

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 10, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Petition Regarding Provision of Education to Students with Special Education Needs

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Danette Andersen, Deborah Brandell, Gloria Chalmers, David Fraser, Heather Raymond, Bonnie Zack

RECOMMENDATION

That the current status and plan for district work relative to the Special Needs Review, as contained in this report, be approved as the Board's response to the request for a Special Needs Task Force.

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**Background:** At the board meeting of January 13, 2009, a petition regarding the provision of education to students with special needs was presented to the Board. The petition advanced the position that "current policies and practices do not serve all exceptional students for the purpose of receiving an education appropriate to their abilities and needs." It proposed the establishment of a task force as a solution for addressing this concern.

**Context:** The District currently serves over 9,000 students with special needs. On the 2006 and 2008 district parent survey, 91 per cent of parents of students with special needs indicated satisfaction with the overall quality of education that their child received in school and a majority responded positively on the range of other programming related questions (Appendix I). Receiving and reviewing satisfaction information from parents is essential, enabling us to get a sense of how well we are meeting the needs of those we serve. The petition itself is another source of feedback from parents and the community. As well, not unlike our experience in other areas, the needs and the demographics of students with special needs are changing. Thus, it is clear that changes are needed. In response, the District is in the process of making changes to programming in the Literacy and Strategies programs; has expanded early learning support through Kindergarten Inclusive Developmental Services (K.I.D.S.) North and South; is implementing and refining collaborative services; has introduced an inclusion pilot and is investigating the development of training in collaboration with partners for staff in areas of expanding need (e.g., Autism). The Deaf and Hard of Hearing program is implementing recommendations from the recently completed review. As well, at this time, early education is being reviewed. Proposed recommendations and an implementation plan will be vetted with staff, parents and other stakeholders this spring.

Concurrently, in preparing the jurisdictional response to Phase 1 of the province's *Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta* initiative, the District has, in its submission, recommended shifts in philosophy and practice based on research and experience. These are shifts that the District is committed to pursuing. Some examples include:

- Expanding offerings in early learning and links with other providers to prevent problems, remediate those identified and improve introduction to schooling
- Developing in-house training to meet the needs of specific special education programming
- Focusing on assessment for programming rather than funding
- Requiring a focus on the functional and educational needs of students
- Investigating more vigorously adaptive technology
- Advocating for adequate and continuous funding from the early years through Grade 12
- Implementing wrap-around service pilots
- Developing mechanisms for meaningfully reporting on the growth of students with special needs

As stated in the jurisdictional response to Phase 1, the District wants "to achieve a system (for all students) that respects the knowledge of teachers but also embraces and utilizes the knowledge and expertise of parents and other support people in a child's life. We need a flexible system in which there is a desire to work with everyone on a child's team. Supporting the whole child can only benefit success in the classroom."

**Next Steps:** The District acknowledges a need to continue to review its programming and services to students with special needs but, at this time, does not recommend that a task force be struck. As work has begun in articulating a district direction through the district's response to Phase 1 of the provincial initiative and will continue to evolve in the development of a jurisdictional response to Phase 2, the plan below is recommended. The plan includes seeking input from staff, parents and other stakeholders.

<b>Components</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Identify areas where change is needed	February 2009
Specify components of a process for implementing change	February 2009
Develop draft jurisdictional report in response to Phase 2	March 2009
Seek input on draft report from district staff, parents and other stakeholders — including those who signed the petition	March 2009
Revise jurisdictional report based on input received	March 2009
Take jurisdictional report on Phase 2 input to board for approval for forwarding to the province	March 2009
Develop a report for board regarding the implications of the jurisdictional report for district policy and regulation, including recommending a process for completing this work, which would include providing a yearly report to board on the progress with the work.	May 2009

The aforementioned plan aligns the work of the District with the provincial initiative while enabling changes at the District level on an ongoing basis rather than awaiting the results of the provincial initiative.

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APPENDIX I – District Satisfaction Survey Results 2006 and 2008 by Eligibility Special Needs (Parents)

**District Satisfaction Survey Results 2006-2008 by Eligibility Special Needs (Parents)**

Survey Question	Percentage of Respondents Satisfied or Very Satisfied	
	2006	2008
How satisfied are you with the overall quality of education that your child is receiving at school?	91%	91%
How satisfied are you with the emphasis placed on English Language Arts at your child's school?	92%	94%
How satisfied are you with the emphasis placed on Mathematics at your child's school?	91%	93%
How satisfied are you with the emphasis placed on Science at your child's school?	91%	95%
How satisfied are you with the emphasis placed on Social Studies at your child's school?	94%	94%
How satisfied are you with the programs/courses available in your child's school?	89%	88%
How satisfied are you that you receive enough information about what your child is expected to learn?	83%	82%
How satisfied are you with the non-teaching staff at your child's school?	93%	95%
How satisfied are you that your child receives the help needed to succeed in school?	87%	84%
How satisfied are you that your child's work is challenging?	83%	86%
How satisfied are you with your child's teachers?	93%	91%
How satisfied are you with the yellow bus service provided at your child's school?	74%	84%
How satisfied are you with the Edmonton Transit service provided at your child's school?	91%	84%