

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 8, 2011

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee M. Janz, District Priorities Committee
Trustee H. MacKenzie, District Priorities Committee
Trustee C. Ripley, Chair District Priorities Committee

SUBJECT: Recommendation from the District Priorities Committee

ORIGINATOR: T. Taylor, Director, Executive and Board Relations

RESOURCE
STAFF: Janice Bell, Patti Didine, David Fraser, Ayesha Moughel,
Cheryl Oxford, Cory Sinclair

RECOMMENDATION

That the attached Vision, Mission, and 2011-2014 District Priorities (Appendix I) be approved.

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Background

Edmonton Public Schools serves about 80,000 students and their families in 197 schools located in a range of socioeconomic neighborhoods. Additionally, it provides educational programming in hospitals, correctional institutions, non-profit social service agencies and in storefronts. To respond to the varying and complex needs of students, the District employs over 7,300 staff, including teachers, support staff, custodians, maintenance staff and exempt staff.

Every three years a new Board of Trustees is elected and at the beginning of its term, a new Board makes one of the most important decisions of its term – setting the priorities around which the Board, the Superintendent and all staff will concentrate their work over the next three years.

To this end the District Priorities Committee serves the Board in leading the development of a Priorities Statement. In addition, this year, as tasked by the 2007-10 Board, the Committee was assigned with reviewing and revising the District Mission policy statement. After much conversation and consultation with students, families, staff, community partners, members of the public, and the Board, the Vision, Mission and 2011-14 District Priorities are attached for approval. The Committee believes the Vision, Mission, and Priorities will inspire and motivate staff, students, families, community partners, the public at large, and the Board itself over the next three years to move Edmonton Public Schools forward in concrete and exciting ways, and most importantly, serve its students better than ever before.

The Process to Date

- 1) During December and early January, the Committee developed a draft Vision, Mission, Beliefs, and Priorities statement for the purpose of public consultation. As it did so, the committee considered the Priorities established by previous Boards, the current Mission Statement, the lack of a Vision Statement, ideas and values generated by the new Board, recommendations from the 2007-10 Board, input from the Superintendent and district leaders, and finally, the challenges and opportunities currently facing the District.

In brief, district challenges include lower than desired high school completion rates (about 75% after five years), poverty that affects approximately 13,000 students, subpar achievement results for many of our FNMI students, and changing demographics, including the tripling of our immigrant and refugee student population to just over 11,000 students over the last five years.

Opportunities include the strong, positive working relationships Edmonton Public Schools has with many community partners, the innovation and dedication of our staff, the expectation of the Minister of Education that the education system must be “transformed” in order to ensure students graduate with the skills and competencies needed by any 21st Century Albertan, and the expectation of school boards ensuring inclusive learning environments for all students as per the Setting the Direction for Special Education initiative.

A summary of the challenges, the current results of students, and current initiatives of the District can be found in the Combined Three-Year Education Plan and Annual Education Results Report (AERR) available online at <http://www.epsb.ca/datafiles/Combined3YearPlanAERR.pdf>

- 2) On January 25, 2011, the Board approved the draft Statement (Appendix II) to be used during the Consultation process. The purpose of seeking feedback from students, staff, parents, community partners, and community members at large was to ascertain if the Board’s statement reflected the public’s expectations of what Edmonton Public Schools’ long-term Vision, Mission and Beliefs should be. As well, feedback was requested on the draft 2011-2014 Priorities to determine whether these areas of focus were appropriate for the Board, Superintendent and staff to specifically focus their work on for the next three years.
- 3) Consultation took place between January 20 and February 7. A summary of the process, levels of participation, and the feedback is attached as Appendix III.
- 4) Based on the consultation feedback and discussion by the Conference Committee, the Committee worked to create a final statement. It aimed to a) simplify the language and “jargon” that was not easily understood by the public, b) wrap the core beliefs into the Vision, Mission and Priorities themselves and c) create a final statement that would be meaningful and relevant to all of our diverse stakeholders and communities.
- 5) Everyone who participated in the consultation has been alerted that the proposed Vision, Mission, and 2011-14 District Priorities are being presented tonight. The Committee remains appreciative of their time and input.

Next Steps

- 1) Once approved, the first order of business will be to communicate the new Vision, Mission, and 2011-14 District Priorities to students, parents, community partners, the public at large, and the media. Building on the knowledge gained from people's answers to Question 4 (How would you like to learn about progress on these priorities?), multiple communication channels (EPSB website, Facebook, media releases etc.) will be used.
- 2) The Superintendent will develop a District Plan around the new priorities that will outline key areas of focus and include accountability measures, etc. In his plan, he will take into account community feedback related to accountability metrics. The Superintendent's District Plan will form the basis for all decision units (Central and Schools) and the Superintendent will share the Plan with the Board in April or May. This plan is expected to guide the District over the next ten years as well as indicate how the Board's priorities will be pursued during 2011-14.
- 3) Once the Superintendent's plan has been shared, the Board will begin the budgeting process with the Superintendent to ensure funding is aligned with the priorities.
- 4) The Superintendent's final 2011-14 Education Plan and 2011-12 Budget will be presented and approved by the Board in May or June. The plan and budget will reflect the key areas of focus that the Superintendent will require schools and central departments to focus on in support of the 2011-2014 District Priorities.
- 5) Once the budget is approved, schools and central departments will then work to finalize their specific plans for the fall. With support from their Assistant Superintendent, principals will be seeking the advice of students, staff and parents on how best to work on the initiatives laid out by the Superintendent in support of the Board's priorities. Central department leaders will be consulting with community partners and Ministry contacts as appropriate.
- 6) In Fall 2011, the Board will meet with the Superintendent, principals and central department leaders to review upcoming plans and results relating to the 2010-11 school year. Depending on student results and a review of what is working and what is not, adjustments to plans may be made at that time.

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- Appendix I - Proposed Vision, Mission, and 2011-2014 District Priorities
- Appendix II - Draft Vision, Mission, Beliefs and 2011-2014 District Priorities Presented at Public Board on January 25, 2011
- Appendix III - Summary of Feedback from Consultations re: Vision, Mission, Beliefs and Values and Priorities

Vision, Mission, and 2011-2014 District Priorities

Vision

All students will learn to their full potential and develop the ability, passion, and imagination to pursue their dreams and contribute to their community.

Mission

We work with families and community partners to provide safe, healthy, diverse, and equitable learning experiences that engage students to achieve their full potential in an increasingly interdependent world.

District Priorities 2011-2014

1. Provide supports and programs that enable all students to complete high school.
2. Deepen students' understanding of equity and empathy as key citizenship traits.
3. Ensure all students and their families are welcomed, respected, accepted, and supported in every school.
4. Promote health and wellness for all students and staff.
5. Listen to staff, honour their contributions, and support their opportunities for growth and professional development.

**Draft Vision, Mission, Beliefs and 2011-2014 District Priorities
Presented at Public Board January 25, 2011**

Our Vision

That every student completes high school* and demonstrates the competencies** and character necessary to be ethical citizens, engaged thinkers and contributing members of an inclusive and democratic society.

Our Mission

To provide learning environments and leadership necessary to support all students to achieve success in a complex and changing world.

Our Beliefs and Values

- Public education underpins a successful future.
- Being responsive to the educational needs of the broader community is the foundation of our District's approach to education.
- All students can succeed in their education.
- Diverse opportunities give students different paths to achieve academic and social success.
- Access to educational opportunities should be fair and reasonable.
- Students, parents, staff, the Board of Trustees, and community members share responsibility and accountability for results.

- Our learning environments should be:
 - safe
 - healthy and health-promoting
 - welcoming and respectful
 - learner-centered
 - responsive and flexible
 - creative and innovative
 - environmentally sustainable

Our District's Priorities (2011-2014)

1. Emphasize literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and innovation for all of our learners.
2. Instill in each student the attributes of healthy living and ethical citizenship.
3. Enable inclusive*** learning environments where every student feels welcome and safe.
4. Provide a collaborative, healthy and innovative workplace that recognizes individual contributions and supports opportunities for growth and professional development.

Summary of Feedback from Consultations re: Vision, Mission, Beliefs and Values and Priorities

Invitation to participate in the consultation process was promoted in the following ways:

- Email “save the dates” were sent in early January to over 1200 contacts including school council chairs, community organizations, Partners in Education participants (once draft was finalized, the “save the dates” contacts were emailed the details)
- District website, Facebook page, Twitter account, Need to Know News and Bulletin Board as well as email from Superintendent to Principals and Central Services
- Reminder given at Partners in Education event on January 31(over 200 parents in attendance)
- Trustees promoted through their websites, newsletters, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts
- Media release and Edmonton Examiner media interview with the Chair
- Board meeting package and discussion at Board meeting and livestream webcast

285 individuals participated in the consultation process from January 20- February 7, 2011:

- 158 filled in the on-line survey (just over 70% said they agreed that the statements reflected their expectations of Edmonton Public Schools)
- 64 students from 33 schools attended the in-person student consultations at the Centre for Education
- 41 community/staff members from a variety of backgrounds – parents, staff representatives, principals, teachers, school council members, community organizations, members of the general public attended the in-person consultations at the Centre for Education
- 10 community members and 2 staff members attended Trustee Ripley’s consultation session at Johnny Bright School
- Approximately 10 community members attend Trustees Mackenzie/Spencer’s consultation session at Jasper Place High School

Vision

Overall, there was support for the vision to help all students complete high school. However, there was consistent feedback across consultations regarding the following:

- Reads too wordy and heavy. Also split support over the words “competencies” and “ethical (citizens)”; how can we define these?
- Inclusion is still not well understood and some stated that the vision did not speak to students with special needs and challenges
- Several also stated that all students will complete high school sounds unattainable

Mission

Overall, people understood learning environments and connection to vision however there was consistent feedback regarding the following:

- Wording “complex and changing world” and leadership was not understood
- Several felt the partners piece was missing - i.e. parents, students and community coming together
- How do you define success? Some suggested that the mission might be where you could include some examples of what success looks like (i.e. pursuing post-secondary education, career of choice etc....)
- That learning environments needed to be better defined or part the mission so it could be clear
- Add learning environments section to the mission and tighten the list of what a learning environment needs to be
- People did not get the “environmentally sustainable”
- All students felt strongly about ensuring learning environments were safe and respectful
- Choice came up a lot in discussion – students were pro-choice as they want to have options that meet their needs, several community members expressed the need for choice and wanted to see it in the statement, and some felt that choice programs are diluting the building of community

Beliefs and Values

Overall, there was support to incorporate these types of statements into the rest of the document because the mission, vision and priorities should reflect the beliefs and values.

Priorities

Overall, people supported the intent of the priorities but wanted to see more plain language and definition of what the Board was looking to accomplish – i.e. help more students complete high school completion, raise the level of literacy? Several also stated that the priorities were too wordy, jargony and long and lacked clear indicators of how the priorities would be measured. People also wanted to see how they relate to get closer to the vision.

Under Priority #1, several did not understand numeracy, critical thinking and innovation and why it was prefaced with the word emphasize.

Under Priority #2, several did not care for the word “instill” as it seemed too militant – prefer nurture or foster and did not like ethical – need to define what is meant – i.e. good citizens? How can the school Board ensure a student is ethical?

Under Priority #3, what does inclusive mean? Is the priority to integrate more students with varying backgrounds together?

Under Priority #4, too long but liked that it acknowledged staff . What does the word collaboration mean?

The following information was also gathered at the consultations. This information will help inform both the District’s Strategic Plan and Strategic Communications Framework.

What Participants Said About How They Can Help With Meeting the Priorities...

Overall themes can be identified as follows:

- Families getting involved and supporting student’s success
- Mentorship for students
- Supports for teachers
- Community organizations becoming more involved in directly supporting students
- Effective communication and engagement between teachers, principals, students and their families and members of multicultural and Aboriginal communities (enhancing collective responsibilities for student success)
- Engaging groups that are currently not engaged so barriers can be lifted
- Be an advocate for public education

What Participants Said about What Success/Measures Could Look Like For Priorities...

Overall themes can be identified as follows:

- Students would be well-rounded
- Test scores/achievement tests
- Students contributions to the community
- Students connecting with their culture and integrating it into their learnings
- Students feeling safe and welcome
- Bullying addressed
- Seeing innovative teaching techniques that engage students
- More life skills options
- Interview the students after they leave Edmonton Public Schools
- Staff feeling valued
- Less reliance on standardized testing

What Participants Said About Preferred Methods to Hear About Progress...

- There was overall strong support for info to be placed on EPSB website, school zone/school newsletters, social media tools and media stories
- People also liked the idea of some face to face meetings including Trustees attending cultural events and connecting with community and providing updates directly to them or school council meetings