

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 14, 2011

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Responses to Trustee Requests for Information

ORIGINATOR: D. Fraser, Executive Director
T. Parker, Assistant Superintendent
B. J. Smith, Executive Director

RESOURCE
STAFF: Will Deys, Andrew Morgan, John Nicoll, Lorne Parker, Darrel
Robertson

INFORMATION

TRUSTEE REQUEST #87, APRIL 26, 2011 (TRUSTEE SHIPKA), PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE MERITS AND DRAWBACKS OF PROMOTING STEVIA AS A NATURAL SWEETENER FOR STUDENT HEALTH. Stevia is generally advertised as a “healthy” sweetener because it has virtually zero calories. As such, the use of Stevia as a natural sweetener could be viewed as acceptable under the Administrative Regulation [GBE.AR](#) - Health and Wellness of Staff and Students, since it would not add calories to a food item (see information on “choose most often” and “choose sometimes” in the regulation). However, although Stevia is available in Canada for purchase by consumers, its use as a food additive in readymade/processed food products is currently not permitted by Health Canada regulations. Health Canada has permitted some natural health products which contain Stevia to be sold in Canada, but in those cases the quantity of Stevia used needs to be within a maximum daily limit. Caution in promoting the use of Stevia is also warranted since there have not been any studies done on the long term use of Stevia in any appreciable quantities. When promoting food items for student health, examination needs to be made of the nutritional benefits of a food choice as well and in this case, the addition of Stevia does not provide any added nutritional value.

It should be noted on the Stevia Sweet Nutritional Information website and on their product labels that they do not recommended Stevia for children and indicate that it should be kept out of reach from children <http://www.steviasweet.ca/nutritionals.htm>.

The following links can be viewed for further information:
Health Canada’s Revised Guideline for the Use of Stevia: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodnatur/legislation/docs/notice-avis-stevia-eng.php>
Nutrition Action Health Letter on Stevia: http://www.cspinet.org/nah/4_00/stevia.html

TRUSTEE REQUEST #88, APRIL 26, 2011 (TRUSTEE HOFFMAN), PROVIDE INFORMATION SUMMARIZING THE NUMBER OF STAFF WHO BEEN GRANTED SICK LEAVE (SHORT AND LONG TERM). THE INFORMATION SHOULD INCLUDE A MONTHLY BREAKDOWN OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS IDENTIFYING PEAK PERIODS OF ILLNESS BY STAFF GROUP IN THE DISTRICT. Appendix I summarizes the number of staff accessing sick leave over a five year period, broken down into monthly averages to identify peak periods. From the information provided, November and May appear to be peak times for short term sick leave among all staff groups, with the exception of maintenance staff. One possible operational explanation for these peak periods could be the increased work load associated with progress reporting in schools. November also appears to be a peak period for long term sick leave for support and teaching staff. The data for October shows a slight increase of short and long term sick time for maintenance staff. The data for custodial staff is consistent throughout the school year. July and August carry lower incidents of short and long term sick leave as schools are not operational during these months, and many 12 month employees access vacation time.

TRUSTEE REQUEST #89, APRIL 26, 2011 (TRUSTEE HOFFMAN), CAN THE ADMINISTRATION PROVIDE ANY EVIDENCE THAT A MODIFIED CALENDAR REDUCES THE NUMBER OF SICK TIME TAKEN BY STAFF IN THE DISTRICT?

The Administration is not able to establish a correlation between a modified school calendar and a reduction in sick time. Anecdotal information from district schools, as well as from schools in the Elk Island Public School District, indicate that there is no tangible benefit between a modified school calendar and reduced sick leave of staff. Principals of schools with a modified calendar report their perception that some staff appreciate the opportunity to travel at non-peak times of the year. A comprehensive study to examine a link between sick time and staff working on a modified calendar would be required to provide a valid and reliable answer to this question. A study of this nature would be very complex, as a multitude of variables could impact the amount of sick time accessed by staff in a given school year.

TRUSTEE REQUEST #95, MAY 10, 2011 (TRUSTEE JANZ), HOW MUCH MONEY DOES THE DISTRICT CURRENTLY SPEND ON NON-ESSENTIAL PESTICIDES, WITH NON-ESSENTIAL AS DEFINED BY THE CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY?

The Canadian Cancer Society suggests the following definition for non-essential pesticides (taken from Canadian Cancer Society Alberta/N.W.T. Division, Banning the Use of Non-Essential Pesticides, Summer 2010 document presented at May 10, 2011 board meeting):

“Non-essential pesticides, also known as cosmetic pesticides, may be used to enhance the appearance of private gardens and lawns, as well as parks, recreational facilities and golf courses, by controlling unwanted weeds, plants and pests. When pesticides are used to simply prevent blemishes and other imperfections, it is referred to as the non-essential use of pesticides.”

Weed control on district sites is done to ensure compliance with provincial and civic laws. The Government of Alberta regulates the spread of noxious weeds and prohibited noxious weeds through the Weed Control Act. When herbicides are applied at district sites they are intended to eliminate noxious weeds. The areas in ornamental lawns around schools are

treated with herbicides deemed safe and non-harmful according to Health Canada. School playing fields are maintained by the City of Edmonton.

The District spends \$14,142 on simultaneous application of fertilizer and herbicides which includes \$1,414 worth of herbicides.

TRUSTEE REQUEST #96, MAY 10, 2011 (TRUSTEE JANZ), WHAT SUGGESTIONS WOULD THE DISTRICT PUT FORWARD FOR AN IDLING BYLAW IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE AIR QUALITY AROUND OUR SCHOOLS?: Edmonton Public Schools Administration supports the proposed City of Edmonton idling bylaw around all schools. This ban would be in line with Health Canada recommendations for air quality. Poor air quality that affects student health is a concern as children's bodies are particularly more vulnerable to air pollution. A bylaw that restricts idling would help in the effort to provide a healthier, more consistent outdoor air quality for all students entering and leaving schools.

The following are suggestions for an idling bylaw that apply to the area immediately around schools:

- The idle free zone should extend a minimum 75m from the nearest school entrance or exit.
- No maximum or minimum cut off temperatures for personal or commercial vehicles in the no idling zones.
- Edmonton Transit and yellow school buses should be allowed a partial exemption.
 - No bus idling in temperatures above 0°C.
 - In instances of extreme cold, when re-starting the bus is in question, or the frosting of windows creates a safety hazard, buses may be exempted from the 10 minute idling cycle.
- Emergency service vehicles shall be exempt.
- Ample signage should denote idle free zones.

TRUSTEE REQUEST #100, MAY 31, 2011 (CONFERENCE COMMITTEE), INCLUDE THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS PROVIDED BY TRUSTEE HOFFMAN IN THE JUNE 14, 2011 REPORT REGARDING THE BUDGET. This information is provided in Appendix VII of the Approval of 2011-2012 Proposed Budget report.

DF:TP:BJS:ja

APPENDIX I Average Number of Staff Accessing Sick Leave Per Month Over a Five Year Period (2005-2010)

AVERAGE NUMBER OF STAFF ACCESSING SICK LEAVE PER MONTH
OVER A FIVE YEAR PERIOD (2005 – 2010)

PAY GRP	Sick Lv Type	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug
SUP	ST	507.8	665.4	751	577.8	691.6	658.6	665	674	713.8	658.2	67.8	127.8
SUP	LT	48.4	66.6	82.8	54.4	77.2	65.2	62.4	61.6	68.2	57.8	9	12.4
CUS	ST	164	175	175.6	151	170.2	156.8	174.2	160.6	179	172	47.8	70.6
CUS	LT	27.6	31.6	37.4	31.6	43.8	39.2	34.6	31.8	36.8	32.6	11.2	12.2
MAI	ST	79	88.4	81.2	77	78.2	73.2	79.4	74.4	80	73.8	70.4	72
MAI	LT	7.6	9.6	9	8	8.6	6.8	9	6.4	7	5.6	6.4	5.6
TCH	ST	1014.2	1495.2	1685.8	1348	1427.2	1490.2	1363.2	1332	1517.2	1342.2	3.8	66.4
TCH	LT	96	136	171.8	128.6	131.6	131.2	130	127.8	131.4	107.2	0.4	1.2
X2	ST	130.6	162.2	168	131.2	164.4	147.4	149	142	138.6	126	59	69.4
X2	LT	9	13	14	14	16.2	15.8	13.2	10	12.8	11	5.4	5.6
X4	ST	11.6	12.8	14.6	12.2	14.4	14	14.4	12.2	12.2	11.8	7.4	7.6
X4	LT	1	1.2	1.6	1.6	2	2.4	1.2	2.4	1.4	1.4	2.4	1.6

ST = Short Term (1 to 3 days)

LT = Long Term (4 or more consecutive days)

X2 = Exempt Non-Management

X4 = Exempt Management

Each person is counted as one person, regardless of their full-time or part-time status. Short Term leaves for one employee are counted as one instance in a given month (if the employee had multiple short term absences)

Long Term leaves for one employee are counted as one instance in a given month (if the employee had multiple long term absences). Absences over 90 days (extended disability) are not included.

Data within each month represents an average over 5 years (i.e. Sept 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010)