

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 13, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

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

SUBJECT: Issues for the 2004 ASBA Spring/Fall General Meetings

RESOURCE  
STAFF: Lisa Austin, Jenise Bidulock, Elaine Decker, Michael Ediger, Avi Habinski,  
Bob Holt, Roland Labbe, Sherryl Petterson, Anne Sherwood, Alva  
Shewchuk, Cory Sinclair

RECOMMENDATION

That the following items, as detailed in Appendix I, for submission to the ASBA for policy development and consideration at the 2004 Spring/Fall General Meeting, be approved:

1. Directive for Action (Spring General Meeting):  
That the Alberta School Boards Association undertake a provincial campaign to inform the public about the importance of voting for school board trustees.
2. Directive for Action: That the Alberta School Boards Association request Alberta Infrastructure to fund an independent study to examine public-public partnership opportunities for effective use of new and existing school facilities for the benefit of the communities these facilities serve.
3. Directive for Action: That the Alberta School Boards Association urge the Alberta government to address increased operating costs incurred by school boards resulting from municipalities shifting the funding of municipal services from the property tax base to user-based utility charges and service fees. The province needs to either affirm the tax-exempt and utility cost exemption status of school boards with municipalities or, provide additional Plant Operation and Maintenance funding to offset the

new operating costs being incurred by school boards for municipal utility charges and service fees.

4. Directive for Action: (Spring General Meeting)  
That the ASBA urge the Minister of Learning and the Minister of Infrastructure to ensure that any amendments to the *Disposition of Property Regulation* will recognize that school boards must continue to play a vital role in determining the use of surplus school space to meet community needs, and in protecting the capital asset value of district property. The Alberta School Boards Association believes that Boards must exercise jurisdiction in these areas as a means of maintaining direct accountability to their electorate, which ultimately provided the capital resources to fund school facilities.

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The administration and trustees were asked to submit suggested issues for the ASBA Spring/Fall General Meeting. The above policy issues/directives for action were submitted to and reviewed by the ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee. If approved by board, they will be forwarded to ASBA Zone 23 for consideration. Zone 23 can submit up to six issues to the ASBA Policy Development Advisory Committee for consideration at the Spring and Fall General Meetings. Two of the above items are being recommended for consideration at the Spring General Meeting due to timing considerations.

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APPENDIX I – Background material supporting recommended directives for action.

**DIRECTIVE FOR ACTION – (Spring General Meeting)**

**Promote the Importance of Voting for School Board Trustee**

**That the Alberta School Boards Association undertake a provincial campaign to inform the public about the importance of voting for school board trustees.**

**Background:**

The ASBA has developed an “election kit” for use by school jurisdictions. The ASBA offers local school districts tools and strategies to help them explain the role of boards and trustees to the communities they serve. School boards are encouraged to modify and adapt these materials for local use. Most school jurisdictions do inform the public of the role and responsibilities of school trusteeship during election time. However, voter participation in school board elections continues to be a concern and remains considerably lower than participation rates for election of other municipal offices. A provincial campaign which would be a “call to action” highlighting the importance of all eligible voters, whether they have children in school or not, participating in school board elections would augment local efforts to inform the public about roles and responsibilities of trustees.

***Sponsor: Edmonton School District No. 7***

## **DIRECTIVE FOR ACTION**

### **An Independent Study of Public-Public Partnerships**

**That the Alberta School Boards Association request Alberta Infrastructure to fund an independent study to examine public-public partnership opportunities for effective use of new and existing school facilities for the benefit of the communities these facilities serve.**

#### **Background:**

The provincial government has suggested that school boards explore creative options that support the construction of new school buildings and better utilization of existing facilities. The provincial government has suggested the possibility of public-private partnerships to meet Alberta's infrastructure requirements. The unique role school facilities have played and continue to play in the lives of Alberta communities lends them more affinity for successful public-public partnerships.

In Alberta, school facilities are a significant asset for the people in a community and any changes to publicly built, owned and operated school buildings requires careful consideration. Many existing school facilities were built with direct support from local taxpayers and members of those communities believe they have a proprietary interest in the use of the facilities. School facilities play an important role in the life of the Alberta communities they serve not only through the provision of education services but through recreation opportunities, day care centers, public health services, election polling stations and community gathering places for young and old alike.

***Sponsor: Edmonton School District No. 7***

## **DIRECTIVE FOR ACTION**

### **Shifting Of Municipal Service Costs From The Property Tax Base To Utility Fees**

**That the Alberta School Boards Association urge the Alberta government to address increased operating costs incurred by school boards resulting from municipalities shifting the funding of municipal services from the property tax base to user-based utility charges and service fees. The province needs to either affirm the tax-exempt and utility cost exemption status of school boards with municipalities or provide additional Plant Operation and Maintenance funding to offset the new operating costs being incurred by school boards for municipal utility charges and service fees.**

#### **Background:**

Some of the province's school boards are being exposed to new operating costs previously provided through municipal property tax revenues. These new operating costs are occurring as municipalities shift the costs to provide some services and utilities from the property tax base to targeted fee collection approaches. Municipal governments in Alberta are struggling with the ability to deliver services within the annual revenues that can be generated through property taxes. In an effort to increase revenues, services previously funded through property taxes are being shifted towards user-based utility charges and service fees. Examples include the Drainage Utility Fee established in Edmonton in the past year, and this year's proposal for a new Fire Hydrant Maintenance Fee, which was defeated. All residential, commercial and industrial property owners pay these new user-fees. Entities such as school authorities, church groups, and community leagues are being categorized as commercial users.

User fees are a method of collecting revenue previously not available to municipalities from tax-exempt entities such as school boards. Without receiving new Plant Operating and Maintenance funding to offset new service and utility fees from municipalities, the funding to operate school facilities will be further challenged. This issue must be raised with the Alberta government and addressed with municipalities throughout Alberta.

The implications for the province's school boards include:

- Operating costs for school buildings will increase as more municipal services are shifted from 'tax base supported' to 'service and utility fee' approaches
- The funding provided to school boards for school facility operation and maintenance will be skewed increasingly towards paying for new and increasing utility and service costs
- The percentage of funding available for maintenance and custodial services will be reduced
- Unforeseen operating cost increases will result as utility operators raise their fees in the future

***Sponsor: Edmonton School District No. 7***

## DIRECTIVE FOR ACTION

### **Amendments to the Disposition of Property Regulation (Spring General Meeting)**

**The ASBA urges the Minister of Learning and the Minister of Infrastructure to ensure that any amendments to the *Disposition of Property Regulation* will recognize that school boards must continue to play a vital role in determining the use of surplus school space to meet community needs, and in protecting the capital asset value of district property. The Alberta School Boards Association believes that Boards must exercise jurisdiction in these areas as a means of maintaining direct accountability to their electorate, which ultimately provided the capital resources to fund school facilities.**

#### **Background:**

Alberta Learning recently announced that the expiry date for the Disposition of Property Regulation (AR 3/2001) has been extended to July 31, 2004 in order to complete the review and consultation process. Potential amendments to the *Disposition of Property Regulation*, which are being considered as part of an internal review by Alberta Learning and Alberta Infrastructure, would be detrimental to boards. Of concern is a potential amendment that would assess the value of a school building on the basis of its depreciated value as opposed to its appraised value in the event of transfer to another board. Also of concern are potential amendments that would facilitate the process for the Minister to install a school program into Board space. Most existing school facilities were funded directly from the local tax base and community members believe they have a proprietary interest in the use and or disposition of those facilities through their locally elected school boards.

The implications for the province's school boards of potential amendments to the regulation include:

- Reduced compensation for school properties that are transferred to another board.
- Installation of Minister-identified school programs into School Board space without consultation with the Board in regard to program compatibility, and without input from the Board in regard to the specific terms and conditions of disposition in the case of a lease of space to competitors of the district programs.
- The requirements of ministerial approval for leases beyond one year would increase administrative work and limit jurisdictions' flexibility in negotiating a longer-term lease that supports the school program and the community.

***Sponsor: Edmonton School District No. 7***