

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 26, 2010

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee G. Rice, Conference Committee Chair

SUBJECT: Report #6 of the Conference Committee (From the Meeting Held September 15, 2009)

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Report #6 of the Conference Committee from the meeting held September 15, 2009 be received and considered.
2. That the attached protocols (APPENDIX I) be approved and included in the Trustees' Manual to serve as a guide for future Boards.

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Background - Recommendation 2

Following the Trustees' Retreat of January 7 and 8, 2008, the Community Relations Committee (CRC) recommended protocols as norms to support team effectiveness. These mutually agreed upon expectations for Trustee behavior contribute to team cohesion and positive team dynamics by establishing predictability and trust, and serve to clarify and improve relations between Board and administration.

The *Establishment of Protocols* conference report was brought to public Board on February 26, 2008, at which time the recommendation was approved by the Board. At that meeting, the Board approved the following motion: *That the Trustee Protocols first be used for six months and then reviewed by the Community Relations Committee before recommending inclusion in the Trustees' Manual to serve as a guide for future Boards be approved.*

On May 5, 2009, the Community Relations Committee brought forward a recommendation for the Conference Committee to approve reaffirmation and inclusion of the protocols in the Trustees' Manual. A few minor wording changes were suggested. The Conference Committee asked the Community Relations Committee to rework the protocols while considering the following ideas:

- Introduction of consequences
- Clarification of a common understanding around an individual trustee's relationship with media
- Addition of a protocol with respect to Sharing Knowledge from Professional Development opportunities

The Community Relations Committee presented this revised set of protocols for consideration by trustees at the fall retreat. The original protocols have been placed into a new framework, which the CRC hopes provides greater clarity and simplicity, and some new protocols have been added. The new framework focuses on five key areas: Conducting Our Business Honourably and with Integrity, Communicating in a Timely, Accurate and Respectful Manner, Building Positive Relationships, Sharing Information, and Addressing Divergence from the Protocols.

With respect to the notion of consequences, the CRC strongly believes that the strength of the protocols is in a common understanding and commitment to these protocols. They act as a guide for Trustees, not a way to control Trustees. The censure and sanction policies of Edmonton Catholic, Calgary Catholic and Calgary Public were reviewed. The two Catholic Boards provide very detailed processes for dealing with trustees who transgress their codes of conduct. Calgary Public's statement is much simpler. Based on studying these documents and the belief that the protocols should primarily act as guidance for Trustees, the CRC recommends the addition of a short section on how Trustees and the Superintendent could proceed if they feel a colleague is harming the district through his or her actions, comments or behaviour.

The Conference Committee approved the Protocols at the September 15, 2009 Conference Committee meeting, and they were reviewed by legal counsel at Conference Committee's request prior to coming to public board. General Counsel has reviewed the protocols and does not make any recommendations for change.

AS:mmf

APPENDIX I - Trustee Protocols

Trustee Protocols

The Board believes that the following mutually agreed upon expectations for Trustee behaviour and conduct will contribute to team cohesion and positive team dynamics. By establishing predictability and trust, they will serve to clarify and improve relations between the Board and administration as well as between trustees.

Conducting Our Business Honourably and with Integrity

- Trustees will respect the confidentiality of private conversations.
- Trustees will be respectful of everyone’s time: their own, staff, and community members.
- Trustees will model respect and courtesy for all in their choice of words, body language, and actions.
- It is agreed that surprises undermine trust and Trustees will endeavour to keep each other well informed as to their actions and comments.
- Trustees will model ideals of democracy, particularly at public board meetings, by engaging fully in debate in which they are open to the ideas and opinions of others and present their own ideas as accurately as they are able.
- Prior to Board decisions, Trustees will refrain from expressing in the media, websites, blogs, correspondence or in private conversations with community members how the Trustee will vote, but will be free to discuss the various considerations that will inform the upcoming discussion.
- Following a Board decision, Trustees will respect the Board decision and if asked about the decision or issue, fairly reflect the discussion, demonstrate support for the Board, and focus on next steps.
- If a Trustee cannot live with a decision of the Board, he or she may choose to resign as an honourable option.

Building Positive Relationships

In order to align ~~our~~ **Trustee** practice with the Board Role and Responsibilities policy (page 1, Trustees’ Manual), which states that two roles for Trustees include “representing the interests of the community and reflecting the values of the community in its decision making” and “serving as a communication bridge between the community and the district”, building positive relationships and being active in our schools and wards is important.

School Relationships

- Visiting schools can be a good way to learn about the school community. As a courtesy, Trustees will ask principals in advance about visiting the school and agree upon a suitable time.
- Trustees will be respectful of the time and ongoing activities of staff and students.
- Trustees recognize that requests are requests; trustees will not direct the actions of any staff member and will ensure that our requests (regarding meetings, building space, etc.) are reasonable and mutually agreeable.
- Trustees will inform the ward Trustee prior to contacting or visiting schools or school councils in wards other than their own.
- Ward Trustees will have the first opportunity to accept invitations to school specific events (e.g., graduations); invitations to district-wide events that are being held in a school will be sent to the ward Trustee and Board Chair.

School Council Relationships

- Recognizing that the School Council acts as an advisory body to the Principal and operates under its own rules and regulations, school council meetings can be a good venue to promote Board initiatives and work, and also to understand and learn about particular school communities. Through Communications, Trustees have access to School Council contact e-mails and are free to use them. If no contact is available through Communications, Trustees may contact School Councils c/o the school's e-mail or by sending a letter through the district mail service.

Community and Government Relationships within Wards

- As Trustees travel about their daily routines, Trustees will consider the potential for building relationships with other organizations as a way of increasing support for the district and public education. If Trustees think there is merit in exploring a deeper relationship with a particular group, Trustees are encouraged to invite administration to review the idea and provide pertinent background information. Trustees can also use the existing conference agenda item "Other Trustee Reports" to report on such meetings or proposed activities.
- Trustees will inform the ward Trustee prior to contacting or visiting community groups or organizations, MLAs, or Councillors in wards other than their own.

Communicating in a Timely, Accurate, and Respectful Manner

Excellent communication about the values, successes, challenges, and future directions of Edmonton Public Schools engenders understanding and support for the district and for public education. Because Trustees are key spokespeople for the district, they should seek out opportunities to highlight what is happening in the district and with Board work.

In All Situations (verbal or written)

- Any Trustee communication will reflect Board values, policies and priorities and be respectful of current district practices, such as site-based decision making.
- Trustees are encouraged to remember that when they speak the perception often is that the Board is speaking and they need to speak with deliberation and care.
- Trustees will avoid speaking for the Board in areas where the Board has not yet taken a position.
- Public statements will avoid criticism of the intentions or actions of other Board members, current or former.
- When speaking, Trustees will communicate as accurately and specifically as possible.

Correspondence: E-mails

- The Board Chair will respond **promptly** to e-mails addressed to all Trustees **within 48 hours**. Note: The first response may be just to acknowledge receipt of the e-mail and to advise that a full response may take some time. Trustees will be advised of the Board Chair's response by way of cc or TM.
- Similarly, Trustees will each respond **promptly** to e-mails sent directly to them **within 48 hours**. If Trustees are on holiday or away, Trustees will set up an "auto" response to that effect.
- As a general rule, Trustees will not respond if they are cc'd in an e-mail.
- Recognizing that e-mail is not a secure communication vehicle, Trustees will not use e-mail to pass along sensitive or confidential information.

Blogs/Websites/Social Media

- Personal blogs, websites, and social media usage generally will be reflective of Board policies and priorities and respect confidentiality. Trustees acknowledge that the expression of personal opinion may impact the range of feedback received or the perception that Trustees are going into a debate with an open mind.

- Trustees will moderate personal sites, e.g., preview the material going up on the site before posting.
- Trustees will consider the timeliness and accuracy of all posts before posting and of the website itself.

School and Community Newsletters

- School and/or community newsletters are a good vehicle for Trustee invitational or informational pieces. If Trustees make a request to share information with school communities in this way, Trustees will respect newsletter deadlines, preferred formats, and possible space restrictions.

Media Requests for Comments or Interviews

- Trustees will respect the Board Chair's role as the spokesperson for the Board. If the Board Chair is present and an individual Trustee is approached by media, the Trustee will connect the media with the Board Chair.
- If the Board Chair is not present and Trustees are asked for comments, they will use their best judgment in commenting, not commenting, or referring the matter to the Board Chair. If they do comment, an email to inform the Board of the comments made will be sent as soon as possible.

Sharing of Information and Perspectives

- Trustees will bring forward for discussion any requests/letters/ideas that they feel needs a Board response and/or are unsure about ~~The time to do this is within the first hour of the monthly "Trustee Meeting"~~, or, if of a more urgent matter, ask the Board Chair for advice.
- The Board provides funds for Trustee professional development. To maximize the value of this learning for the Board, upon their return, Trustees ~~may choose to prepare a short report for the Board will share their experiences and learnings with their colleagues~~, outlining what they have learned and how it may be applicable to the work of Edmonton Public Schools.
- Trustees agree that e-mail is an effective way to share information. Trustees will be respectful of others in the volume of e-mail sent to colleagues and they will endeavour to read information sent by colleagues. Trustees agree that discussion and debate are best in a face-to-face meeting and ideally, will avoid debate by e-mail.
- If Trustees are sharing information pertinent to an upcoming debate or meeting, Trustees will consider the timeliness of sending the material.

Addressing Divergence from the Protocols

- If a Trustee or the Superintendent (the complainant) has concerns about a Trustee's behavior or comments negatively impacting the work of the Board or the District, the complainant should address the issue with the Trustee directly. All staff concerns would be expressed through the Superintendent.
- If the matter is not successfully resolved, the complainant can raise the issue with the Board Chair. The Board Chair may choose to speak directly with the Trustee whose actions or comments are being questioned or with both Trustees. If the Board Chair is one of the trustees involved, the Vice Chair may be approached to facilitate such a meeting.
- If the matter is still not successfully resolved, the use of an external mediator may be considered by those involved or a discussion by the full Board at a private meeting may be requested. In either case, the complainant and the Trustee who is deemed to have diverged from the protocols are to put their positions in writing to be sent in advance of the discussion. All such documents will be strictly confidential. The decision of the full Board with respect to resolution of the issue shall be final and shall be recorded in writing.
- After all the steps above have been taken, and if a Trustee does not abide by the decision of the Board or a mediator, a motion of censure against the trustee in question may be considered at a public Board of Trustees meeting and/or a motion to remove the trustee from one or more appointments.