

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 13, 2008

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Responses to Trustee Requests for Information

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent
J. Bidulock, Assistant Superintendent
T. Parker, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Ann Calverley, Michael Ediger; Kelly Hehn, Anne Mulgrew; Lorne Parker; Cindy Skolski

INFORMATION

TRUSTEE REQUEST #77, MARCH 11, 2008 (TRUSTEE HUFF) REGARDING SERVICE REQUEST #43 – WHAT IS THE PLAN TO TARGET THOSE SCHOOLS THAT HAVE A HIGHER THAN AVERAGE DROP-OUT RATE? In the February 22, 2008 Transmittal Memorandum, information was provided on drop-out rates for 2001-02 up to 2005-06 for all district high schools. The 2005-06 data is the most recent data available from Alberta Education.

Alberta Education defines the drop-out rate as follows: “Alberta students aged 14 to 18 are tracked for one year to determine how many have left the education system without completing. Students are considered to have dropped out if they are not enrolled in the following year or have not met a high school completion criteria, i.e., have not, within the tracking period: received a high school diploma, IOP Certificate, high school equivalency (GED), earned credits in 5 grade 12 courses (including 4 diploma examination courses), or enrolled in a K-12 school in Alberta, an Alberta post-secondary institution or registered in an Alberta apprenticeship program.”

All students who drop out of school are of concern to the District regardless of which school they attend. There are home, environmental and school factors that impact drop-out rates. Some district schools serve a higher percentage of students who have a number of these risk factors which may impact their drop-out rates. The schools in the District that have higher than average drop-out rates are aware of this issue. Outlined below are examples of how schools are responding to this issue. These strategies reflect research related to causes of dropping out and have a positive impact on supporting students to complete school.

Connections and Relationships

Research indicates that one of the factors associated with dropping out of school is a lack of connection to or identification with their school. Almost every research source suggests that building meaningful relationships with students is a key element to successful transitions.

Relationships of school staff with students should emphasize respect, caring, trust, high expectations and faith in their success.

Actions that district schools have taken with community agencies in this regard include

- establishing collaborative projects to support identified students at risk
- accessing support from district resources such as Aboriginal liaison workers, and the English Language Support Services Centre (ELSSC)
- using community conferencing in lieu of expulsion to plan proactively for students re-integration into school
- establishing a plan to foster personal supportive connections between staff and identified students at risk
- recognizing student diversity through a variety of cultural events

Self-Efficacy and Academic Support

Students who have low confidence in their ability are less likely to feel they have control over their learning are more likely to drop out. Research (Dweck 2006, O'Connor 2008, Wiliam 2007) suggests that fair and flexible grading practices, assessment for learning strategies and differentiated instruction enhance the development of autonomous, capable learners. Actions that district schools have taken in this regard include:

- ongoing professional development (both AISI and targeted professional development) to enhance teachers' skills and confidence in applying these strategies
- use of in-school rather than out-of-school suspensions to reinforce the importance of continuous learning so that discipline related to behaviours will not exclude students from learning opportunities
- instilling a staff-wide belief system that all students can be successful
- ensuring that staff are aware of student behaviours that may be indicative of impending disengagement with schools (e.g., absenteeism, sudden changes in academic achievement)

Forward Planning

Drop-outs often have a less clear idea of how education will help them to meet their career goals. Strategies used to overcome this include:

- extensive career counselling
- access to a variety of registered apprenticeship programs and work experience placements
- provision of information about career pathways (e.g., Learning Clicks, career days)

Transitions

Transition from junior high to high school is difficult for many students, so providing opportunities for students to feel connected from the beginning of the school-year is critical.

Some district schools have implemented the following strategies:

- opportunities for Grade 9 students to visit high schools during a school day and for high school students to visit junior highs so that students entering high school will feel comfortable with older students and with the high school environment
- establishing a student mentor system where incoming Grade 10 students are "buddied" with a Grade 11 or Grade 12 student

- analyzing Grade 10 data on an ongoing basis in order to support students who are at risk academically

There are a variety of ways that schools share the strategies they are using with each other, central departments, the community, and Trustees

- AISI May sharing
- planning documents and presentations
- committee on transitions for First Nation Métis Inuit (FNMI) students
- presentations to Board

It is anticipated that these efforts on the part of schools will result in a continuation of the District trend of a decreasing drop-out rate. By the end of May 2008, Alberta Education will release the 2006-07 drop-out rates for the jurisdiction and each high school. This updated information will be provided to Trustees. (A. Mulgrew, 429-8351)

TRUSTEE REQUEST #88: APRIL 15, 2008 (TRUSTEE RIPLEY) PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING WHETHER STUDENT PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IS A CONCERN ACROSS THE DISTRICT OR JUST TO PARTICULAR SCHOOLS IN WARD H. WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM? WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES AT SCHOOLS THAT HAVE HAD THE PROBLEM IN THE PAST AND HAVE SUCCESSFULLY DEALT WITH IT? HOW OR IF THE DISTRICT SUPPORTS SOLUTIONS FOR THIS ISSUE AT INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS BEYOND THE REGULAR BLOCK FUNDING WAY OF DISTRIBUTING MONEY? IS THERE ANY DISTRICT RESOURCE MATERIAL OR RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES WITH REGARD TO STUDENT PEDESTRIAN SAFETY FOR SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL COUNCILS? IS EXPANDING THE PARKING LOTS FOR PARENTS ONE WAY TO HANDLE SAFETY CONCERNS (SO AS TO REDUCE NUMBER OF CARS ON ROADS AROUND SCHOOLS) OR HAS THE NUMBER OF BUSES EVER BEEN INCREASED TO REDUCE PARENTS DRIVING AND THUS CONGESTION?

Pedestrian safety is a common issue which arises relatively equally across the District. The most common issue is related to the disregard shown by some motorists who illegally use bus loading, no parking, no stopping zones and use crosswalks as points to drop-off and pick-up students. Another common pedestrian issue relates to parents who believe that a road crossing cannot be done safely, without also acknowledging that doing so without the required parental supervision is not supported by the District or in the best interests of the student. It is also common that locations other than schools or stop locations are problematic. These include curved roadways which affect sightlines, speed limits and traffic volumes, jaywalking, road structures, sidewalks, walkways, alleyways and parking lots. There is no single solution or set of practices that are available that can counter these unique situations. In most cases, the issue is not within the mandate of the Board as it is an issue on the roadway, and therefore, the responsibility of the City of Edmonton. Planning and Student Transportation staff work closely with both the City of Edmonton during the planning stages of a new neighbourhood as well as with schools and parents who raise safety issues. This assistance can include input into the approval process for neighbourhoods, signage changes and advocacy with the City of Edmonton, enforcement contacts and advocacy, pedestrian training and crossing patrol programs through the Alberta Motor Association (AMA.). Some of the resources available on pedestrian safety and parking topics include:

<http://www.infratrans.gov.ab.ca/3275.htm>;
<http://www.police.edmonton.ab.ca/Pages/TrafficSection/ParentParkingPatrol/ParentParkingPatrol.asp>;
<http://www.safetycouncil.ab.ca/index.html>;
<http://www.shapeab.com/index.asp>.

Expanding and/or modifying parking lots are costly and often an unfunded undertaking. The modifications that have taken place in a few District schools have had mixed results. Each situation is unique; therefore, an evaluation to identify the most effective solutions is necessary. (K.Hehn 429-8585)

TRUSTEE REQUEST #89: APRIL 15, 2008, (TRUSTEE HUFF) PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING THE CURRENT PRACTICES AND NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES FOR SCHOOLS SCHEDULED FOR SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, IN PARTICULAR, WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPALS AND PARENT COUNCILS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS BEING ADVISED REGARDING THEIR SCHOOL'S STATUS AND THE STEPS THEY SHOULD BE TAKING IN THE YEARS PRIOR TO REVIEW. ALSO PROVIDE SIMILAR INFORMATION REGARDING SCHOOLS WHOSE VIABILITY COULD BE AFFECTED BY THE OPENING OF THE ASAP SCHOOLS IN 2010: Current practices regarding notification to schools and communities of schools that are scheduled for sustainability reviews, and current practices regarding the provision of information regarding a school's status are:

- Presentation and adoption of the District's Ten-Year Facilities Plan at a regular public meeting of the Board of Trustees. The plan identifies the schools that may potentially participate in a sustainability review within the next 10 years.
- Correspondence is sent from the Superintendent of Schools to the parent or guardian of each student attending a school that is potentially participating in a sustainability review in the first year, as identified in the plan.
- Direct correspondence is sent from the Superintendent of Schools to the president of each community league associated with a school that is potentially participating in a sustainability review within the next 10 years, as identified in the plan, a copy of plan is enclosed.
- Direct correspondence is sent from the Superintendent of Schools to the president of the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues drawing attention to the list of schools that are potentially participating in a sustainability review within the next 10 years, a copy of plan is enclosed.
- Direct correspondence is sent from the Board Chair to the Mayor and City Councillors drawing attention to the list of schools that are potentially participating in a sustainability review within the next 10 years, a copy of plan is enclosed.
- A request is made of each school that is potentially participating in a sustainability review to provide or update 'Local Conditions' information for their school profiles.
- Presentation and adoption of the Annual Implementation Plan at a regular public meeting of the Board of Trustees, which confirm those schools that will participate in a sustainability or continuation review in the current school year.
- Correspondence is sent from the Superintendent of Schools to the parent or guardian of students attending a school that is confirmed to be participating in a sustainability or

continuation review within the current year, as identified in the plan, with an attached flyer inviting all persons to attend an information meeting regarding the review.

- Correspondence is sent from the school principal to parents and guardians identifying individuals who have expressed an interest to participate on a working committee.
- An invitation is sent to all parents and guardians to a public meeting regarding the sustainability review.
- Information and an invitation to the public meeting are sent to the president of each community league associated with a school that is participating in a sustainability review, and typically the community league is active in disseminating the information to members through local newsletters and signage.
- Detailed enrolment information and neighbourhood of residence information is provided to each school identified as potentially participating in a sustainability review.
- Follow up meetings are held with school staff or parent councils regarding the number of public supporting pre-school and school-aged students living in the attendance area, and where they are choosing to attend school, advice and assistance is provided as requested.

In terms of the advice given to principals, parent councils and community members as to steps that should be taken prior to a review, the administration initiates contact through the school principal to share best practices, steps and processes that other schools have used successfully to improve the viability of their schools.

The impact on existing schools of the six new ASAP schools planned to open in 2010, as well as the impact of the three schools planned to open in 2012 will be addressed in the *Ten-Year Facilities Plan* and the *Three-Year Capital Plan*. Notification and support to these schools will proceed as outlined in the above process. (L. Parker, 429-8426, M. Ediger, 429-8430, C. Skolski, 429-8339)

TRUSTEE REQUEST #90: APRIL 15, 2008 (TRUSTEE HUFF) PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING WHAT THE PROPOSED DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP POINT IS FOR WOODCROFT STUDENTS WHO WILL BE BUSED TO THEIR DESIGNATED SCHOOL IN THE NEW YEAR. Student Transportation performs the application process and subsequent route design during an annual process starting on June 1 of each school year. This process is normally completed by July 31; with parents receiving their child's busing information in mid-August via postal service. A number of factors can influence the location of stops including mileage efficiencies, numbers of schools served, school hours, road structure and demand. For these reasons, it is not advisable to guarantee a stop location as it eliminates the required flexibility in routing scenarios, e.g., the direction of travel. The intention is to provide a stop in the Woodcroft neighbourhood with consideration that a stop not be located in front of the school, that an ETS bus stop will be used as a preferred stop location, that arterial and collector roadways are a preferred travel path, and that the stop location is centrally located, safe, sustainable and stable. (K. Hehn 429-8585)

TRUSTEE REQUEST #92, APRIL 15, 2008 (TRUSTEE HUFF) DEVELOP A REPORT ON THE PROS AND CONS AND THE COST IMPLICATIONS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE BOARD: Students are the primary recipients of programming and services in Edmonton Public Schools. They are one of our most important stakeholder groups, and their insights provide critical information to assist schools and the district to develop policy and shape

practice. While the district has limited experience in organizing student consultations with the Board of Trustees, school staff members routinely consult with groups of students on many issues, providing for student input to areas such as academics, programming and school-based activities.

With respect to student consultations with the Board, the administration established standing student advisory committees from 1997 to 2001. There were cost implications; specifically, the model required dedicated planning and organizational time from professional and support staff, as well as supplies and equipment to support the meetings. There were recurring costs associated with the transportation of students as well. Approximately twice each year for four years, student representatives met with the Superintendent and the Board Chair, to provide advice and input to a variety of topics. However, by the end of the fourth year, both the student representatives and their school principals asked the administration to re-think the practice of having a standing student advisory committee. Student participants overwhelmingly indicated that their course loads at school, as well as after school commitments including homework, jobs, sports, and club activities precluded their participation in meetings of this nature. The administration was also told that meetings arranged at the Centre for Education were both time consuming and inconvenient to attend. These views were reinforced by principals, who indicated that parents expressed concern about time taken from school and extracurricular activities to attend the meetings.

Based on these recommendations, the format of student advisory meetings was amended. Since the fall of 2001, student advisories have been convened only at the request of the board or the superintendent for specific topics considered to be of high importance, for example, provision of input to the work of the provincial Education Commission or the development of district priorities. Student advisory activities have also been aligned with plans for broader, inclusive consultations with parents, as well as community and business groups.

Edmonton Public Schools recognizes the importance of obtaining the viewpoints of all stakeholders in public education, including students. *The Framework for Stakeholder Engagement* currently being developed for the Board's consideration will provide a range of strategies for consulting with all education stakeholders, including students. In the meantime, alternative mechanisms for trustees to meet and discuss issues with students could include:

- school-based meetings with representatives of student councils or graduation classes
- school-based meetings with student focus groups to provide input to items such as the Three Year Plan
- interviews with groups of students at the junior and senior high school levels regarding their educational experiences to date, for example at-risk or Aboriginal students.

(A. Calverley, 429-8358)

TRUSTEE REQUEST #95, APRIL 29, 2008 (TRUSTEE FLEMING) CLARIFY THE NOTE ON PAGE 5 OF THE MID-TERM REPORT **THE 5 STAFF WHO WERE SECONDED TO EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN FEBRUARY 2007 WERE EXEMPT THERAPISTS. THEY ARE NOT HERE IN 2008. PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE IMPACT TO THE DISTRICT WITH THE LOSS OF THESE THERAPISTS GIVEN THE DISTRICT'S SHORTAGE OF THERAPISTS.* In 2000-2001, the principal coordinator of the City Centre Education Project (CCEP) arranged to second family therapists from the Family Centre to support the work of the CCEP schools. That service continued on a secondment basis through the 2006-2007 school year. For 2007-2008, the services of family therapists are purchased by district schools from the Family Centre through a fee-for-service agreement rather than a secondment contract. There is no relationship between family therapists and challenges related to the recruitment of occupational therapists or physical therapists. (V. Lastiwka, 429-8088)

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