

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 10, 2007

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: B. Holt, Acting Superintendent

SUBJECT: Response to Staff Group Budget Presentations

ORIGINATOR: E. Schmidt, Executive Director

### RESOURCE

STAFF: Jenise Bidulock, Diana Bolan, John Edey, Michael Ediger, Mike Falk, David Fraser, Lisa Johnston, Veda Lastiwka, John Nicoll, Ellen Ogilvy, Garry Padlewski, Jamie Pallett, Tanni Parker, Dean Power, Pat Sadoway, Larry Schwenneker, Marie Tauber, Bonnie Zack

### INFORMATION

This report is provided in response to budget presentations made to the board of trustees on February 27, 2007 by CUPE Local 3550 representing support staff and by the Exempt Staff, and on March 13, 2007 by Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 of the ATA, CUPE Local 784 representing construction and maintenance staff and CUPE Local 474 representing custodial staff. All principals and decision unit administrators will be provided with copies of this report and the written submissions provided by the staff groups.

As in previous years, there was a recurrent theme in all five presentations about the inadequacy of funding for public education in a province that continues to report multi-billion dollar surpluses. Each staff group representative talked about the long-term effects that insufficient funding has had on their members, our staff. Concerns were expressed about workload and the impact on individual health. Several presenters also expressed doubts about the ongoing sustainability of present models and processes, specifically decentralization vs. centralization and cost recovery for central departments.

A new theme that emerged in several presentations was the connection between insufficient funding, workloads and the ability of the district to remain competitive in attracting and retaining quality staff in the current labour market.

Many of the presenters made suggestions about how the district could address these concerns, whether in the form of continuing to address class size issues, meeting the provincial 4% administrative cap, eliminating or reducing the download of functions and work from central services, or centralizing custodial and maintenance budgets. While the administration understands and shares similar concerns about the long-term impact of insufficient funding and workloads, the challenge remains that we must address these concerns in the context of fixed and limited funding. The administration also recognizes that staff attraction and retention issues and workforce planning are and will continue to be significant issues as we move forward over the next few years.

While the administration continues to support site based decision making, consideration is being given to centralizing resources in specific circumstances, e.g., internet video feed licensing. Elimination of the cost recovery service model is not under consideration.

There continues to be a heightened sense of urgency related to plant operations and maintenance (PO&M) funding as our buildings become yet another year older and more difficult to clean and maintain to the standard our staff, students, parents and community expect. This is especially difficult for our custodial and maintenance staff who have the knowledge and expertise to address the identified concerns.

There was also a renewed call from all presenters for the board to continue their advocacy for adequate funding of public education. The board remains committed to private and public advocacy as part of their legacy statement. The board chair, trustees and the acting superintendent continue to meet regularly with the Ministers of Education and Infrastructure, as well as MLAs from all parties, to put forward a public education agenda that stresses the need for adequate and sustained funding to support teaching and learning. In addition, the board will continue to work with the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) to impress upon the provincial government that additional funding is needed.

The following sections outline the board and administration responses to the individual presentations by the staff groups, in order of presentation.

#### CUPE Local 3550 (Support Staff)

The board recognizes and appreciates the valuable and complex role our support staff has in supporting teaching and learning, either directly in the classroom or in administrative and operational support functions.

The Local raised the need for improved in-house financial reporting to avoid staff cuts and the boom/bust cycle of layoffs and hiring. The administration recognizes the impact on all staff of last year's need to address the projected deficit. Schools and decision units are required to report their projected surplus/deficit amounts on a bi-monthly basis throughout the school year. When the district projects a deficit, the superintendent should and will ask schools and decision units to reduce their spending so that the district can minimize or eliminate the deficit. If the deficit is not eliminated, funds must be placed in the following year's budget to eliminate the projected deficit. In the latter half of 2005-2006, schools and central decision units were able to reduce their spending and retain surpluses, which created a modest surplus for the district heading into 2006-2007. The boom/bust cycle should be minimized in the future, as the administration has set aside funds this year which are equivalent to 60% of projected school and central decision unit surpluses.

The board appreciates the actions taken by the national, regional and local offices of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) to lobby the federal government to exempt school districts from paying the Goods and Services Tax (G.S.T.) on all purchases. The board supports the efforts of CUPE and will continue to support the ASBA and the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) in their lobby effort at the local and federal levels.

The board and the administration recognize that the provincial government's desire to use public-private partnerships (P3's) to fund capital projects is a contentious issue for our unions. The district is aware of the issues with P3's that have been raised in other provinces; however, as the provincial government continues to urge school boards to consider alternative methods to procure capital funds to supply school space, Edmonton Public Schools must consider exploring alternative methods in order to address the needs of our students and parents.

The board understands that professional development is important to all support staff. The administration and the Local have agreed through recent negotiations to continue the work of the Joint Support Staff Development Committee. The Committee has undertaken a survey of all support staff requesting their input regarding the training they need to perform their responsibilities. The results of this survey, including input from principals and central services administrators, is helping to guide the work of the Committee as they develop qualification targets, identify mandatory and discretionary training requirements and make overall recommendations regarding development, delivery methods and the resources necessary to meet these needs.

The district has experienced considerable success with the two mentor positions that are presently in place for administrative assistants and custodial staff. The services these positions provide look similar in all school and central locations. While the administration acknowledges that consulting and mentoring support is needed and desirable for teacher assistants, the responsibilities and knowledge/skill requirements for teacher assistants vary greatly from position to position. The context and composition of resources needed for teacher assistants will not be clear until the Committee undertakes the development of qualification targets and training requirements. The administration is considering the suggestion put forward to coordinate staff development for support staff on non-instructional operational days, e.g., during Teachers Convention.

Over the past two years, the administration has implemented a leadership staff development program for principals and central services administrators. In 2005-2006, the focus was on supervision, coaching and evaluation. This year the district partnered with the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) to focus on *Leadership, Change and Building Healthy Relationships*. The administration is appreciative of the feedback from the staff groups through the District Return to Work Committee regarding plans for this series. Leadership staff have been reminded of the interconnectedness of district health, workplace health and individual health. Improvements in health in one area will influence improvements in health in the other two areas. Many suggestions have been received from the participants in the training sessions, and the senior administration is carefully considering this input to prepare a plan to move forward.

The board acknowledges and appreciates the recognition expressed by the Local for the role school trustees have in being present during negotiations to hear and understand issues of support staff. Trustees will continue to be present during collective bargaining sessions and participate in the grievance process through membership on Interpretations Committees. The administration has committed to provide the board with reports of all grievances and their resolve in order for all trustees to stay informed about current issues.

## Exempt Staff

The board recognizes the broad range of skills and expertise represented by the various disciplines that make up the exempt staff group and their contribution to the effective and efficient operation of the district. The board also appreciates the focus exempt staff place on the classroom and the commitment to aligning resources in support of teaching and learning.

The board and administration recognize that central services continues to function below the administrative cap set by the provincial government. The administration is currently examining the needs of central decision units and how these needs can be appropriately funded within the administrative cap, while continuing to meet the needs of schools.

The board acknowledges that exempt staff have appreciated the generic professional development opportunities provided to staff over the past two years. The administration also acknowledges that discipline specific staff development is critical to decision unit productivity.

## Edmonton Public Teachers, Local 37 of the ATA

The board appreciates and values the continued commitment by our teaching staff to enhance learning and improve student achievement.

This year's presentation by the Local highlighted several issues.

The Local referenced the work of the joint committee established under the collective agreement to review the implementation of the *Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making*. The board commends the collaborative approach taken by both parties to establish this committee and is very interested in the outcome of the discussions. The administration believes the work of this committee will have a positive influence on the implementation of the recently revised board policy on *Respectful Learning and Working Environments* and the organizational health initiative.

Concerns were raised by the Local regarding professional development, the use of AISI funding and a belief that the importance of and funding for professional development activities initiated at the school and individual levels were being minimized in light of the AISI funding. The administration believes there is a wide range of options open to teachers in pursuing professional development activities. These options include accessing inservices through Consulting Services, application for professional improvement leave and/or tuition support, participation in out-of-district conferences, accessing university courses to upgrade subject content knowledge and application for leader (LED) or principal (PED) education and development. AISI funding is a separate allocation to school districts and comes with expectations and criteria from Alberta Education. Regardless of AISI funding being provided to schools, consulting services allocations to support teacher professional development has continued to be provided to schools as part of their overall funding received from the district. The methods in which consulting services funds are distributed within a school are the responsibility of the principal in consultation with the staff. Principals are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that funds for professional development are equitably distributed based on school and teacher development need.

The Local shared their Class Size Census data with the board and administration. While the Local was appreciative of the progress taken by the district to meet the targets set by the Learning Commission, concern was expressed that there has been an increase this year in class sizes in several areas. The Local is also concerned that this may indicate an upward trend for the future, especially in light of the level of provincial funding. The board and administration recognize the importance of the Local undertaking this census each year and share the concern about the upward trend in some areas, particularly in Division I.

For the 2006-2007 school year, the district received \$26.2 million for the purposes of reducing class sizes. These resources were distributed as follows: \$23.4 million to Division I, \$1.7 million to Division III and \$1.1 million to Division IV. There are several factors which impacted schools, resulting in an increase in class size for Division I:

- Setting aside funds at the district level to eliminate the projected deficit from 2005-2006;
- Increase in teacher unit costs as a result of the contract settlement and increase in increment costs;
- Increase in enrolments in Division I and II across the district;
- Significant enrolment increase in Kindergarten;
- Programming of Division I students with special needs in an inclusive setting, compared to programming of Division II, III and IV students with special needs in district centers which have smaller class sizes;
- The scheduling and programming challenges that exist in schools with low enrolments (under 140 students) may have resulted in larger class sizes in some instances;
- Timing of funding announcements resulted in many elementary schools increasing staffing for teacher assistants while reducing staffing for teachers;
- Many elementary schools focused on correcting the ratio of staffing costs to costs for supplies, equipment and services.

For 2007-2008, the district will address many of the above factors through continuing to target its resources on the work in the classroom. The board and administration recognize the challenges faced by principals in continuing to meet provincial class size targets.

#### CUPE Local 784 (Maintenance Staff)

The board recognizes the significant contributions that maintenance staff make in creating and maintaining safe and healthy learning environments for students, staff and the community.

The board remains firmly committed to the concept of site-based decision making and views its challenge in the context of insufficient funding for plant operations and maintenance rather than how the money is distributed. The allocation of Plant Operations and Maintenance (PO&M) budgets for maintenance services allows those closest to where the services are needed and performed to determine how to allocate those resources to meet the needs of the schools and students. Principals are reminded that, in determining the allocation of PO&M resources within their schools, it is prudent to solicit input and feedback from the

experts in this area, namely the staff in Facilities Services and the custodial staff in the schools. The issue of centralization vs. decentralization is not under consideration at this time.

As noted above, maintenance staff are recognized for their skill and expertise and the district encourages schools to access this expertise through the use of maintenance service agreements. Staff in Facilities Services and Maintenance Services have been reviewing the use of these agreements with representatives from schools. There is a growing awareness by all parties of the need to address district due diligence related to required maintenance inspections mandated by law and district policies.

The board and administration appreciate the proposal put forward by the Local to visit the maintenance shops. Maintenance Services is planning an open house in the future and trustees, senior administration and principals will be invited. This invitation will be forwarded to principals through the Facilities Services Principal Advisory Committee and during the next Central Showcase Resource Fair.

The board and administration share the Local's concern regarding attraction and retention of skilled trades personnel in a strong Alberta economy and an unemployment rate at an all-time low. The board and senior administration are committed to assisting Facilities Maintenance find and train future trades and semi-skilled staff. The trustees recently approved and funded an initiative to increase the number of apprentice positions, which should enable the decision unit to recruit new apprentice staff on a regular basis. There have been seven new apprentice positions filled this year. Another component of the approved initiative is the use of Registered Apprentice Program (RAP) students in Maintenance Services. These students will begin working with maintenance staff next fall and it is hoped that some of these students may consider future employment with the district.

The board and administration share the Local's concerns regarding the violations of Clause 19 of the Maintenance Collective Agreement. Principals will be reminded of their contractual obligations under Clause 19 at an upcoming Senior Educational Leadership Team (SELT) meeting.

#### CUPE Local 474 (Custodial Staff)

The members of Local 474 continue to ensure that our schools provide safe, clean and appropriate learning environments for our students, families and communities. The board acknowledges and values this important contribution to the fabric of the district.

The board and administration acknowledge the issue raised by the Local that sufficient staffing levels are required to achieve appropriate cleanliness standards in our facilities. Both parties agreed through the last round of negotiations to move to a standard of cleaning 2500 to 3000 square feet per hour per custodial FTE. The administration will forward information in the near future to each school and central decision unit regarding the square feet cleaned per hour per custodial FTE in their facility.

The board is supportive of the general direction toward a green cleaning program, and appreciates the joint work by several committees and working groups to examine custodial

chemical purchasing and practices. A final report that includes an overview of current issues, rationale, recommendations and implementation strategies for standardizing custodial chemical use and management practices throughout the district is presently under consideration. Until a district direction is finalized, schools are encouraged to move toward green cleaning practices.

The board understands the issues raised by the Local concerning community use of schools. District representatives to the current review of the *Joint Use Agreement* are examining these concerns. Existing and potential models for shared use of schools and the associated implications and impact for custodial staff will be considered during these deliberations.

The board and administration appreciate the Local's concerns regarding the cost of utilities and the recommendations regarding the energy management plan. Facilities Services will develop an Energy Conservation Course to be delivered to custodial staff in the 2007-2008 school year. This course would be provided at no cost to the schools, which would only need to provide release time at their cost for custodians to attend this course. Facilities Services is currently in the initial stages of developing an Energy Management Plan for district schools and district owned and operated buildings. Any savings in utility costs as a result of energy management initiatives would benefit the PO&M budget and improve the district's ability to deal with rising energy costs.

The board and administration are supportive of ongoing professional development for all custodial staff. Both parties through the last round of negotiations agreed to continue the Joint Custodial Staff Development Committee. The feasibility of establishing a custodial training centre should be referred to the Committee for discussion and possible recommendation.

The administration acknowledges the recommendation from the Local regarding the establishment of a joint hiring committee. Personnel Recruitment and Staffing provides assistance to principals and administrators regarding the competition process through a resource document entitled, "Staffing Custodial, Maintenance and Support Positions". The process and guidelines outlined in the document ensure that the best possible candidate is hired, all contractual recommendations are met, all applicants are treated fairly and equitably, and that the competition is concluded in a timely manner. Principals and administrators consider the technical expertise required for the vacant custodial position and may request a Custodial Consultant or a Head Custodian to sit on their interview panel. Principals and administrators are reminded to use this resource document and solicit advice and assistance from staff in Personnel Recruitment and Staffing in staffing their positions. The Local is encouraged to refer individuals, interested in custodial work with Edmonton Public Schools, to Personnel Recruitment and Staffing.

The board and administration acknowledge that new equipment is required in a number of areas in order to replace outdated equipment, improve cleanliness and ensure the most effective use of custodial staff. The replacement of custodial equipment in the schools is the responsibility of the schools. Facilities Services provides a custodial mentoring service to schools and custodians as to the most appropriate equipment to use and would advise if replacement is warranted.

GRH/dmf