

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 14, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Staff Group Budget Presentation

ORIGINATOR: B. Tams, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Meredith Colgan, Will Deys, David Fraser, Karen Keats Whelan, Mark Liguori, Leah Milton, Peg Mitchell, Ellen Ogilvy, Jamie Pallet, Eugene Plawiuk, Pat Sadoway, Bonnie Zack

INFORMATION

This report is provided in response to the budget presentations made to the Board of Trustees on February 24, 2009 by CUPE Local 3550 representing support staff, and the Exempt Staff Group, and on March 10, 2009 by CUPE Local 474 representing custodial staff and Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 representing teachers. CUPE Local 784 representing maintenance staff declined to make a presentation to the Board this year. All Decision Unit Administrators and Principals will be provided with copies of this report and the written submissions provided by the staff groups.

As in previous years, there were some common themes in the presentations regarding specific issues. Each staff group also identified matters that were of particular concern for their Local.

The first of the common themes relates to the implications of the economic downturn, particularly the impact on our grants from the Province. Although funding for teachers' salaries is guaranteed, there is no such guarantee for other budget areas and this is a concern. The staff groups also raise questions and make suggestions about the use of savings from the elimination of Alberta Health Care premiums. The Administration shares the concern regarding funding, and is hopeful that the Government will provide the District with the level of funding required to maintain the current level of service to students, staff, parents and the community. The Administration will address these concerns through the budget process for 2009-2010.

A second commonality in the briefs is the desire of district support for ongoing professional development for all employees. The staff groups point out that new staff members have a steep learning curve if they are to succeed in their occupations with Edmonton Public Schools. Seasoned staff members also need opportunities to stay current with knowledge and practice in their fields. Such opportunities are seen as key to engagement and retention of all staff. The District concurs and is working actively in the area of staff development to ensure

that appropriate learning opportunities are available for all employees through a comprehensive professional learning framework.

Staff groups continue to be concerned about succession planning, and attraction and retention of employees to replace those who will be leaving due to retirements. Although the District has experienced an increase in applicants for positions, the presenters recommend planning wisely for future recruitment and retention of staff so as to be prepared when the economy improves. The Administration concurs. The appointment of a workforce planner is part of our strategic plan to address these issues. We also note that a number of initiatives undertaken in the past year by Personnel, including new recruitment strategies and an extensive advertising campaign, have led to more applications to work with the District.

Finally, the District and the staff groups share a focus on the need to promote good health and well-being. The District has several initiatives in this area and appreciates the collaborative efforts of the Locals to make these initiatives successful.

The District respects the Locals' position regarding the questions raised and values the suggestions and solutions offered in the briefs. Suggestions included strategies to invest in staff well-being, initiatives for providing professional development, and examination of recentralizing of some funds. The latter proposal would provide equitable or standardized access to the custodial, maintenance, supply and consulting services areas. The District is reviewing options to address these matters.

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

CUPE Local 3550 (Support Staff)

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

The District appreciates the Local's concern regarding the impact of the current economic situation on provincial funding to the District. As requested in the brief, the Board continues to lobby the Government for adequate and stable funding. This will enable the Board to provide fair compensation to support staff members, protect them from changes in their employment status, and continue to attract and retain top-quality employees.

The Local outlined the importance of updating the Support Staff Classification Manual. The current job evaluation system for support staff positions was developed and implemented in 1992 and updated in 1998. Due to changes in position responsibilities as the result of evolution of technology, changing administrative processes, inclusion of more children with complex special needs in classrooms and so on, the current system is less able to reflect current and evolving business requirements. The District and the Local are collaborating to develop a point-factor job evaluation plan and corresponding supports for support staff positions within the District. This job evaluation plan will be customized to address the

District's ongoing needs, culture and values. The Administration looks forward to the Local's participation in the design of the new system and in the evaluation of benchmark positions. The District has proposed that training regarding classification and the new job evaluation system be provided jointly by the District and the Local. The committee met in December, 2008 to identify concerns with the current system. There are several meetings planned for the remainder of the school year. The work of this committee will continue into the next school year. The District values the opinions, input and contributions of CUPE 3550 Local in this project.

The Board appreciates the Local's recognition that the District is committed to working to improve our training and development of all staff members. Representatives of the Local and Administration have been engaged in the development of competencies and qualifications for support staff positions. The qualifications and competencies will provide the basis for the design and implementation of a staff development framework for support staff. These competencies will also dovetail with work done in the classification area.

Different types of training for support staff are offered by the District. For example, professional development for support staff with office duties focuses on district software applications specific to their roles and responsibilities. The office training courses, which are collaboratively designed and delivered by central decision units, are revised on an ongoing basis in response to the needs of the staff and district sites. A one-day preparation session for new supply support staff has been initiated this year.

The Administration recognizes that there is a need for development of skills training for educational assistants, and is working toward this goal. Currently access to Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training is provided through the collaboration of Staff Development and Consulting Services. Discussions are ongoing regarding the logistics and structure of a general professional development day for support staff.

The Board appreciates the Local's acknowledgement of the addition of two new educational assistant mentors who join the administrative assistant mentors in providing one-on-one coaching for support staff.

Work-life balance and staff wellness are issues that both the Board and the Local take very seriously. In recognition of concerns about workload and demands in the District, an additional one hundred full-time equivalent support staff positions have been created in the past year. The District also has several services available to all employees to assist in addressing wellness issues. For example, advisors from Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan are available at no cost to individuals and groups to assist in developing wellness plans. Support is also provided through the Employee and Family Assistance Program, and through Health Recovery Services. As well, Occupational Health and Safety consultants can assist staff with safety or ergonomic concerns, and we are currently working on a web-site for District Employee Health Services. The services provided by the support staff mentors are another way in which the District is working to assist support staff with their assignments. We are encouraged to note that absences for support staff employees have decreased for the past three years. The District agrees that education plays a big part in achieving work-life balance and that it is a joint responsibility. The District thanks the Local for its collaborative work in this regard.

CUPE 3550 identifies the need to look at present and future human resource requirements needed to serve students, parents and staff. As part of the District's strategic plan, a workforce planner position has been created. The person in this position will give us additional capacity to provide research and objective data that can be used to address these issues. The District agrees that it is important to examine on a continuous basis the best way to do our work, the use of new technologies and processes, while being mindful of the challenges that change can cause.

Funding for school construction recently has taken the form of Public Private Partnerships. Although the Board recognizes the Local's concern about this type of funding, these are decisions that have been made by the Provincial Government.

The Board acknowledges and appreciates the Local's recognition of the important role that Trustees play in the collective bargaining process.

Exempt Staff

The Board acknowledges the varied and valuable service provided by the exempt staff. Both administrative and operational staff, and the staff from the health-related disciplines support the education of students in the classroom. The work of the first group of exempt staff members results in our finances being handled appropriately, our technology kept running smoothly, our buildings built and maintained, our staff hired, our message communicated, to identify just a few of the important functions for which exempt staff are responsible. The second group of exempt staff members enables the District to provide more comprehensive service to our students who have multiple challenges so that the children can be successful in school. These professionals bring a wide range of specialized, professional skills to support their teaching colleagues, and to provide service to students in classrooms.

The Board and the Administration agree with the exempt staff group that, although we currently have some respite in the demand for talented employees, it is likely that this will be short-lived. The retirements which will occur within the next few years will result in a significant loss of experience and knowledge. We must use this time to continue with our strategic plan for becoming an employer of choice. As indicated previously, the District has created a workforce planner position which will play a key role in developing a strategic succession plan for the District. The Administration will also be initiating an employee engagement survey of all staff in the fall of 2009. Information gathered from this survey will help shape the initiatives needed to be an employer of choice.

The Board acknowledges that some exempt staff currently on 10-month contracts would prefer to work 12 months. This group of professionals typically works with students, doing assessments, providing suggestions for programming, meeting with teachers and parents, and in some cases, providing direct service to students. The District's practice has been to have these staff members work during the period of time when students are in school. While there is merit to both 10-month and 12-month assignments, the District needs to balance the needs of students and financial realities with the desire to attract and retain qualified staff. The Administration continues to examine this complex issue.

Access to ongoing professional development continues to be a concern for exempt staff. The Administration concurs that professional development is an important component of the District's efforts to attract, engage and retain staff. Similarly, the Administration is cognizant of the importance of work-life balance in ensuring staff wellness.

CUPE Local 474 (Custodial Staff)

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

The Local has raised ongoing concerns about the Public Private Partnerships (P3s). The Board acknowledges that there will be issues to resolve as we go forward with this new method of building schools, and appreciates the Local's concern.

Regarding staff levels, the Local states that a minimum of 2.5 custodial staff are required for each site under 50,000 square feet, and between three to four staff for sites up to 75,000 square feet. Meeting such a goal would require considerable resources. The District understands the Local's concern regarding the amount of work staff are required to do, particularly in some schools. We are meeting the custodial guideline of cleaning 2500 to 3000 square feet per hour, but recognize that the addition of the ASAP schools will bring new challenges. The District looks forward to working with the Local to address these issues. We are pleased to report that the District has added 39 new custodial staff members to our permanent complement, including nine new permanent relief custodians. As well, an additional 85 temporary custodial staff have been hired since September 2008.

The Local continues to advocate for a central custodial department and reorganization of central custodial services. It notes that there are several positions in different departments which deal with custodial training and custodial consulting issues. The Local suggests that locating services under one custodial department would lead to higher quality standards, a more effective service model and consistency throughout the District. The Local further recommends that the District establish a custodial training centre, and provide standardized purchase of custodial equipment for all sites. The Administration notes the purchasing department negotiates the best possible prices for equipment, and that schools and decision units are required to make any major purchase through that department.

The District is actively involved in examining custodial training, and a joint committee will be considering a proposed reorganization of the current training program with a view to constructing various training paths for custodial staff. Some areas which have been identified for discussion include mentorship/coaching training, use of technology for custodians, and leadership development for those in custodial leadership positions.

The Local is concerned about specialized types of custodial work including window cleaning, high dusting, and flood and fire clean-up. The Administration agrees that there are certain types of custodial work which are highly specialized; for example, carpet care requires specific training and skill. To this end, the District has a dedicated carpet cleaning service. The Board and the Administration respect the Local's perspective in these matters, and continues to seek appropriate solutions to these complex issues.

The Local has voiced concern about attraction of custodial staff. The Administration is pleased to report that the “Work with Me” campaign has been very successful. We continue to participate in job fairs at colleges, Northlands, Metro Continuing Education, and Employment and Immigration Centres. We have had a significant increase in the number of applications received for custodial work. Notwithstanding this success, we continue to have difficulty attracting custodial applicants who hold a 4th or 5th Class Power Engineering Certificate.

The Administration is aware of the issues raised by the Local regarding community use of schools. The District acknowledges that additional cleaning is required when schools are used after hours. Schools are compensated for this use through direct rental revenue or Community Use Allocation funding. School principals are responsible for community use of their schools and for ensuring that appropriate staffing is in place to meet the custodial needs in the schools. Tenants leasing district facilities must follow the conditions negotiated by the district for cleanliness, maintenance and security. The Administration is available to assist schools with issues that may arise.

The District appreciates the interest that the Local has in energy management and recognizes that custodial staff play an important role in this area. The District Energy and Environmental Management unit is committed to reducing overall utility consumption and costs. Savings which result are used for district operations.

The Custodial Local has been a leader in encouraging the use of greener cleaning products and better environmental practices. The Board appreciates these efforts which are in support of the District priority concerning healthy and innovative workplaces.

Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 of the ATA

The Board values the strong relationship between the Local and the District. The collaborative manner in which the Board and the Local have approached several initiatives has yielded gratifying results. It has indeed ‘redefined the box’ to which the president of the Local referred.

In its presentation, Local 37 focused on the ways that the District could tangibly demonstrate respect and recognition for its employees. As an example, it was suggested that the District should reimburse staff for the money that was previously allocated to cover Alberta Health Care premiums. The Local strongly indicated that this was part of a negotiated collective agreement, and as such, staff are entitled to receive the equivalent money in compensation. As indicated previously, the District will respond to this issue once the level of government funding for 2009-2010 is confirmed.

Concerns were raised by the Local regarding the availability and accessibility of funds for professional growth. It is the position of the Local that teachers should have more control over these funds, and should make their own choices about personal professional development. A joint committee is reviewing issues regarding the availability and use of funds for professional development activities related to individual professional growth plans. The committee anticipates making recommendations as the result of its work by the end of 2009.

The Local and the District have worked together to bring to fruition the New Teacher Induction Program. This year 393 teachers on probationary contracts took part in this program. Diverse learning opportunities have been offered including on-site coaching and curriculum planning, school visits, e-mail and phone support, websites, share sites and monthly newsletters. Teachers on temporary contracts in their first three years of service in the district can also access support. Many departments are involved in assisting our new teachers, including Teacher and Learning Support Services, English Language Support Service Centre, Aboriginal Education, and the Institute for Innovation in Second Language Education. Staff in district schools also play a major role in this work. The Board appreciates the work that the Local and district staff have undertaken and looks forward to continuing to refine and enhance this program in support of our newest teachers.

The Local continues to question whether it is always beneficial to decentralize all funds to decision units when education grants are less than adequate; for example, under the cost recovery model, schools must cover costs for short-term supply teachers, Consulting Services and Maintenance Services. Therefore, it is argued that access to these services depends on the priorities of the school. The result can be that there are inequities among sites in the type and amount of service accessed. The Administration notes that funds allocated to these areas will be the same regardless of whether they are held centrally or in the schools and acknowledges that this is a complex issue.

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

ES/dmf