriculum drafts.*
9. *Ensure that programs of study mandate only the knowledge and skill outcomes that students are required to achieve.*
10. *Recognize the costs associated with implementing new curricula, including resources, staff training and technological upgrades.*

All of these recommendations are fully compatible with the goals outlined in the April 2002 Alberta Learning publication *Campus Alberta: A Policy Framework*.

#### **Recommendation 6**

*Create a standing advisory body to provide advice to the Assistant Deputy Minister Basic Learning on matters of curriculum, development, design and implementation.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

A standing committee of the type recommended would provide fair and proportional representation of the urban and rural voice in curriculum matters. This committee would provide advice and guidance from the outset of any curriculum development process, and would avoid situations where Alberta Learning has already determined a course of action and then learns it is not supported by school districts.

The membership of this body should consist of the curriculum leaders of the four urban boards, and one curriculum leader from each of the five zones to represent rural perspectives. The advice received from this body would facilitate both curriculum development and implementation.

#### **Recommendation 7**

*Create advisory bodies composed of discipline specialists from post-secondary institutions, as well as appropriate experts from industry, business and trades.*

**Rationale, issues, context**

These advisory groups will assist the province to have a curriculum development process that is more responsive to the needs of a changing economy. They will also provide advice on issues of curriculum content and sequencing, to ensure a smooth transition to post-secondary programs, apprenticeship programs and direct entry into the work force. Such an advisory body needs to be created for each academic subject and for trades and technologies represented within the present Career and Technology Studies (CTS) curriculum.

**Recommendation 8**

*Ensure that curriculum development timelines allow for advisory bodies, teachers and parents, to provide constructive critical appraisals of curriculum drafts.*

**Rationale, issues, context**

In order to have truly excellent curriculum, it is worth investing significant time to allow for meaningful input on draft curricula during the development process. Input from stakeholders should not be delayed to the final stages of the process.

The meaningful involvement of teachers in the curriculum development process provides an important professional development opportunity and facilitates smoother, more complete implementation of new curricula.

**Recommendation 9**

*Ensure that programs of study mandate only the knowledge and skill outcomes that students are required to achieve.*

**Rationale, issues, context**

Programs of study outlining curriculum should focus on articulating the “What” of the curriculum – that is the actual knowledge and skill outcomes students are required to achieve. The growing practice of including a “How” – that is, prescribing or suggesting the methodology of instruction, should be curtailed. It is important to leave questions of methodology to the professional judgement of educators, better enabling the public education system to be responsive to the broad range of needs of the students it serves.

**Recommendation 10**

*Recognize the costs associated with implementing new curricula, including resources, staff training and technological upgrades.*

**Rationale, issues, context**

If school districts are to implement new curricula in the most effective way possible, they require adequate print and technology resources as well as support for the professional development needs of teachers. While the provision of some resources in electronic format is practical, it is not an alternative or replacement format for textbooks as schools cannot provide each student with access to computers and not all students have computer access at home.

## **B. Recommendations: Career Preparation**

- 11. Introduce a program that will enable all students to engage in learning related to a family of occupations.*
- 12. Provide, in consultation with industry and post-secondary institutions, ways for students to assess themselves relative to essential workplace skills.*
- 13. Promote the value and dignity of a career in the trade and technology field.*
- 14. Create opportunities for students to enter the workforce during high school while still retaining their connection to schooling.*

### **Recommendation 11**

*Introduce a program that will enable all students to engage in learning related to a family of occupations.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

The current Career and Technology Studies (CTS) structure is not well received by school districts, industry or post secondary institutions, and very few students are taking courses at the advanced CTS levels. A new program is required that will better connect with apprenticeship and career internship experiences, and lead to professional or technical level careers or, in some cases, direct entry into the workforce.

### **Recommendation 12**

*Provide, in consultation with industry and post-secondary institutions, ways for students to assess themselves relative to essential workplace skills.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

Such a resource would assist guidance counsellors to better advise students on potential career choices and would give students a tool to assist them in identifying their own levels of proficiency relative to career-related knowledge and skills.

### **Recommendation 13**

*Promote the value and dignity of a career in the trade and technology field.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

It is known that a relatively small percentage of high school graduates actually continue directly to university. However, over the last several decades, it seems that only a university education is valued by society. As a result, capable students are not encouraged to consider the skilled trades as career options. The government, industry and the school system need to take steps to change the prevailing attitudes.

It is critical – especially in Alberta – that we be able to address shortages of skilled trades people. We must also change the belief that only less capable students should consider the trades.



#### **Recommendation 14**

*Create opportunities for students to enter the workforce during high school while still retaining their connection to schooling.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

We know that some students are simply not motivated to be in school as it is currently structured. If there were opportunities for these students to enter employment for several months or a year without actually dropping out of school, there is some potential for them to see a relevance to completing their schooling. These experiences would be much longer than current work experience placements, and the students would be actual employees and develop some of the generic skills essential to the workplace. This concept would not be subsumed under the Registered Apprenticeship Program because it would also involve work placements in other fields.

The hope would be that these work placements would motivate students to complete school, or perhaps to move on to an apprenticeship program or other post-secondary education.

#### **C. Recommendations: Curriculum Design and Implementation**

- 15. Ensure that mandated curricula provide for character education and citizenship development based upon accepted Canadian values*
- 16. Ensure that all students complete their schooling as well rounded individuals, with a basis of knowledge in humanities, sciences, fine arts and possessing strong literacy and numeracy skills*
- 17. Ensure that all students have a level of proficiency in a language other than English*
- 18. Maintain a high level of accountability through the provision of standardized provincial testing in core subject areas including second languages.*

#### **Recommendation 15**

*Ensure that mandated curricula provide for character education and citizenship development based upon accepted Canadian values.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

It has always been an important role of public education to prepare good citizens. This role is no less important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than in previous times. Character education is an integral part of good citizenship, and assists students to be successful in the world of learning, work and living beyond graduation. It also helps schools create a learning environment in which students can be academically successful. Character education should be integrated throughout the curriculum, and not considered as a separate course.

#### **Recommendation 16**

*Ensure that all students complete their schooling as well rounded individuals, with a basis of knowledge in humanities, sciences, fine arts and possessing strong literacy and numeracy skills.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

If students are going to be life-long learners and are to be able to make smooth transitions to post-secondary education or the workplace, they will require some level of proficiency in all

of these areas. The level of proficiency required by any individual will depend on interests, cognitive abilities and career goals.

In addition to a broad base of knowledge plus strong literacy and numeracy skills, students must be educated for healthful living. This will help them to become well-rounded, balanced, productive citizens.

#### **Recommendation 17**

*Ensure that all students have a level of proficiency in a language other than English.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

There are many proven cognitive, cultural and personal benefits of proficiency in a second language. Canada is a bilingual country and a country that welcomes immigrants from all over the world. As such, it is important that Alberta's public education system value many languages and cultures. This valuing can be demonstrated through the provision of immersion, bilingual and second language programs. In addition, having citizens who are able to function comfortably in languages other than English enables Alberta and Canada to remain competitive in a global economy.

#### **Recommendation 18**

*Maintain a high level of accountability through the provision of standardized provincial testing in core subject areas including second languages.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

For the purposes of instruction and programming, classroom and school district performance indicators are of vital importance. It is also crucial that there be objective external measures that give school districts and parents a broad, provincial perspective on student achievement. These tests ensure school districts' accountability for provincial curriculum. External standardized tests can also provide an indicator of how Alberta's students achieve relative to students in other provinces and countries. This knowledge enables target setting and informs curriculum development needs by identifying areas requiring improvement.

Standardized tests should not be used to rank individual schools.

### **STUDENTS AND THE CLASSROOM**

#### **Recommendations**

- 19. Recognize that school districts must be able to provide reasonable class sizes, appropriate resources and adequate support staff to ensure the best learning conditions for students and to facilitate attracting and retaining excellent teachers.*
- 20. Support school districts in providing a range of options for students with special needs, including full inclusion in the community school.*
- 21. Support program enhancements for Aboriginal students.*
- 22. Establish a "Graduate Profile" or set of exit level competencies that a student completing basic education should exhibit.*
- 23. Re-examine the current "credit system" and school leaving requirements.*

### **Recommendation 19**

*Recognize that school districts must be able to provide reasonable class sizes, appropriate resources and adequate support staff to ensure the best learning conditions for students and to facilitate attracting and retaining excellent teachers.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

Teachers state that their working conditions have gradually deteriorated over time, affecting their ability to provide the highest quality of education. The issue of class size was central to the teachers' strike of 2002. It is important to teachers and students that class sizes can be maintained at levels that are appropriate to the nature of the students, any special requirements of the subject area, and that ensure safety of students and staff. However, mandating class sizes either at a provincial or a district level would be disastrous because of the implications on facilities. School districts with high space utilization would be incapable of complying because they would not have enough classrooms or free-standing portables, and would not receive funding from Alberta Infrastructure to create the needed space. Moreover, research does not support the benefits of small classes except at the primary level. School districts do, however, need to have sufficient funding to allow them to create small classes where this makes sense. As well, it is known that many parents and school councils are raising money for textbooks, computers, library books and other resources that should be provided through public funds. A strong public education system should not tolerate the differential provision of such basics, especially since the capability to raise funds tends to vary inversely with the need of the school community.

### **Recommendation 20**

*Support school districts in providing a range of options for students with special needs, including full inclusion in the community school.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

Alberta Learning's funding structure recognizes the need to provide for the mild, moderate and severe special needs of students. It does not, however, adequately recognize the challenges associated with providing a wide range of settings for special needs students, varying from highly specialized facilities and segregated settings, to full inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classroom.

Parent views on the appropriate accommodation of students with special needs cover the entire spectrum from total segregation to total inclusion. Many parents would advocate for the total inclusion of all students. They view inclusion not as a special education program, but rather as the preferred way of educating all students, and as the right of each student.

Provincial and school district policy supports inclusion as the first placement option to be considered for students with special needs. The costs of supporting this option can be high because there may be no opportunity for economies of scale in providing specialized equipment and support staff.

## **Recommendation 21**

*Support program enhancements for Aboriginal students.*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

As a society, we have not been very successful at acknowledging, honouring and supporting our Aboriginal population and their culture. Edmonton Public Schools has been working to implement programs and program enhancements that provide an appropriate cultural and educational experience for urban Aboriginal students, so that they will experience success in school and learn about their heritage. This is particularly important since the Aboriginal population is increasing rapidly and Edmonton has the largest urban Aboriginal population in the province.

The special status of Aboriginal peoples must be recognized by the Alberta government and the province's public education system through specific efforts to provide resources and programming that will ensure the preservation of their languages and cultures, and the success of their children in school.

## **Recommendation 22**

*Establish a "Graduate Profile" or set of exit level competencies that a student completing basic education should exhibit.*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

The current structure does not always effectively articulate from one division to another, nor does it provide the students with an opportunity to explore career options or recognize that the majority of students do not enter post-secondary institutions immediately upon completing grade 12.

While each student may vary significantly in terms of any one competency, a minimum expectation can be stated for each of a number of areas such as: numeracy, literacy, sciences, humanities, second language and healthful living. This becomes a set of global expectations for all students.

## **Recommendation 23**

*Re-examine the current "credit system" and school leaving requirements.*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

Consideration should be given to whether the current credit system might be replaced by an 'exit portfolio' of completed courses, training and general work experience. This could constitute an educational record acceptable for post secondary entrance and meaningful to employers. Such a document would be "continuous" in that it would not end after the student leaves the K to 12 system, but could be built upon when the student completes recognised workplace training or if he/she returns to the school system to add to the record. The requirements of the "Graduate Portfolio" and post-secondary or workplace entrance requirements would drive student course selection.

The current high school diploma has less meaning than it did in the past, with Universities accepting students based on their having completed particular courses rather than on whether they have a high school diploma.

## **SUPPORT FOR EXEMPLARY STAFF**

### **Recommendations**

- 24. That all staff have opportunities to engage in staff development.*
- 25. That universities and university/colleges establish programs that allow for rigorous academic training as well as professional training that focuses on the requirements of the Teaching Quality Standard.*
- 26. That the School Act be revised to establish a two-year probationary period to achieve continuing contract status.*

### **Recommendation 24**

*That all staff have opportunities to engage in staff development.*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

The goal of Edmonton Public Schools is *Superb Results From All Kids*. To achieve this goal, teachers must demonstrate exemplary teaching skills for all students in their care and to maintain this high standard, teachers require regular and on-going access to staff development.

It is also necessary to provide similar opportunities to all staff to enhance their skills and abilities so that they can remain current in a changing environment.

The *National Staff Development Council* identifies that 10% of staff expenditures should go towards staff development. Research indicates that the effects of well-prepared teachers on student achievement can be stronger than the influences of student background factors, such as poverty, language background, and minority status. There must be sufficient resources to allow this to occur.

### **Recommendation 25**

*That universities and university/colleges establish programs that allow for rigorous academic training as well as professional training that focuses on the requirements of the Teaching Quality Standard.*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

In order to be successful, teachers require strong grounding in one or more academic areas. They also require training related to the practice of teaching, including methodology, effective classroom management, assessment, research based practice and other elements of the Teaching Quality Standard. Extensive practicum experience is essential in such a plan.

Beginning teachers should be provided with mentoring by master teachers who have demonstrated excellent teaching practice.

### **Recommendation 26**

*That the School Act be revised to establish a two-year probationary period to achieve continuing contract status.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

This would align with the expectation of two years for permanent certification and would allow for a reasonable period of time to assess the teacher's success in meeting the teaching quality standard.

## **RESPONDING TO SOCIETAL ISSUES**

### **Recommendations**

- 27. Provide funding to enable school districts to implement strategies that compensate for limitations due to poverty (e.g., full-day kindergarten, small class size in grade 1, parent education, intensive literacy interventions)*
- 28. Ensure that health, children's services and justice have a clear mandate to partner with education to provide a comprehensive, systemic and sustained support system for children ages 6 to 21 that parallels the 0 to 6 early intervention plan and funding (e.g., income support, family counselling, speech therapy, housing registry, psychiatric interventions, mentoring, nutritional programs)*
- 29. Maintain the enabling legislation that allows school districts to provide alternative programming based on religion.*

### **Recommendation 27**

*Provide funding to enable school districts to implement strategies that compensate for limitations due to poverty (e.g., full-day kindergarten, small class size in grade 1, parent education, intensive literacy interventions)*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

Poverty limits developmental opportunities for children. It is well established that children who live in poverty face more challenges and are more likely to encounter serious problems in their lives than other children, including: a higher death rate, more chronic illness, more emotional and behavioural problems, more difficulty in developing cognitive, emotional and social skills needed for success in preschool and school; higher rates of injury and an over-representation in the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Furthermore, while it is important to recognize that not all low-income children will have difficulty in school, many will experience the negative effects of poverty educationally. The relationship between educational achievement of children and income levels is highly statistically significant. There are differences among children in school readiness according to the family's household income. This has a substantial impact on education when we know that, in 1996, the poverty status for children 0 to 14 years was 32% in Edmonton and 22 % for the province.

### **Recommendation 28**

*Ensure that health, children's services and justice have a clear mandate to partner with education to provide a comprehensive, systemic and sustained support system for children ages 6 to 21 that parallels the 0 to 6 early intervention plan and funding (e.g., income support, family counselling, speech therapy, housing registry, psychiatric interventions, mentoring, nutritional programs)*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

Children and youth come to school with a multiplicity of needs that go far beyond the mandate of education and the expertise of educators. Poverty is linked to this recommendation as well. District schools that serve children and families living in poverty find that they are pressured to shift their attention from instruction to accessing non-educational services and supports for students and their families – areas that are outside their responsibility and control. However, not all needs presented by children and families are related to income. Children, youth and families from all income levels may experience family breakdown, chronic and traumatic health needs (e.g., brain injury through accident), emotional and behavioural challenges or be perpetrators or victims of violent crime. Without a clear mandate the services required are often not forthcoming or are cut arbitrarily, sometimes mid-year as we experienced this past year with the Ma'mōwe Capital Region Child and Family Services cuts to intervention programs for school-aged youth. As the issues are rooted in society, working together in a comprehensive manner is required if we are to prevent and intervene effectively. Because non-instructional services provided in a coordinated fashion positively impact achievement, attendance and retention and enable our teachers to focus on teaching and learning, the absence of services or services being cut put many students at risk.

### **Recommendation 29**

*Maintain the enabling legislation that allows school districts to provide alternative programming based on religion.*

### **Rationale, issues, context**

An increasing number of families want education to encompass a spiritual dimension. We know there is a demand for education that encompasses the spiritual as evidenced by the support for Catholic education and the fact that the majority of private schools are faith based. As well, we know from experience that faith-based education can be accommodated within the public system. Rather than fragmenting education as private schools do, this enables the provision of education within a common framework and provides opportunities for greater understanding among faiths and respect for individual choices.

## **SUSTAINABLE AND SUFFICIENT FUNDING**

### **Recommendations**

- 30. Combine the current instructional and support funding blocks, while maintaining transportation and capital as separate blocks.*
- 31. Minimize the use of conditional funding.*
- 32. Eliminate the administrative cap.*
- 33. Make building area the primary consideration in the formula for Plant Operation and Maintenance funding.*
- 34. Provide for the orderly replacement and upgrade of assets, particularly school buildings.*
- 35. Recognize factors that create disproportionate costs for school districts.*
- 36. Provide school districts with access to a non-government controlled revenue source.*
- 37. Refine and streamline accountability structures.*

**38. *Provide sufficient and sustainable funding to support implementation of all the recommendations.***

**Recommendation 30**

***Combine the current instructional and support funding blocks, while maintaining transportation and capital as separate blocks.***

**Rationale, issues, context**

The current funding framework has the intent of increasing the flexibility of school jurisdictions to meet the needs of students at the local level. However, the current use of funding blocks with expenditure and transfer limitations and conditions attached to some of these dollars reduces the jurisdiction's flexibility. This goes against the stated intent of the funding framework. Edmonton Public Schools proposes that the current support block, with the exception of transportation funding, be rolled into the instructional block, and spending conditions be removed. Capital expenditures should continue to be funded separately.

**Recommendation 31**

***Minimize the use of conditional funding.***

**Rationale, issues, context**

Although we believe it is appropriate to have earmarked funds for transportation and capital, the over-all flexibility intended with the basic instruction grant is being continually eroded with additional conditional funding. The most significant is the move to earmark a specified portion of the basic instruction grant for students with mild and moderate special needs. There should be a move toward increased unconditional funds recognizing pertinent equity factors. Jurisdictions should not be monitored on whether they have spent a specified portion of money on a specified activity but rather on whether they have met specified outcomes.

The funding framework should be streamlined by reducing the number of conditional grants. Unconditional grants provide greater flexibility in service delivery and enhance the boards' abilities to respond to local circumstances. Conditional and earmarked funds usually result in extensive administrative requirements that go far beyond those required to access significantly greater amounts of money. A disproportionate amount of these conditional grants is spent in administering them. Conditional grants should be rolled into the basic instruction grant.

**Recommendation 32**

***Eliminate the administrative cap.***

**Rationale, issues, context**

It is recognized that administrative costs should be held to a reasonable proportion of total educational costs. However, the government should not impose a limit on administrative costs based on an arbitrary number or percentage. Rather, administrative expenditures should be determined by the school jurisdiction in order to meet its mandated results.



**Recommendation 33**

*Make building area the primary consideration in the formula for Plant Operation and Maintenance funding.*

**Rationale, issues, context**

Plant operation and maintenance (PO&M) funding should be based on both the area in square metres of the facilities being operated and maintained by a jurisdiction and the number of eligible students, since both of these factors determine the cost of plant operations and maintenance. However, the area of facilities being operated should be the primary factor in determining funding. The provincial utilization rate should not be a factor in calculating the PO&M funding. Funds to operate schools should recognize that some under utilized space is an asset in that it provides flexibility to institute new programs and meet community needs.

**Recommendation 34**

*Provide for the orderly replacement and upgrade of assets, particularly school buildings.*

**Rationale, issues, context**

The province must provide for the orderly replacement and upgrade of assets. The building quality restoration program and modernization funding allow for some funds for upgrading our school buildings. These programs are inadequate to finance our needs. If significant dollars are not given to school jurisdictions to bring our schools up to an adequate standard, more money will be needed for ordinary repairs and maintenance. In addition, infrastructure needs such as technology, school equipment and furnishings, CTS equipment and administrative and financial systems must be addressed and funds provided to school jurisdictions.

**Recommendation 35**

*Recognize factors that create disproportionate costs for school districts.*

**Rationale, issues, context**

Funding must include recognition of school jurisdictions that have proportionately higher expenditures whether in staff costs or other operational costs. We support the provision of sparsity and distance funding for rural jurisdictions, as well as growth and density funding for urban boards.

**Recommendation 36**

*Provide school districts with access to a non-government controlled revenue source.*

**Rationale, issues, context**

The 2001-2002 labour dispute with teachers provided an unfortunate but clear example of why it would be important for school districts to have access to a funding source that is independent of government. Many school districts would have been willing to negotiate salary settlements with their teachers, but were constrained by the available dollars. Because the provincial government held total control of the money, they became the focus of teachers' anger.

There are other areas besides salaries in which it would make sense for school boards to be able to provide additional funding, and they should have the ability to do so. The current mechanism which would allow a plebiscite every three years is unsatisfactory. The provincial government should develop a strategy which would allow boards access to another funding source which is not controlled by the government and which boards may access at their discretion.

### **Recommendation 37**

*Refine and streamline accountability structures.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

Edmonton Public Schools believes it must retain the authority and flexibility to establish priorities for the provision of education programs in response to the needs of students, parents and the community. Alberta Learning should set the results to be achieved by school jurisdictions. Jurisdictions should be held accountable for the results achieved and be provided with maximum flexibility to achieve those results.

Alberta Learning's three-year planning and reporting framework identifies the results school districts are expected to achieve including what the province will accept as evidence that they have been achieved. We believe this is an effective and efficient method to ensure accountability of local jurisdictions. However, we believe that all funding from Alberta Learning should be provided at adequate levels for each of the three years, in order that meaningful planning may occur in providing appropriate programs for our students and community. We also judge ourselves against our standards, through target setting, and the utilization of community, parent, staff and student satisfaction surveys, and Alberta Learning and district student achievement awards. With these checks and balances in place, we believe the funding framework should support a much greater level of autonomy in decision-making and resource allocation at the district level.

In order for school districts to demonstrate accountability for special initiatives within a framework which provides greater unconditional funding, Alberta Learning's accountability framework should be based on a limited number of measures and indicators that are reliable, comparable across districts, focused on the essential work, and stable over time to allow districts to identify trends and areas in need of improvement.

### **Recommendation 38**

*Provide sufficient and sustainable funding to support implementation of all the recommendations.*

#### **Rationale, issues, context**

As our funding and the funding in other sectors affecting children and families erodes, the demands on public education are escalating in an increasingly competitive world.

It is recognized that many of Edmonton Public Schools' recommendations in this submission will require additional funding to school districts or additional expenditures by Alberta Learning and Alberta Infrastructure. Specific examples include those recommendations referring to:

- The creation of conditions that facilitate increased involvement and collaboration for parents
- The creation of curriculum development advisory bodies
- The costs associated with implementing new curriculum
- Ensuring that all students have proficiency in a language other than English
- Enabling districts to provide reasonable class sizes, appropriate resources and adequate support staff
- Provision of a range of options for special needs students, including full inclusion
- Provision of program enhancements for Aboriginal students
- Provision of enhanced staff development for all staff
- Provision of funding to school boards and involved government departments to deal with poverty-related issues
- Ensuring the orderly upgrading of facilities and other assets