

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 9, 2000

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dossdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making

ORIGINATOR: Angus McBeath, Department Head School and District Services

RESOURCE

STAFF: Karen Beaton, Mary-Ellen Deising, Avi Habinski, Allan Jack, Catherine LeBlanc, Peter McNab, Faye Parker

INFORMATION

The current collective agreement between Edmonton Public Schools and the Alberta Teachers' Association contains a letter of understanding which reads as follows: "The parties agree to establish a committee consisting of four representatives of the Board and four representatives of the Association to draft a framework for the involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process within site-based decision making. The committee will ensure the appropriate involvement of stakeholders in preparing the draft framework."

From the perspective of the ATA, the issue that prompted the creation of the letter of understanding was that teachers had expressed concern that their level of involvement in decision making seemed to be significantly different from school to school, and they were looking for guidelines regarding what could be expected. From the district's perspective, there is a long-standing expectation that staff, parents and other stakeholders will have opportunities to be involved in decisions that affect them as well as in developing school plans and budgets. Therefore, both parties saw an advantage to be realized from the development of a framework for involvement in decision making.

As a result, a committee was created consisting of Peter McNab, Karen Beaton, Allan Jack and Catherine LeBlanc on behalf of the Association and Faye Parker, Angus McBeath, Mary-Ellen Deising and Avi Habinski on behalf of the district.

The committee has now completed its work, and the superintendent has approved the resulting framework (Attachment I) for use in the district. As part of the implementation process, it will be included in the budget manual and other relevant district documents. The document also includes a number of recommendations regarding professional development related to involvement in decision-making. These will be followed up and implementation plans put in place over the next several months.

The key sections of the framework are the guidelines for involvement in decision making, the 'misconceptions and responses' section, and the recommendations regarding professional development. The document also provides an overview of input received and some examples of successful experiences with involvement, as well as support documents from the district, the ATA and Alberta Learning.

The framework has been reviewed and supported by superintendent's council and by vertical groups. The Local's Executive and Council of School representatives have unanimously endorsed it. The Local has also sent a letter to the superintendent indicating support for the document and for the recommendations regarding professional development.

### **Process**

The committee believed that, in order to create guidelines with respect to involvement in decision making, it was necessary to determine what various stakeholder groups considered to be the important aspects of such involvement. Because the letter of understanding specified that stakeholders were to be involved in the preparation of the framework, the committee decided to obtain input from teachers, principals and parents, as well as support, maintenance, custodial and exempt staff groups. Focus group sessions were organized with each of these groups. Participants responded to a series of open-ended questions designed to obtain their views regarding the nature of genuine involvement, the things they wanted to be involved in, and the processes and conditions that encourage genuine involvement and help people feel they have been heard and their input considered. In addition, through the Local's mailing councillors, all school staffs had the opportunity to respond to similar questions, and their written input was analyzed along with the focus group results. There were strong similarities among all groups with respect to the characteristics of genuine involvement and the working environment that fosters it.

### **Highlights of the Input Received**

Some of the key messages that emerged from the focus groups were:

- Involvement means having the opportunity to make or influence decisions in a variety of ways.
- Feedback regarding the decision that is made and the rationale for it are critical to making people feel they have been involved in a process.
- Individuals want to be involved in decisions that affect them and their work.
- Token involvement is always recognized and never appreciated. People unanimously said that, if a decision has already been made, there should not be an attempt to manipulate people into agreement under the guise of involvement.
- A person's decision not to be involved should be respected.
- People have a responsibility to take opportunities for involvement, and, once a decision has been made, have a responsibility to behave in a professional and supportive manner.

### **Highlights of the Guidelines**

The guidelines are intended as an aid to decision-makers as they consider whom to involve in which kinds of decisions and what kinds of processes to use. Some key points are:

- There is a particular kind of environment that fosters involvement in decision making. It is the responsibility of every principal or manager to strive to create such an environment in the work place.
- Effective involvement improves support for decisions.
- There is a skill set involved in being able to create the environment and the processes for effective involvement in decision making. Like other skill sets, it can be learned.
- Processes need to be designed to suit the participants and the situation.
- One should consider both stake and expertise in determining whom to involve.
- Stakeholders as well as decision makers have a responsibility to help create the conditions and environment for involvement.

### **Conclusion**

The work has been a very positive and productive experience, and the committee is confident that the framework, in combination with the continued commitment of the district and the Local to work towards implementation of the recommendations, can make a significant positive difference in the district.

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ATTACHMENT - Framework for Involvement in Site-Based Decision Making