

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 27, 2010

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Staff Group Presentations re: 2010-2011 Budget

ORIGINATOR: B. Tams, Assistant Superintendent

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INFORMATION

This report is provided in response to the budget presentations made to the Board of Trustees on February 23, 2010 by Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 representing teachers, and on March 10, 2010 by the Exempt Staff Group, CUPE Local 474 representing custodial staff, CUPE Local 3550 representing support staff, and CUPE Local 784 representing maintenance staff. 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 are common themes in the presentations regarding specific issues. Each staff group also identifies matters of particular concern for their individual Local.

The first of the common themes again relates to implications of the economic downturn, particularly the impact on our grants from the Province. Although funding for teachers' salaries is guaranteed, there are no guarantees for other budget areas. This is an on-going concern. The Administration shares the concern regarding funding, and is hopeful the Government will provide the District with the funding level required to maintain current service to students, staff, parents and the community. The Administration will address these concerns through the budget process for 2010-2011 and through continued dialogue with Alberta Education. The Board will continue to press the issue of sustainable funding with the elected officials of the provincial government.

The second common theme relates to the need to review the application of the district's site-based decision making model, which has been in place for over thirty years. This desire to review the model also resonated throughout the recent review of the co-ordination and integration of central services. The Administration has committed to establishing a process to discuss the definition of core services, related to plant operations and maintenance and technology. There will also be an examination of the implications for the cost recovery model of offering such core services. Although the majority of participants in the review acknowledged that site-based decision making was an innovative and vital part of our District's success, the model needs to be examined and re-defined based on current and

future challenges. The Administration has further committed that, as part of this discussion, the issue of “have and have-not” schools will also be examined, as well as the application of cost recovery for core essential and optional value-added services. The Administration acknowledges that, while there is a strong common desire to have these discussions, there are a variety of perspectives and emotions related to these issues. These discussions will need to be completed by January 31, 2011, as any implications for basis of allocation will need to be finalized prior to budget planning for the 2011-2012 school year.

Again this year, a third commonality in the briefs is the desire of district support for on-going professional development for all employees. New staff members continue to experience a steep learning curve if they are to succeed in their occupations with Edmonton Public Schools. Seasoned staff members also benefit from 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 continues to work actively in the area of staff development to provide a comprehensive professional learning framework, comprised of appropriate learning opportunities for all employees.

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

The District respects the Locals’ position regarding questions raised and values the discussion, suggestions and solutions offered in the briefs. Suggestions include strategies to invest in well-being of staff and initiatives for providing enhanced professional development. The District will continue to review options to address these matters.

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

Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 of the ATA

The Board values the trusting relationship between the Local and the District to which the president of the Local referred. The collaborative manner in which the Board and the Local have approached a number of recent initiatives is yielding gratifying results.

In its presentation, Local 37 focused on ways the District could tangibly demonstrate respect and recognition for its employees. The Local reiterates its belief in the development of maximum class size standards for each division, offering a suggestion of ideal numbers. In keeping with respectful learning and working environments policy, it was also suggested that no new initiatives be undertaken without bringing closure to the old. While it was acknowledged that good work has been accomplished through the joint committee on site-based decision-making, it was also noted that more needs to be done if all staff are to feel trusted and able to provide meaningful input into decisions affecting their work. As well, it was noted that all schools need adequate budget allocations to enable them to provide substitute services rather than resorting to internal coverage. Attention to the perception of how staff is respected and recognized is critical to job satisfaction. The Board and

Administration acknowledge these concerns and will take them into consideration as planning for the 2010-2011 school year continues.

Concern was again specifically raised by the Local regarding availability and accessibility of funding for professional growth. It continues to be the position of the Local that teachers should have more control over these funds, and should make their own choices about personal professional development. While supportive of the work of the joint committee on professional development, the Local cites lack of consistency in what is allowed from school to school as an on-going concern. In their view, a fair distribution of professional development resources would also enhance the sense of employees being valued and contribute to the District being a respectful workplace. The Board and Administration encourage decision units to be mindful of the ATA's perspective.

The Local and the District have continued to work together, supporting and nurturing new teachers, through the New Teacher Induction Program. Significant work has been accomplished in this area. The Board appreciates the work the Local and district staff have undertaken and shares the hope the work of this committee will continue to refine and enhance this program in support of our newest teachers.

The Local continues to question the inequity among schools and in learning opportunities for students, noting that technology resource costs are a huge drain on every location. However, whether or not a school has a strong parent group raising extra funds through casinos or other fund-raising initiatives, it is important to provide proper technology and training as well as release time for teachers to take this training. The Local urges the Board to work to influence the Government for greater funding in this area. The Board assures the Local that dialogue with Alberta Education regarding general as well as targeted funding is on-going. The issue of inequities among schools and in learning opportunities for students will be a topic included in the discussion of core services mentioned previously.

Finally, the Local underlines the emotional impact on staff during the process of considering school closure. While commending the District for its efforts to provide support to staff as the process unfolds, the anxiety and stress, doubts and concerns, generated by Sector reviews is difficult to avoid. The Board and Administration acknowledges this concern.

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

Exempt Staff

The Board acknowledges the varied and valuable service provided by the exempt staff; it concurs that it is through this group's diversity that intricate, unique and essential service needs of the District can be fully achieved.

The Exempt staff group expresses a specific concern regarding access to professional development opportunities. It is their hope that professional development funds continue to be supported and distributed equitably among staff groups and Decision Units. The Administration concurs that professional development is an important component of the District's efforts to attract, engage and retain staff.

Committed to providing the highest quality of service in their related disciplines, the Exempt staff group identified a need to carefully consider workload commitments, ensuring workloads are realistic and manageable. They again cite, as a possible solution, the creation of an option where school-based staff can extend their work year beyond the current 10 months. The Board continues to acknowledge 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. District practice has been to have these staff members work during the period of time when students are in school. While recognizing merit to both 10-month and 12-month assignments, the District reiterates its responsibility to balance needs of students and financial realities with a desire to attract and retain qualified staff. The Administration continues to seek alternatives to this complex issue.

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.

In its presentation, the Local expresses their belief in the value of revisiting outstanding issues from the last decade. They reiterate their view that short term solutions to shortfalls in funding have often resulted in a reduction of custodial staff and that we are still not at the required staffing levels to properly clean and maintain our schools. The Local also cites what it perceives to be a lack of adequate custodial support services, relying on temporary custodians to make up for the lack of permanent spares and relief custodians. The District understands the Local's concern regarding the amount of work staff are required to do, particularly in some schools. We are, however, meeting the custodial guideline of cleaning 2500 to 3000 square feet per hour in 95% of our schools and are continuing to work with the principals of the remaining 5% of schools. The District looks forward to working with the Local to address these issues. We are pleased to report the District has added 33 new custodial staff members to our permanent complement. As well, an additional 50 temporary custodial staff have been hired since September 2009.

The Administration is aware of issues raised by the Local regarding implication of lack of custodial staffing resulting in denial of public access through 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 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 Local continues to advocate for a central custodial department and reorganization of central custodial services. 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 issue of reorganization of central custodial services

was also raised in the recent review of the co-ordination and integration of central services. The Administration has committed to the consolidation of all central custodial support services within Facilities Services by August 31, 2010. This will ensure that responsibility for all central plant operations and maintenance functions is grouped together in one department. It should be noted that this does not include direct custodial services provided through Head Custodians in schools and central units. Head Custodians will continue to report through to their principal or central manager.

The Local further recommends the District 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.

On-going training is again identified by the Local as key to staff retention and satisfaction. Acknowledging the success of the District's Custodial Staff Development Day, the Local expressed its view that training programs need to be expanded based on hands-on training as well as classroom and computer-based training. The District is actively involved in examining custodial training. A joint committee monitors the current training program and considers various training paths including mentorship/coaching training, use of technology for custodians, and leadership development for those in custodial leadership positions. As well, there exist several positions within central services which deal with custodial training and custodial consulting issues.

Citing again the need to Green our Schools, replacing cleaning chemicals with Green products, the Local identifies as problematic the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards for Lillian Osborne High School and the new Alberta Government P3 schools. It points out that LEED is a California-based American standard not necessarily appropriate for our climate and circumstance and that local custodial input is needed when we are designing or renovating our schools. The Board acknowledges there will be issues to resolve as we move forward with this new method of building schools, and appreciates the Local's concern. The Board also recognizes that the Custodial Local has been a leader in encouraging the use of greener cleaning products and application of better environmental practices, and appreciates these efforts in support of the District priority concerning healthy and innovative workplaces.

The Local again expresses its view that carpet cleaning continues to be an issue outstanding in the District. They believe that each school should be required to have carpets cleaned annually by the District truck-mounted carpet cleaning units, which this would occur if we had a custodial department coordinating cleaning in a centralized manner and, further, that expanding this cleaning service out of district would help recover the costs of such a cost-recovery operation. Fire and flood cleaning is also identified as an area of concern, having experienced numerous fires and floods over the past few years. The Administration agrees there are certain types of custodial work which are highly specialized, requiring specific training and skill. The Board and the Administration respect the Local's perspective in these matters, and continues to seek appropriate solutions to complex issues.

Computer technology, specifically access to messaging and, in some cases, computer hardware is again identified as a continuing issue for custodial staff. As well, a lack of comprehensive computer training for custodial staff is expressed. The Board and

Administration acknowledge this concern and encourage schools and decision units to consider this situation in their planning.

The Local continues to cite boiler safety as a major concern in our schools. They reiterate the requirement, agreed to by Collective Agreement, that the 5th Class Power Engineering course be mandatory. The Board agrees that boiler operations are sophisticated and sometime problematic. Notwithstanding our continued attention to this matter and the progress achieved in support of custodial staff attaining certification, we continue to experience difficulty attracting custodial applicants already holding the 4th or 5th Class Power Engineering Certificate.

The District appreciates the interest that the Local has in energy management and recognizes that custodial staff play an important role in this area.

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.

Specific to the Local's request for sustained professional development funding is the identification of continued financial support for in-house professional development opportunities. 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 developed competencies and qualifications for support staff positions, providing the basis for design and implementation of a staff development framework. These competencies also dovetail with work done in the classification area. Different types of training for support staff continue to be offered by the District including: professional development for support staff with office duties focusing on district software applications specific to roles and responsibilities; office training courses, collaboratively designed and delivered by central decision units, and revised on an ongoing basis in response to needs of staff and district sites; one-day preparation sessions for new supply support staff. A Best Practices series initiated for support staff with office duties is now using a guided networking format. The Administration recognizes a need for further development of skills training for educational assistants. Continuing to work toward this goal, a district PD day for educational assistants is scheduled in May. Access to Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training continues to be provided through collaboration by Staff Development and Consulting Services. Discussions are ongoing regarding the logistics and structure of a general professional development day for all support staff.

Work-life balance and staff wellness are issues both the Board and the Local take very seriously. The Local requested the Board provide additional resources to assist its membership in becoming more familiar with worker wellness and work-life balance. 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 past collaborative work in this regard.

The Board appreciates the Local's acknowledgement of the administrative assistant and educational assistant mentors' availability upon request at no cost to schools. The Local thanked the Board for recognizing the importance of having the support staff mentor positions and requests an increase of one administrative assistant mentor position in the upcoming year. Changes to staffing levels in all areas will be contingent upon funding allocations and individual department priorities and upon demand.

The Local has suggested the development of a support staff staffing ratio formula to assist in forecasting the District's annual needs and in addressing work-load issues. It contends that such a formula might assist principals, and could be reviewed and up-dated as procedures, technologies and dynamics change. The Local further suggests a good place to begin might be by creating a staffing formula for integrated special needs classrooms in the six new schools opening this fall. Decisions regarding the staffing of new schools rest with the principal.

CUPE 3550 continues to question what works well under the site-based decision-making model. Its current contention is that it is a mystery as to why data entry for bill payment has to be done at the school level. The Local believes this work would be effectively and efficiently completed by its members in Central Services who are specialists in such data entry in an expanded accounts payable department. They request the Administration review this practice. The District agrees that it is important to examine on a continuing basis the best way to do our work, the use of new technologies and processes.

With funding for current new school construction delivered in the form of Public Private Partnerships, the Local looks forward to continued financial reporting to Trustees, providing information comparing operating and maintenance costs of the new P3 schools to similar District sites. While the Board recognizes the Local's concern regarding this type of funding for new construction, these are decisions that have been made by the Provincial Government.

The Local acknowledges the recent update to Board Policy regarding use of volunteers and review of the Volunteer Handbook document. Further, it seeks assurance from the Board and Administration that CUPE 3550 members will experience no reduction in positions or time worked due to the addition of volunteers working with students during the regular school day. It is the belief of the Board and Administration that adherence to Board Policy and application of principles outlined in the Volunteer Handbook document will alleviate these concerns.

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

CUPE 784 (Maintenance Staff)

The Board relies on the members of Local 784 Maintenance Workers for the maintenance of buildings in our inventory. We very much appreciate this important contribution to the

success of the District and particularly wish to recognize the Local for taking the opportunity, after an absence of several years, to again make a budget presentation on behalf of its membership. Notwithstanding the Local's contention that there was no previous follow-up or challenge to concerns brought forward and that the expertise of its members has not been realized to its full potential, the Board wishes to reiterate that a response to staff group presentations has been provided each year and that discussion and suggestions contained in briefs has been given careful consideration over the years.

The Local believes that principals should not be in charge of the maintenance of schools as they have no certification or knowledge of what it takes to be a building manager. Further, they ask the Board to investigate bringing back 100% of the dollars allocated for maintenance of schools into a centrally managed budget and decision unit, allowing principals to excel in the educational leadership for which they are noted. The Board acknowledges this concern.

The Local also expresses dissatisfaction with the Facilities Maintenance Agreement (FMA) and identifies as an ongoing issue, the three levels of service into which schools can opt. Few schools choose the mandatory level in which basic maintenance items are inspected and repaired. More schools opt for level 1 which includes the basic service of the mandatory level and also adds inspection of certain mechanical, electrical and carpentry items. Schools are still required to dedicate additional maintenance dollars and submit work orders to have repairs completed. Level 2 participation in FMA releases the entire school maintenance budget to the maintenance department, putting the school in the hands of Facilities for all their maintenance needs. While major work is typically spread over the life of the contract, it is the belief of the Local that schools drop back to level 1 or the mandatory level of FMA once they perceive the building has been upgraded to a reasonable degree. CUPE 784 believes this is not fair and continues to recommend the recentralization of maintenance dollars administered by professionals who have not only been trained and educated in these fields but have the years of experience to go with the trade ticket they hold. The Local questions that if the Board must relinquish the maintenance budgets of the P3 schools, should they not give the same consideration in the case of other schools by similarly returning their maintenance allocations to Facilities Services? The Board and Administration respect the views of the Local and continue to monitor this situation and the effectiveness of the Facilities Maintenance Agreement program.

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