

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 25, 2008

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Staff Group Budget Presentations

ORIGINATOR: B. Tams, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: John Edey, Michael Ediger, David Fraser, Veda Lastiwka, Ellen Ogilvy,
Renee Thomson, Bonnie Zack

INFORMATION

This report is provided in response to budget presentations made to the board of trustees by three of five district staff groups prior to the beginning of budget deliberations. On February 26, 2008 the board heard presentations by Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 of the ATA and by the Exempt Staff, and on March 11, 2008 CUPE Local 474 representing custodial workers made their presentation. All principals and decision unit administrators will be provided with copies of this report and the written submissions provided by the staff groups. CUPE Local 3550 representing support staff will make their presentation on March 25, 2008 and CUPE Local 784, representing maintenance staff, have chosen not to make a presentation this year.

A common theme in all three presentations was the importance of the district focusing on its staff as a resource. Staff wellness, involvement in decision making, occupational health and safety, and access to professional development were issues brought forward by all groups.

Another common theme, and one that has taken on more urgency, is that of attraction and retention of employees in all staff groups. Each presentation outlined concern regarding the effect of staff shortages on the workload of their members, and the resulting effect on the health and work/life balance of district employees.

A third theme in the presentations involved the challenges that result in the application of the cost recovery model. It is the perception of the staff groups that inequities in service delivery sometimes emerge, depending on the decisions made at each site.

Many of the presenters made suggestions about how the district could address these concerns. Recommendations were made regarding the provision of increased access to professional development, examination of ways to strengthen staff involvement in site-based decision making, and centralization of funds for some district functions e.g. custodial training and supervision, consulting services and maintenance services.

The administration understands the concerns that the staff groups have raised. Extensive work to construct a comprehensive human resources strategy is ongoing. Meetings have been held with all staff groups, and with principals and central administrators to gather input regarding attraction, retention, development and engagement of staff. This report will be shared with the board and other stakeholders in the spring 2008.

As a district we recognize that we are in a rapidly changing labour environment. Alberta's booming economy, the related challenges that exist in competition for employees, and the demographics of our own employees have created unique and challenging circumstances, especially in light of our current fiscal reality. The administration is examining innovative ways of recruiting staff. We also recognize the importance of providing sound orientation both to the district and to respective job assignments and are now offering such in-services. Cultivation of our own staff through first class training programs and professional development will be key to engagement, retention and succession planning. As an organization, we must be open to doing things differently if we are to respond to this new world of work. It is encouraging to hear our staff groups commit to dialogue about these issues, and voice interest in seeking new solutions that will be mutually beneficial.

The following sections outline the board and administration responses to the individual presentations by the staff groups, in order of presentation.

Edmonton Public Teachers, Local 37 of the ATA

The board appreciates the strong relationship between the Local and the district. With the new collective agreement in place, the district also looks forward to an opportunity to work collaboratively on issues of mutual concern during the coming years.

The Local's presentation focused on the wellness of district staff in terms of both individual and organizational health. The strength of the employer/employee relationship that we share will allow us to address some of the issues which may have been ignored in the past. The board anticipates that through joint committees of Local and administration representatives, there will be an opportunity to redefine our approach to issues around organizational health.

The Local referenced the results of the survey conducted by the joint committee on the *Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making*. The board commends the collaborative approach taken by both parties to gather and share this information. The board recognizes that there is work to be done to educate all stakeholders about the importance of meaningful involvement in site-based decision making. The administration sees a strong connection between the work of this committee and the growing awareness of the need for broader skill development in communication and conflict resolution.

Although the Local supports the concept of decentralized budgeting and site-based decision making, it raised questions about the challenges which result when funding is inadequate. The Local is concerned that when schools are required to purchase services from either Consulting Services or Maintenance Services, there may be inequity from site to site, depending on the priorities of the individual school or decision unit. It suggests that consideration be given to recentralizing these services in order to ease pressure on the schools. The district appreciates the Local's acknowledgement that this is a complex issue.

The concept of a comprehensive New Teacher Induction Program has been developed in a joint Local and administration committee. The Local suggests that many benefits would result from providing significant support to our new teachers as they embark on their careers with our district. The administration agrees and plans to move forward with this program for the 2008-2009 school year. The district looks forward to working with the Local on this initiative.

Concerns were raised by the Local regarding access to personal professional development. Although there is recognition of the extensive professional development funded through the Alberta Initiative on School Improvement (AIS), the Local states that it is important for teachers to have access to funds for personal professional development. In the last round of collective bargaining, the district committed to participating in a joint committee to examine the concerns around this matter. Discussions will include, but are not limited to, an examination of issues regarding the availability and use of funds for professional development activities related to individual professional growth plans. Discussions may pertain to such activities as courses offered by a recognized university, workshops or conferences sponsored by the ATA, ATA Specialist Councils, professional development consortia or Alberta Education or any other professional development activities which meet a professional growth need.

The board appreciates the Local's support and encouragement for the work that the Board does in advocating for public education, and for continuing to lobby the provincial government for the funds needed to address educational issues.

Exempt Staff

The board relies on the exceptional range of skills and expertise represented by the various disciplines in the exempt staff group. The contribution of this group of professionals is critical to the effective and efficient operation of the district. The dedication that exempt staff place on the classroom and their commitment to supporting teaching and learning is highly valued. The administration looks forward to working with the Exempt Liaison Committee and others to develop and implement strategies to enhance the profile of exempt staff and provide recognition to the group as a whole.

The exempt staff group raised the issue of the disparity in access to professional development opportunities, suggesting that cost recovery units appear to provide less access. An additional concern is that workload may preclude staff members from accessing professional development. As part of the human resources strategy, the district will be examining the importance of total rewards, including opportunities for professional development for all staff.

The exempt staff group cites internal and external factors causing heavy workload for their members. One third of their members indicated in a recent survey that they feel their workload is unreasonable. While there is acknowledgement that staff shortages may be beyond the control of the district, the exempt staff cautioned that expectations for provision of the same level of service in the face of staff shortages may have negative consequences. Issues around payment for work done outside normal working hours were raised, as was

disparity in salaries between teaching and exempt staff. The administration acknowledges that reasonable workloads are a concern for several staff groups. There is also recognition that this is a complex issue and that, in addressing workload issues for a particular area and/or staff group, there may be implications for staff in another area or group.

The district recognizes that the exempt staff group is concerned about compensation. The exempt staff cite growing discrepancy between the salaries negotiated by teachers and those of exempt staff as an issue. The district is aware of these concerns and has surveyed other employers to determine comparable salaries for exempt positions. Information addressing this issue will be forthcoming.

The district acknowledges the appreciation expressed by the exempt staff group around recent occupational health and safety initiatives, and offers assurance that efforts to make improvements in this area will continue

CUPE Local 474 (Custodial Staff)

The board acknowledges and values the important contribution that custodial workers make to the district.

The district is committed to meeting its collective agreement requirements regarding the Letter of Understanding regarding the cleaning guideline of 2500 to 3000 square feet per hour per FTE by September 1, 2008. The administration has consulted with the Local regarding the application of the Letter of Understanding.

The Local has made several recommendations in its budget brief on how this cleaning guideline related to workload could be enhanced and the administration has analyzed the cost of these recommendations:

- The Local indicated that Head Custodians are only able to clean two hours per day. The cost of adding custodians to do the six hours of cleaning not covered by the Head Custodians would be approximately \$7.5 million (an additional 152.25 FTE).
- The Local has indicated that schools under 50,000 square feet should have a minimum of 2.5 custodial FTE and schools between 50,000 and 75,000 square feet should have a minimum of 3 to 4 custodial FTE. The cost of adding custodial staff to do this work would be between approximately \$4.5 million (an additional 111.632 FTE) and \$7.6 million (an additional 154.632 FTE), depending on whether custodial assistants or custodians were hired and whether a minimum of 3 or 4 FTE for schools between 50,000 and 75,000 square feet is applied.

While the administration acknowledges the concerns raised by the Local and recognizes the benefits of an increased custodial staff complement, there are implications for adopting any of these recommendations without increased support from the provincial government. Without additional plant operations and maintenance (PO&M) funding, the allocation to pay for these improvements would either need to come from within the existing PO&M grant, which could result in a significant impact on maintenance staffing levels, or an impact on the classroom through a reduction of teaching and support staff, and a resulting increase in class size.

The administration has been working with principals to assist them to meet the 2500 to 3000 square feet collective agreement cleaning guidelines within the resources available and has requested input from the Local on an ongoing basis. The board is pleased that the Local has indicated it is willing to work with the administration to resolve the complex challenges that we face in this area.

The Local proposes a model in which certain functions related to custodial services could be centralized. It points out that there are several departments within Central Services which have responsibility for custodial issues. While the administration recognizes that there is always merit in examining our organizational structures to determine if enhancements are required, there is no desire to move to a centralized model of delivering custodial services.

In the presentation, the Local identifies the need to have new, standardized custodial equipment and better access to technology. The board and the administration understand the importance of all staff having the resources that they need to do effective work. It continues to be a challenge in the schools and central decision units to balance the need for new resources and the need for additional custodial positions within the requirements of the funding that we receive in the PO&M grant. Facilities Services provides a custodial mentoring service to schools and head custodians as to the most appropriate equipment to use and would advise if replacement is warranted.

The Local raises concerns around specialized types of custodial work, including carpet cleaning, window cleaning, flood and fire clean-up. The board and the administration respect the Local's perspective in these matters, and look forward to continuing to seek win-win solutions to these complex issues.

Regarding the attraction of custodial workers to the district, CUPE 474 makes several suggestions for reaching potential employees. Many of these suggestions reflect current practice, and the board and administration will continue to consider all suggestions for more effective ways to attract and retain staff.

The Local also identifies some barriers to working for Edmonton Public Schools. The administration appreciates the input, and agrees that "when the employer partners with the union and employees to develop strategies and share accountability, there are better outcomes for staff and students". This approach will be critical as we examine some of the attraction and retention barriers that have been raised by current and prospective employees regarding the current collective agreement, e.g., shift start times, staff working in multiple sites, requirements to hold a 5th or 4th Class Power Engineering Certificate.

The Local notes that progress has been made in the area of green cleaning. It recommends centralization of the purchase of all custodial products, and training around the use of green products that are introduced to the district. The district agrees that it is important that appropriate training be provided whenever new products are introduced, and supports the movement toward the use of a green cleaning program.

The issues brought forward by the Local regarding community use of schools, are known to the administration. The district works with its staff and the community to find balance

between providing access to the schools, and ensuring that the school is appropriately looked after:

- Custodial services are included in paid rentals of school space, and schools are compensated from rental fees.
- Custodial services are not included in district lease agreements, but tenants have the option to obtain custodial services from the district. Many tenants have cleaning specifications and requirements that are quite different from schools, such as infant day cares and health clinics.
- School principals have the responsibility to ensure appropriate staffing is in place to meet the custodial needs of the school.
- The district does not see a requirement for an additional planning committee associated with the Joint Use Agreement. Custodial staff are encouraged to work through their school principals to raise issues and concerns relating to community use.

The board and administration are supportive of ongoing professional development for all custodial staff, and the work of the Joint Custodial Staff Development Committee, established through the collective agreement. There has been a significant investment by the district over the past three years in professional development opportunities for custodial staff:

- Thirty-four staff have participated in the training opportunities provided in-house and through NAIT in order to prepare to challenge either the 5th or 4th Class Power Engineering Certificate through the Alberta Boiler Safety Association (ABSA).
- Approximately 39 staff have participated in three cohorts of the Building Operator Certificate program.
- Approximately 300 custodial staff participated in the Custodial Staff Development Day offered February 29, 2008.
- Technology Sessions for Head Custodians will be offered in late April and early June.
- Confined Space Training will be offered to all Head Custodians, Charge Hands, Utility Custodians and Spare Custodians by the end of June.
- Two sessions on Supervision and Evaluation of Staff were offered to Head Custodians during the current school year.

While the administration recognizes the benefits of offering further opportunities for training and professional development, there are challenges in doing so when a significant amount of the current funding is designated to meet the collective agreement requirements related to possession of a Power Engineering Certificate. The administration looks forward to discussing and resolving this complex issue with the Local.

The Board appreciates the Local's support for energy management. All the CUPE Locals have been invited to send representatives to an Energy Management Program Workshop to be held on March 27, 2008.

BT/eo