EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

September 10, 2002

TO:             Board of Trustees

FROM:           A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT:        Monograph:  "Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making: Sharing our
                Experiences"

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

RESOURCE
STAFF:          Jan Baker, Donna Barrett, Karen Bassi, Brent Bauer, John Beaton, Karen
                Beaton, Marie Caley, Sylvia Clarke, Jeanne Commance, Bev Crossman,
                Terry Cruickshank, Mary-Ellen Deising, Ruth Donovan, Pam Hall, Avi
                Habinski, Jim Higgs, Allan Jack, Bill Jensen, Lyndi Karbonik, Ann Keech,
                Tony Kernaghan, David Kun, Catherine LeBlanc, Louise Lecompte, Linda
                Lindsay, Allen Linville, Kirby Osepchuk, Shauna Paradis, Faye Parker,
                Larry Payne, Brett Polowy, Edgar Schmidt, Jason Smith, Sherry Talbot,
                Laura Tanasychuk, Marilyn Tywoniuk, Shawn Tschritter, Colin Willows,

INFORMATION

As a result of a letter of intent between the Edmonton Public Local of the ATA and
Edmonton Public Schools that arose out of the 1998 round of collective bargaining, a joint
committee of the Local and district administration developed a document entitled
"Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making."  This document was presented
to the board of trustees and was approved by the superintendent for use in the district in May
2000.  The Framework document is now part of the district's Principal Reference Guide and
Handbook.

The Framework contains a number of recommendations regarding professional development
to assist staff in becoming more comfortable and skilled in involving themselves and others
in decision making.  One of the recommendations was that "the Edmonton Public Teachers'
Local and Edmonton Public Schools work together to compile and disseminate an inventory
of effective practices related to involvement in decision making."

Accordingly, in 2000-2001, Leadership Services and the joint committee developed a pilot
project involving ten schools who wanted to work with the Framework document and with
other research on involvement in decision making to design and implement a "framework for
involvement" in their own schools.

Each school was represented by a team consisting of the principal or designate, the school's
ATA representative and another interested teacher.  Under the guidance of Shirley Stiles and
Donna Barrett, they met for five half-days during the period from January to June 2001.
Each session involved the participants in learning and practicing specific strategies or
techniques for creating discussion among staff, for analyzing situations, and for learning from

1

each other.  Between sessions, the schools practiced the various strategies and then reported on their experiences at the next session.

The attached monograph (Attachment 1) presents the school stories arising from the pilot project.  Each of the ten schools has written its own story, describing what they did, what they learned, and what questions they still have.  Sections are also included providing the stories of the joint ATA-EPS committee and of the central services staff involved in the project.

As the monograph is a joint project between the district and the Local, it has been presented to the Local's Executive Committee and to the Council of School Representatives as well as to Superintendent's Council and Vertical Teams.  It was well received by all of these groups.

The monograph is intended as a companion piece to the framework document, and it is hoped that, by making it available to schools, it will encourage and facilitate further collegial discussion among principals and staffs related to the whole area of collaboration and involvement in decision making.

FP:KB:pn

Attachment 1 - Monograph:   "Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making: Sharing our
                    Experiences"

# INVOLVEMENT IN SITE-BASED DECISION MAKING:

# SHARING OUR EXPERIENCES

**Evansdale School**

**Garneau/Queen Alexandra School**

**Greenfield School**

**Kenilworth School**

**Lorelei School**

**Lynnwood School**

**Strathearn School**

**W.P. Wagner School**

**Waverley School**

**Weinlos School**

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**EDMONTON PUBLIC TEACHERS LOCAL 37**

December 2001

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# INTRODUCTION

This monograph is a companion piece to the <u>Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making</u> produced in May 2000 by Edmonton Public Schools and Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37.

The Framework document can be found on the Edmonton Public Schools website at http://intranet.epsb.ca/frame_principals.html.

Read on for the reflections of the participants on their experiences with involvement in site-based decision making.

> "This discussion became a springboard to assist us in decision making regarding next year's instructional focus."
> *(Garneau/Queen Alexandra School)*

> "At Greenfield School, we have worked to create an awareness where administration and staff work collaboratively to make good decisions."
> *(Greenfield School)*

> "We have learned that we don't deal with problems in isolation. Other schools face similar situations and, therefore, our collaborative efforts can extend across school boundaries."
> *(Greenfield School)*

> "This has generated significant positive energy for the 10 staff members who have embarked on this process."
> *(Kenilworth School)*

> "This is staff involvement at its finest!"
> *(Kenilworth School)*

> "We have learned that learning and change are processes and that we need to celebrate our small successes."
> *(Lorelei School)*

> "Changes that have taken place are belonging to the staff! The process was slow but the staff feel ownership for the changes. Through the team approach the staff have identified who the stakeholders are. They recognize that different levels of involvement are acceptable."
> *(Lorelei School)*

> "It is our hope that gradually there will have to be less direction and setting of agendas from administration, as teams solidify, and members take more ownership for what is important to them and necessary to the improvement of the school."
> *(Lynnwood School)*

> "Through implementation of site-based decision making, we are pruning programs and grafting ideas."
> *(Strathearn School)*

> "Models provided for 'staff involvement in decision making' may prove useful to teams or the participating group of teachers as a whole in refining this initiative as it develops".
> *(W.P. Wagner School)*

"This new emphasis on collaboration transformed our staff meetings from being simply a time for information sharing to an opportunity to reflect on educational issues and the value of a collaborative approach."                    *(Waverley School)*

"We have learned that it is far more difficult to listen than talk.  Active listening takes work!  We have learned many new activities and strategies that can be used to create a more collaborative culture."                    *(Waverley School)*

"We began to level the playing field so that ALL were seen/treated as equals."
                    *(Weinlos School)*

"Change must also be done in a trusting environment that fosters dialogue."
                    *(Weinlos School)*

"Spending time together, building trust, and building relationships are critical. Processes help, but genuine involvement is not a 'bag of tricks'."          *(Central Services)*

# JOINT COMMITTEE STORY

The document "Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making" was the result of a co-operative effort between the Edmonton Public Teachers Local of the ATA and Edmonton Public Schools. It came about as a result of a letter of intent between the two parties that was agreed upon during the 1998 round of bargaining. Teachers had expressed concerns that their level of involvement in decision making seemed to be significantly different from school to school, and they were looking for guidelines about what could be expected. The purpose of the document is to provide a framework and suggestions for effective ways of involving stakeholders in decision making processes within the context of the district's site-based decision making model.

A committee was formed consisting of four members appointed by the Local and four members appointed by the district. The representatives of the Local were Karen Beaton, Allan Jack, Catherine LeBlanc, and Peter McNab. The representatives of the district were Mary-Ellen Deising, Avi Habinski, Angus McBeath, and Faye Parker. The committee decided to obtain input regarding the important aspects of involvement in decision making from teachers, principals and parents, as well as support, maintenance, custodial and exempt staff groups through a series of focus groups. The focus groups responded to a series of open-ended questions designed to obtain their views regarding the nature of genuine involvement, the things they wanted to be involved in, and the processes and conditions that encourage genuine involvement in decision making. In addition, through the Local's mailing councillors, all school staffs had the opportunity to respond to similar questions.

## *What did we learn as a Committee?*

- We learned that involvement in decision making is a set of skills, and that learning those skills takes time and commitment.
- A positive attitude towards involving those affected by decisions and towards collaborative ways of working is not enough by itself. Even individuals with a positive attitude do not always have the skills to involve others effectively.
- Collaborative effort takes time.
- Building trust is an important element of effective and genuine involvement.
- We began the committee as two "sides" – ATA and district. Over time, the distinction between the "sides" disappeared, and we became a unified group working towards a common goal. In this way, we learned that involvement and collaboration build trust and friendships.
- The work on this project allowed each member of the committee to understand the importance of involvement and to develop a commitment to the importance of ensuring that our work would have an impact on district practices.
- We understood that simply presenting the document, as a finished product to the Local and to district stakeholders would not be sufficient to effect positive changes.
- People have very different ideas about the extent of involvement they want and the areas in which they want involvement.

## *What Further Steps Did We Take as a Result?*

The joint committee continued to meet to look at ways of making the Framework more

widely known and used in the district. In collaboration with Leadership Services, we structured a pilot project for ten schools who wanted to work with the Framework document and other research on involvement in decision making and to design and implement a "framework for involvement" within their own schools. Leadership Services developed and provided the training component of the pilot project.

The participating schools were: Evansdale, Greenfield, Weinlos, Lynnwood, Lorelei, Kenilworth, Garneau/Queen Alexandra, Strathearn, Waverley and W. P. Wagner. Each school sent a team consisting of the principal or designate, the school's ATA representative and another interested teacher. The group met for five half-days during the period from January to June 2001.

Each session involved the participants in learning and practicing specific strategies or techniques for creating discussion among staff, for analyzing situations, for learning from each other. Between sessions, the schools practiced strategies, and then reported on their experiences at the next session. Any of the schools would be pleased to share their experiences and the specifics of strategies that worked well for them.

This monograph presents the school stories arising from the pilot project. The stories reflect the experiences and thoughts of each school group, and are not intended to present specific models or recommendations. As the project ended, each school expressed the feeling that they had really just begun a journey towards creating a culture that enhances and facilitates genuine involvement in all aspects of school decision making.

# EVANSDALE SCHOOL

## *What Have We Done?*

Evansdale is a school of diversity because of several special needs programs and a multicultural population. There was a realization that an important focus for staff was to work together as a team when possible. Team building exercises with a mixing of program staff were developed to create an atmosphere of trust, empathy, fun and collaboration. Behaviour and Learning Assistance and Early Education staff have had the opportunity to come together in division meetings to share their expertise with other staff and have built a network of "buddying" with other classes and reduced resistance to integration. Peer coaching and mentoring were in place along with inservicing from some of our exempt staff such as Speech and Language Pathologists and Occupational Therapists. A school culture of collaboration pulled a large staff of forty-five together for the betterment of the students and parents.

The administrators have turned over some decision making to the staff by developing a committee for each district priority. All teachers, teacher assistants, exempt and support staff have served on committees for each of the priorities to closely monitor action plans, analyze results indicators, and make recommendations for further work. There was an empowerment for such groups as they were also responsible for a portion of the budget that was applicable to their priority. Functions and events for the school were included within each Priority so there was an over-all reduction in the number of committees required. Within a Priority

Group, if a topic required action research, an adhoc committee was formed and they reported back to the group. Each Priority Group would report every other month on the progress of their committee and bring forward suggestions for staff feedback during staff meetings. It was through action research that many groups were able to gather information on best practices and report to the rest of the staff. The consensus model of decision-making was well in place. If there was a need to have further discussion before an informed consensus decision was made, we provided more time for it. Informal and formal conversation either within staff meetings, division meetings or priority meetings provided all staff with an opportunity to share their ideas.

Different staff members who volunteered each month chaired staff meetings. They were responsible for directing input during the staff meeting ensuring all those wanting to share had the opportunity. This was a great opportunity for dialogue and discussion. Providing information through a daily newsletter, email and posted memos were some ways to streamline the sharing of information and provided additional time for items that required discussion.

Another well-received opportunity to build team was providing coverage for teachers when they were experiencing collegial marking and planning. A result of this strategy was a low stress time for teachers while they shared and used student work to improve instuction. It was felt that the benefits of time provided for examining practices and reflecting on the results far outweighed the financial cost of this process.

### *What Have We Learned?*

We've learned that it takes time to create change that is effective. It sometimes hurts and is challenging as we form, storm, norm and reform. Sometimes, we had to re-evaluate the direction we were going and change course. As administrators, we sometimes had to reflect on the letting go process and leave the empowerment with the rest of the staff when decisions needed to be made. This wasn't always easy for staff coming from a top-down decision making school. We had to find ways to dissolve the "we and them" concept between groups of special needs staff. If we were able to show benefits on both sides, we were better able to foster a team atmosphere. We had to work hard at looking at the humour of the situation and remember to celebrate the little steps taken. We relied on everyone to create the fun in working together.

### *What Questions Do We Have Now?*

Our questions continue to be, "Where are we going next?" Developing a culture of trust for a leadership team will an on-going challenge as we look forward to the use of an Expectations Diagnosis. We are also looking forward to reading educational articles and using many of the process skills associated with professional dialogue.

In summary, this on-going process has unified a large, diverse group into a team that works efficiently and effectively together for a common goal. The staff is showing greater satisfaction in being involved in the decision making process and the administrators are relinquishing the decisions that can be most effectively made by the team. More time is being provided to accomplish the most important "WORK" of teaching and learning.

# GARNEAU/QUEEN ALEXANDRA SCHOOL

*What Have We Done?*

An examination of 1999-2000 HLAT results and a commitment to the central importance of writing led the administration and staff of Garneau/Queen Alexandra to embark upon a school-wide writing project for 2000-2001. At a combined staff meeting early in the school year, we chose six genres upon which to focus and began, in teams of two, to prepare packages of graphic organizers, planning and writing tools, literature links and instructional strategies. These packages were presented to the entire staff over two PD days, held in November and January. An implementation plan was put in place and we were off! This process was important to us, as all staff members helped identify our students' learning needs and develop action plans to meet them. We were actively engaged in the decision-making and planning.

We went through a process of teacher led in-services, followed by implementation in each of the classrooms. Students wrote specific assignments and teachers brought them to staff meetings to "debrief", to share writing samples, and to reflect upon common patterns we saw at various grade levels. This was a valuable process because of the professional dialogue related to student writing and teacher instruction. As a staff we were growing in professional knowledge and skill in the area of writing. This would not have been possible without everyone's active participation in decision-making and planning.

*What Have We Learned?*

We have learned a great deal this year about structuring a school-wide writing focus, about professional dialogue and working as a team to decide important school plans. As a staff, we have become more analytical in our approach to writing assessment and reflection of the writing instruction process. We reflected upon the fact that many of the children who encountered difficulty with writing are also children who have difficulty maintaining sustained attention on any project. We felt the active involvement of deciding our instructional focus and planning it had a powerful impact on our own learning as professionals.

*What Questions Do We Have Now?*

Some of our questions related specifically to our instructional focus. We want to engage "expert opinion" and possibly look at data from other schools - to expand our 'sample'. Can we put supports in place to foster sustained student focus? How can we continue this instructional focus in a more effective, refined manner?

This process took a considerable amount of time and dedication. We feel it was valuable and have questions about what strategies could be used to structure more time for an exchange of teaching ideas and strategies, and professional dialog. How can we use some of the decision-making strategies we learned to expand into other areas, such as school discipline, and parent involvement for example? This work was an important first step and we see a need to continue it.

# GREENFIELD SCHOOL

*What Have We Done?*

Greenfield School's participation in the "pilot project" of the *Framework for Involvement in Decision Making* was positive and informative. Our intent was to develop ways to improve upon our own school-based 'framework', based on the ideas and suggestions in the *Framework* document and the ideas and experiences of other schools participating in the project.

Our school framework includes a Belief Statement, which provides overall direction; a Decision Making Model, which provides three options or modes for making school-wide decisions, and selected process models, which may be utilised to enhance the involvement of staff.

At Greenfield School, we have worked to create an awareness where administration and staff work collaboratively to make good decisions. Each staff member's opinion is heard and validated. In our school vocabulary, we have included the terms "dialogue", "collaboration", and "consensus". We have explored various processes in support of decision making. Some processes helped to reveal the underlying causes of issues; other processes helped to develop school plans.

*What Have We learned?*

We have learned many things. We have learned that building and maintaining a culture that involves shared decision making is a long-term process, often slow, with no immediate changes. We recognise that not all of our attempts at shared decision making will be successful, but we are encouraged to continue nonetheless.

We have learned that we don't deal with problems in isolation. Other schools face similar situations and, therefore, our collaborative efforts can extend across school boundaries.

*What Questions Do We Have Now?*

The questions facing us now pertain to the new school year. They are as follows:

1. How do we actively support our Belief Statement so that each staff member's involvement contributes to a team effort? (Our team effort reflects a school culture that actively promotes our Model of Shared Decision Making.)

2. How do we best implement our knowledge, on our first day back to school in August, to inform new staff members about the framework in which Greenfield School operates respecting decision making?

# KENILWORTH SCHOOL

*What Have We Done?*

Our story begins when staff were asked to participate in shaping the annual professional development plan for Kenilworth staff. A small, but courageous group of staff stepped forward eager to take on the challenge, and oh what a challenge it was. The PD committee met with a fabulous consultant and worked through a process in preparation for the big day, and after thinking about the possible staff response, based on the relationships and staff dynamics, the entire process was pitched out the door. We began again. The new plan was to be based on professional conversation. The day was lead by Katherine Weinmann and was very successful. It took staff through a process where they had to talk about their practice. The foundation for risk taking began. Coincidental to this, three key players were involved in the Framework for Decision Making committee. Now the rubber hit the road, because the staff team took over and felt confident in shaping the next level of staff PD.

We began to use the strategies we practiced at the Framework committee. Throughout the second PD day, staff were lead through "Save the Last Word for Me", and staff all participated in a gallery walk for sharing best practice in core subjects. One of the most insightful pieces of learning was a result of the 5 Why's process. Five separate staff groups came up with the exact same focus for our next steps as a staff. Subsequent to that, our principal, Pamela Hall, committed to follow-up with the work that had been done, and asked for volunteers to participate in a staff focus group, related to accountability for student learning. A student and a parent focus group were also formed to further explore the identified issue of student accountability.

Representatives of the 3 focus groups have now met and have created a document that clarifies expectations for students, parents and staff. The document is a work in progress, but will form a foundation of our work to institutionalize high accountability for student learning at Kenilworth for the school year 2001/2002. (We'd be pleased to send our document if this is useful.) We have learned that letting staff take risks and "fly" with their own ideas is a very powerful process. We have found staff more willing to express their views, contribute to the process of arriving at consensus and be open to new ideas and the possibility of change.

We find people far more willing to share talk about their practice and support one another. Under the leadership of Auriana Kowalchuk, we have begun the process of analyzing and discussing student work using specific protocols. This has generated significant positive energy for the 10 staff members who have embarked on this process. A staff study group has been formed to continue this work next September. A second staff study group has asked to explore character education work as a result of the data emerging from the focus groups. This is staff involvement at its finest!

*What Questions Do We Have Now?*

1. How do we keep on top of new ideas/processes about collaborative work?
2. How do we keep our positive energy going?
3. How do we find/make time to collaborate/reflect?

# LORELEI SCHOOL

*What Have We Done?*

**Background**
Four years ago a team structure was implemented. It began as an administration direction, organized as grade grouping; K/1, 2/3, 4/5/6 and staff in support of classrooms (including administration, music teacher, librarian, custodian, office staff).

Agendas were administration directed and meetings were scheduled at specific times. Teams changed as Opportunity teachers and more support staff arrived.

The principal was involved in the original committee, which began in 1998 to develop the Framework for Involvement in Site Based Decision Making. As one of the facilitators of the pilot project, our principal encouraged us to become involved in the ten-week pilot.

**Evolution**
Teams have become more self-directed, dealing with issues and topics specific to their needs while still providing feedback and information to administration on specific issues. Cross-team study groups have emerged. Teams are spontaneously formed around various issues and events. Committees are phasing into new teams.

**The Pilot Project**
We introduced several communication tools to our staff in small steps and repeated them over a period of time. We began with *Save the Last Word* and the article from *The Systems Thinker* titled *Conversation as a Core Business Process.* The content of the article and the success of the process began our journey.

We introduced *Save the Last Word* at staff meetings and at a Professional Development day in the spring of 2001. The *Box* as it came to be known at Lorelei – ie. the *Self Reflection quadrant* was demonstrated at a staff meeting. It was then sent to teams for initial input. A compilation was brought to the whole staff for clarification without discussion. It was then sent back to teams for discussion and recommendation. At the June staff meeting, teams prioritized the final draft. We will use this document to introduce our new principal to Lorelei.

*What Have We Learned?*

We feel that there has been a cultural change at Lorelei, and that this change has come about over a period of time. We have learned that *learning and change* are processes and that we need to celebrate our small successes.

Changes that have taken place are *belonging to the staff*! The process was slow but the staff feel ownership for the changes. Through the team approach the staff have identified who the stakeholders are. They recognize that different levels of involvement are acceptable. They feel a sense of responsibility to their team and to the entire staff.

### What Questions Do We Have Now?

How will we keep this going with a significant staff turn over, a new principal and a new superintendent? Will the new superintendent value the work we have done and support a continuation of the project?

## LYNNWOOD SCHOOL

### What Have We Done?

In our attempt to provide more opportunities for involvement in the decision making process at Lynnwood School, the principal, principal designate and TAG representative engaged in a series of district level sessions, where they acquired strategies that could be used to engage the staff.

As a starting point, the monthly Staff meeting agendas were revamped to provide TIME for the collaboration process to take place during the meeting. We felt this would help teachers to see that we valued the process and did not want the collaborative time to be looked on as an add-on to their already busy schedules. Email became the vehicle to dispense with many of the administrative items that had formerly been on the agenda. We wanted staff to see we valued the importance of talk time, as a problem solving tool. In small groups they had opportunity to provide input into decisions and to raise issues that they felt impacted on them and their classrooms as well as the total effectiveness of Lynnwood School. For example at one of the monthly meetings we used the 5 Why's technique to examine ways of improving some attitude survey results.

On alternate Thursdays each month, assigned Teams met for a specific purpose. The Teams were provided with a specific agenda. Following the meetings Team leaders provided a synopsis of the meeting to the administration. Input gathered from each Team meeting assisted in deciding the future direction for Team meetings and small group collaboration during staff meetings. Working in Teams and as part of a small group during staff meetings, we provided staff opportunities to be honest and open in discussion. Many of the staff that did not willingly contribute during whole group staff meetings had an avenue to be heard in a less-threatening environment.

### What Have We Learned?

This process has only been in place for the past two months. We realize that it is just the beginning and that we have a long way to go. However, feedback from staff regarding the small group and Team format was mostly positive. They saw their involvement as valuable in their professional development as well as in whole school improvement. We feel confident that next year there will be continued growth in the collaborative process as staff continues to see the value in their involvement. It is our hope that gradually there will have to be less direction and setting of agendas from administration, as teams solidify, and members take more ownership for what is important to them and necessary to the improvement of the school.

*Next Steps*

We will continue with the team meetings on alternate Thursdays, as well as opportunity for small group collaboration during each staff meeting. We will go a step further and set up a monthly meeting with team leaders or representatives and administration. The purpose of these meetings will be to link the whole school together, where each representative will be there as spokesperson for their team. They will have opportunity to communicate issues, concerns, and team decisions as well as providing a communication link back to their team. The teams will be set by the administration and remain the same for the year, but the small group collaboration done during staff meetings will not remain static and will provide opportunity for each staff member to work with a number of individuals throughout the year.

# STRATHEARN SCHOOL

### What Have We Done?

Strathearn School's participation in the *Framework for Involvement in Decision Making* couldn't have come at a better time. The 2000/2001 school year at Strathearn started with a new administration team and approximately 75% new teaching staff. During the previous year the school culture and environment had experienced some strain between the programs that are offered at the school. Our intent for the 2000/2001 school year was to develop a school culture that promoted harmony and collaboration and to make decisions that were focused on the betterment of all the students rather than betterment of various programs.

Some of the initiatives we instituted to create a collaborative culture in our school included:
- Buddy programs between grades
- Option program involving cross grade/division utilizing the expertise in the school
- Cross divisional, cross programs teaching assignments
- School wide assemblies
- Junior High Leadership and Career Transitions option program that perform services at all grade levels
- Character Education Program serving as a unifying force and common language
- Community volunteers working across grades and programs

Development of school wide instructional focus

### What Have We Learned?

We have learned the value of an already effective team and affirmation of the direction we have chosen. Through the utilization of team building exercises, our staff has shown growth in the area of collaboration and on both a professional and social level. We have learned to and will continue to focus on decision-making that encompasses all our grades (K to 9) and the three distinct programs that exist in our school.

***What Questions Do We Have Now?***

How to keep the momentum of program unity and development going forward while avoiding the stumbling blocks of staff transition or turnovers?


# W.P. WAGNER SCHOOL

***What Have We Done?***

*Background to the Two Ideas*
W. P. Wagner School has undergone tremendous change over the past eight years. Since 1994 there have been three principals, growth of the student body to close to 1600 students and a change in focus. W. P. Wagner is now an academic school with a science and technology specialization and no longer a vocational school. The learning curve for staff over this period has been high, as they have often been included in pilots of new initiatives such as the use of classroom SIS for marks management and reporting. It is expected that most teachers integrate the use and understanding of new technologies into their instruction, while teaching a full slate of hours.

***The first initiative: An exercise in testing an idea before implementation – staff and community involvement – Scenario I.***
When John Beaton became Principal in the fall of the 2000-2001 school year, he was invited to take part in the ATA/District initiative to increase staff involvement in decision making within the school. This coincided with the development of other initiatives such as that were in line with a District focus on instructional strategies. What follows is the story of how consultation with staff and the school community grew through testing one vision and moving into another:

Initially staff and students were surveyed about an idea of a late Thursday start which would allow a set time for staff meetings and collaborative department planning to be framed by a period in the school day where all teachers were free to meet with one another.

Staff were introduced to this concept, and some were involved in generating possible scenarios for how the late Thursday arrival might be timetabled without adding more time to the teacher's assignment. A second draft met with general acceptance among staff. Parents of the existing student body were surveyed in April and, of the 200+ who returned their responses, 75% were in favour. Student representatives from RAD class homerooms had also been asked for input at a principal's forum. Their response was also largely favorable to the idea of a late Thursday start, but not unanimously so.

As a final check, incoming grade nine families were also consulted – they had questions relating to the proposed timetable's effect on the student's day and their response was mixed. Including their responses increased the positive parental support to 77%.

Another complication arose out of consultation with Edmonton Public School Transportation and city transportation, but after three or four meetings it was clear that Edmonton Transit would support the school with their initiative.

However, after consultation with our Superintendent, Dr. Dosdall, it was determined that an 85% approval rate would still be necessary to change the timetable to a late Thursday start, and since this was not quite achieved after all the interactions with " stakeholders", this idea was not implemented this year.

However, a second initiative is taking shape now which also is intended to build on an instructional focus and enhance opportunities for professional development for the teaching staff who choose to take part in it.

### *Initiative*
As it stands now, the idea is to build in an optional 1/14 time allocation to be used for preparation and planning by teaching staff who volunteer to be part of a collegial inter-visitation initiative for a portion of that time. Working with another teacher or teachers on staff, participants will design a plan to involve observation and feedback in the area of instructional practice and strategies. This will provide opportunity for voluntary professional growth, allow scheduled time for collaborative learning within and across departments, and will hopefully allow staff some flexibility in designing interactions which will promote their own instructional growth.

The development of this idea is still in the works – two small group meetings have occurred with staff interested in the initiative – representing about twenty of the seventy-five or eighty possible participants. At these meetings, we discussed possible forms the idea might take and used sticky notes to document and discuss the plus/minus/interesting aspects of how it might be developed. At a whole staff meeting in June, details of the proposal as it stands to date were shared. Some departments, such as English, indicated an interest in taking part as a whole in order to expedite timetabling for the 2001-2002 year – but teachers were given the option to opt out within that group. In some departments, or for teachers working together across disciplines, it has been necessary to arrange schedules in such a way that collaboration can occur as a team – this is currently in the works. To date, approximately 40% of the staff have chosen to be involved in this initiative for the 2001-2002 school year.

### *The Possibilities of the Process (under construction)*
The promise of this pilot idea is that it may prove to be a very sound investment of budget funds at a local level that will show a good return in terms of reflective time for teachers, improved morale and collegial exchange opportunities, and improvements over time in instructional practice. From an administrative point of view, the initiative becomes a means for involving teaching staff in their own growth and that of their colleagues. It serves as an extension of professional development, as well as being complementary to a "management by walking around" style of observation, that keeps an eye on, and celebrates, what is happening in the classroom day by day. Good practices can be effectively shared and areas needing development can be self selected and built into a teacher's weekly or semester plan with observable, as well as intangible, morale-boosting results. The whole school stands to benefit from the introduction of this model, which will be reflected upon and revised as a whole, as well as within its various individual manifestations, on an ongoing basis. Outside PD assistance maybe brought in to provide "models for dialogue" and to help teachers develop specific observation and feedback skills. Literature on related initiatives will be made available to interested participants as needed. Models provided for "staff involvement in decision making" may prove useful to teams or the participating group of teachers as a whole in refining this initiative as it develops.

# WAVERLEY SCHOOL

*What Have We Done?*

One of our major goals was to encourage increased collaboration between two district programs within our school, an elementary program and an early education program. Some of the activities we utilized to facilitate this process include encouraging active listening through activities such as "save the last word" and "cocktail party" and encouraging the two programs to collaborate by planning events such as an Early Education Fun Day together.

This new emphasis on collaboration transformed our staff meetings from being simply a time for information sharing to an opportunity to reflect on educational issues and the value of a collaborative approach.

*What Have We Learned?*

We have learned that it is far more difficult to listen than talk. Active listening takes work! We have learned many new activities and strategies that can be used to create a more collaborative culture.

In addition, we have discovered that it is vital to balance the theoretical aspect of collaboration with the practical work of actually becoming collaborative educators.

Individuals need to feel that there is a purpose behind each activity that will have concrete results. While this is a valid point of view, it is also important to create a vision through the use of theory. Having a vision ensures that our collaboration will be focused and valuable.

> C - conversation (begins with)
> O - open communication
> L - learning, situation resulting in growth
> L - laughter
> A - abstract thinking (outside the box)
> B - broader perspective
> O - opportunity for involvement
> R - "real" (not just a theory)
> A - affirming
> T - team (common base)
> I - include all stakeholders
> V - vital
> E - enriching and empowering

*What Questions Do We Have Now?*

As we focus on implementing our respective instructional focuses, more opportunities to collaborate are going to be provided to each decision unit.

For example, classroom inter-visitation and coaching by peers are some possible approaches that may be taken. More opportunities for the two decision units to collaborate at staff meetings and informal settings will continue to be provided.

Some questions we still have are:

1. How are we going to continue to improve our collaborative efforts effectively as a whole staff?
2. How do we elicit more positive response to a collaborative approach?
3. How do we find the time and how do we ensure that all staff see this process as necessary for professional growth and not a waste of time?
4. How do we make people feel they have a valid voice in decision making?
5. How do we balance the theoretical and practical aspects of collaboration?

# WEINLOS SCHOOL

### *What Have We Done?*

Recognizing the culture of Weinlos School, three staff members began the journey of making shared decision making a reality. Intuitively, we knew that we could "plant seeds" of change during the year, yet, we needed to be patient with ourselves and our colleagues. We began by making small, external changes that symbolized a more systematic change. This included: opening our doors, meeting around one big table, discussing how we "discuss" and encouraging others in a safe environment. We recognized the issues such as "time" and attempted to solve them through SWEET (School Wide Engage in Excellence Time). It was in this manner that we began to level the playing field so that ALL were seen/treated as equals. This was accomplished through the initiative of creating a unified mission for our school. We are now pleased to have realized a new vision for our school. We do know that our work has only truly began, and that next year, we will be able to bring some of the decision making processes to the forefront!

### *What Have We Learned?*

Change is in the eye of the beholder. It can exist on many levels, and our three staff members have observed change differently. One has recognized that <u>patience</u> is required in the change process. Another has realized that change is not always a result of moving schools, but can occur with an open mind. Further, change needs to be manageable and pursued in "chunks." Change must also be done in a trusting environment that fosters dialogue. We modeled this by coming together at these meetings and created across schools "A Framework for Decision Making" community.

### *What Questions Do We Have Now?*

1. How do we sustain our work and ensure that we keep the vision alive?

# CENTRAL SERVICES

*What Have We Done?*

In order to make the "Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making" a living document in EPS, Central Services staff have undertaken several initiatives. There have also been joint initiatives with the Edmonton Public Local of the ATA.

- Presenting the document to trustees through a board report and to the Local's Executive Council and Council of School Representatives
- Meeting with the president and the coordinator of professional development of the provincial ATA to discuss the Framework
- Including the document in the "Principal Reference Guide and Handbook"
- Distributing it to principals, assistant principals and department heads
- Providing a copy to all school council chairs
- Creating, through Leadership Services, opportunities to provide training to principals and aspiring principals with respect to involvement and collaborative decision making
- Creating a ten-school pilot project to provide schools with opportunities to learn and apply skills, techniques and strategies related to collaborative decision making

*What Have We Learned?*

- Spending time together, building trust, and building relationships are critical. Processes help, but genuine involvement is not a "bag of tricks."
- We worked with a group of schools over time in a structure based on having people learn skills and techniques, giving them time to apply them in their schools, and coming back together to report, reflect and learn new ideas or skills. We learned that this is a powerful framework for practicing and modeling collaboration.
- Collaboration is a skill set. It can be learned, practiced and improved.
- Practice needs to happen in a non-threatening, open environment.
- Collaboration occurs most effectively if it has a purpose and a meaningful context, although practice can occur effectively in a more artificial setting.
- Practice adds to one's ability to be flexible and make good judgements about the kinds of processes that will be most effective with various groups of people and various issues.

*What Questions Do We Have Now?*

How do we imbed collaboration and involvement in our work with principals?
How do we create and capitalize on opportunities?
How do we raise awareness about collaboration and involvement?
How do we create more collaborative processes and skills in central services?
How do we sustain the momentum created over the past two years?

*What Are Possible Next Steps?*

Consulting services will develop additional expertise in the areas of collaboration and involvement so that schools can access professional development in these areas.
The 'pilot project' could be repeated.

# Board of Trustees

Don Fleming, Chairman

Svend Hansen, Vice-Chairman

Bill Bonko

Bob Dean

Gerry Gibeault

Lynn Odynski

George Nicholson

Ray Martin

Jean Woodrow

## Superintendent of Schools

Angus McBeath