

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 11, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations Research

ORIGINATOR: B. Holt, Executive Director, Instructional and Curricular Support Services

RESOURCE

STAFF: Edgar Schmidt

INFORMATION

The purpose of this presentation is to share information from a recent research study entitled *Equity in Edmonton Schools*, which was conducted by the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations (NAARR). A portion of the research was conducted in Edmonton Public Schools. The Program Manager of NAARR has provided key findings and comments related to the study (Appendix I).

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APPENDIX I – Equity in Edmonton Schools
Research by the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations (NAARR)

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NAARR wishes to thank Edmonton Public Schools for the very positive working relationship we have developed over the years. In fact, both Donna Leask (Aboriginal Education) and Trustee Don Fleming have been members of our organization for several years. Many of your schools have been involved in our March 21 (*International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination*) campaign. In fact, our campaign Launch was held at W.P. Wagner School this year, where we worked with the school to set up a one-hour program and all 1800 students of the school attended. We were very pleased to welcome Board Chairman Svend Hanson at this event. Superintendent McBeath and his research department were welcoming of our conducting surveys in several high schools in this district, helping us to achieve a successful research project. Superintendent McBeath was also cooperative by appointing one of his senior staff, Karen Bardy, and now Edgar Schmidt, to work with us and a committee of community people to address the research results with an appropriate action plan.

We recognize that Edmonton Public schools has many positive programs in place to address racial discrimination, but despite these best intentions, we did find that problems still exist in a number of areas. We are hopeful that we will be able to work together to find some ways to address the problems.

I also wish to note that NAARR is currently working with the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta toward including a compulsory course that would help future teachers become very familiar with the issues of Aboriginal education, Cultural differences, and positive Race Relations. We will also be approaching Alberta Learning to address some issues that arise out of the curriculum.

Summary of Findings

These findings are presented as information to the Board of Trustees of Edmonton Public Schools.

We wish to point out that this was an exploratory study, and was only able to include 148 students in the survey portion of the research. We also held focus groups with 132 parents from Edmonton Public, Edmonton Catholic, and the local Francophone district. Our findings were very consistent with other research that has been done across Canada.

We discovered some “**best practices**” that operate within some schools in your district, creating a positive school culture for visible minority and Aboriginal students.

Racism does operate on an **individual** student-to-student level. This ranges from very subtle forms (in many cases where the student is unaware they are causing hurt) to very blatant and even violent forms of racism. The subtle forms were evident in the social exclusion of Aboriginal and minority students, in cultural differences not being respected, and with minorities feeling less safe. More overt forms were evident in the fairly common use of racial jokes, occasional verbal harassment, and occasional racially motivated violence.

Systemic inequities

Systemic inequities were pointed out by parents. Parents perceived a shortage of Aboriginal and Minority teachers presented few role models for success and that there needed to be an effort to remedy this situation. A lack of knowledge of different cultures and of racism by teachers was noted. The curriculum was perceived to be set for the most part in mainstream Canadian society and when different cultures were taught, it tended to be at a superficial level.

Effect on student

Complex negative emotions are produced in recipients of racial inequities. Parents perceived some of the results to be low achievement, low self-esteem, low attendance, and a tendency to drop out of school. Student recipients of racism would exhibit inappropriate behaviour if they lacked adequate support to deal with it, a positive manner and in the worst case, they would erupt with violence.

Effect on parent

Minority and Aboriginal parents felt they had to constantly monitor their children's experience in school. Barriers existed for many parents, preventing them from being proactive with the school. Some parents were afraid that if they approached the school, the situation would become worse. There was a tendency to move the child to another school.

When schools were approached with a problem

Parent perceptions were that in many cases, situations were not dealt with effectively and that schools had difficulty acknowledging these problems. Parents perceived a tendency for schools to deal with symptoms and not root causes. 2/3 of students surveyed felt that if a racial incident occurred that it would be dealt with effectively in their school.

We believe that a school district will not be able to eradicate racism in their schools, but the question is—what level of racial discrimination is acceptable? We would all agree that the answer is none, and we look forward to building on our positive working relationship with Edmonton Public Schools to create greater equity for students, staff, parents and the community.

Charlene Hay, Program Manager and Head Researcher of this project