

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 16, 2010

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Responses to Board Requests for Information

ORIGINATOR: D. Fraser, Executive Director, Corporate Services
T. Parker, Assistant Superintendent, Student Learning Services

RESOURCE
STAFF: Deborah Brandell, Glenn Johnson

INFORMATION

BOARD REQUEST #2 NOVEMBER 2, 2010, PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE SAFETY OF WiFi INSTALLATIONS IN SCHOOLS: Providing a safe learning environment continues to be a priority. The District is following the guidelines of the World Health Organization, Health Canada and Alberta Education. These guidelines indicate that there is no convincing scientific evidence that the weak radiofrequency (RF) signals from base stations and wireless networks cause adverse health effects. The District relies on the expertise of Health Canada and the World Health Organization, who continue to monitor emerging research on the safety of electromagnetic field (EMF) radiation, and recently reaffirmed their position on the safety of wireless networks.

There are over 120 district schools with wireless network access available, with some in place for as long as 5 years. The relatively weak RF signal strength of the wireless networks implemented in the District operates at thousands of times lower than the safety guideline allowed in Canada. By comparison, a typical cell phone user is exposed to thousands of times more RF radiation than a wireless network emits.

Further information on wireless networks is available in the District Technology handbook available at: <https://sites.google.com/a/share.epsb.ca/wireless-handbook/Home/wireless-and-saf>

Specific fact sheets can be referenced directly at the following:

- World Health Organization
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs304/en/index.html>
- Canada Health
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/radiation/wireless_safe-securit_sansfil-eng.php
- Alberta Education
<http://education.alberta.ca/media/5916207/wifi%20safety%20sheet%202010-10-18.pdf>

BOARD REQUEST #3 NOVEMBER 2, 2010, PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING IN THE DISTRICT WITH RESPECT TO SPECIAL NEEDS: Currently, the District central review committee is looking at the reorganization of Student Learning Services. There is a possibility that Special Education support programs could be delivered differently after the review is completed. The attached report (Attachment 1) "*Plan for Special Education 2010-2011*" was provided to the Board on May 25, 2010. This report is the latest information available with respect to the *Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta* initiative.

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ATTACHMENT 1: Plan for Special Education 2010-2011

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 25, 2010

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Plan for Special Education 2010-2011

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Deborah Brandell, Gloria Chalmers, John Edey, Monica Ellis, Shelly Jobagy, Colleen McClure, Colleen McClure, Belina Pasula, Heather Raymond, Jan Small-McGinley

INFORMATION

Background

This report is provided as a follow-up to the special education plan presented to board in May 2009 as a response to Phases 1 and 2 of the province's *Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta* initiative. This report summarizes the progress of the year one implementation of the special education plan and outlines the continued and new actions for implementation in year two. Brief descriptions of the projects and new initiatives, based on new provincial information and input from parents, community members, district staff and students are identified in the special education plan, attached in Appendix I.

Year One Highlights

Consultations

A key action in the 2009-2010 plan was to establish advisory groups that would inform district direction in implementing recommendations from Alberta Education's *Setting the Direction*. This action involved meeting with students, staff and parents to collect data that would inform our work as we move forward in meeting the needs of a diverse student population in all school settings. Staff from Programs, Consulting Services and the Superintendent's area met with parents and community members in October 2009 for a morning of information gathering around three questions: What is working well, what isn't working and what would be your best advice for us? A similar process was used with district staff and students.

Key themes identified from the consultations were the need for:

- coordination of information about programming and supports
- timely communication between parents and the learning team supporting a student
- effective processes to mediate conflict and provide support to families
- improved access to supports and resources
- standards for programming in inclusive and congregated sites

- support for the social-emotional development of students with special needs
- a multidisciplinary team model of support
- increased staff expertise and capacity to support students with special needs
- improved training for preservice teachers in such areas as differentiated instruction, adapting the curriculum, diversity and classroom management
- increased use of adaptive technology to support diverse learners

Feedback was vetted by all consultation participants, and then shared with a parent/community advisory group on March 4, 2010. This advisory group reviewed the district plan for special education and a summary of the consultation feedback. Additionally, advice around district communication was requested. Participants identified the need for accessible information, ongoing communication with all members of the support team working with the student, as well as ways of contacting district staff for teaching and learning support.

Inclusive Education

A second key initiative was the expansion of the Inclusive Education Pilot. Currently, this pilot supports development of inclusive education practices in 16 district schools. In five of the Inclusive Education pilot schools, the District is using a cross department service model that includes consultants from Kindergarten Inclusive Developmental Services (KIDS), Edmonton Regional Educational Consulting Services (ERECS), Special Education Support Teams (SEST), and Teaching and Learning Support Services (TLSS) in a multidisciplinary approach. Key learnings from the Inclusive Education Pilot have been compiled and will be shared throughout the District to support building staff capacity. Other District work in support of inclusion, such as the Inclusion Working Group and KIDS, will be discussed in the Inclusion of Students with Special Education Needs board report scheduled to come to board on June 15, 2010.

Community Partnerships

Initiatives have also been undertaken with other organizations to build our capacity to serve students. Working in partnership with the Joint Action Committee for Children (JACC), parents, schools and central services staff are receiving training through a team-based model of professional development for supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Through a partnership with the University of Alberta (U of A), work on the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) research intervention project continues. Data from parents, staff and caregivers is being collected to develop a collaborative tool for integrating school-driven interventions for children identified with FASD. Initial results of this research project have been presented at three conferences.

Early Years

Finally, the Early Years website was developed to support parents of young children. Grounded in the District's new Early Years policy, the website provides parents, staff, and community partners with information about the variety of early years learning opportunities to assist families to make informed choices about their child's first learning experiences.

Second Year Initiatives

Based on input collected from year one and progress on initiatives, the following actions are planned for year two:

- support implementation of programming standards for learners with special education needs
- continue cross-department service model and share learnings with district staff
- continue to collaborate with community partners and district staff to build our capacity to provide inclusion as a fully supported choice for students
- work with district staff to provide parent and student friendly information that supports transitions and helps families investigate learning opportunities for their child
- develop capacity in the use of assistive technology to support student learning
- continue to advocate for improved pre-service training of teachers and support staff
- create an accessible website that provides information on supporting diverse learners, in areas such as access to supports and resources, and advocacy and mediation services

These initiatives are consistent with our current understanding of the provincial *Setting the Direction* framework.

Next Steps

The Special Education Plan for 2010–2011 has been updated as indicated above and in Appendix I. As additional information regarding *Setting the Direction* becomes available, the plan will be reviewed and amended as required. A meeting with representatives from Alberta Education Special Education Branch has been scheduled for June 14, 2010, to update parents and community members on *Setting the Direction*.

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APPENDIX I: Plan for Special Education Year One Status and Year Two Plan

Plan for Special Education Year One Status and Year Two Plan

APPENDIX I

2009-2010 Actions	Year One Status	Year Two Plan
Parent/Staff Collaboration		
Establish parent advisory group to provide input to district direction in implementing <i>Setting the Direction</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input gathered through parent and community session on October 24, 2009 Parent advisory group met March 4, 2010 to review compilation of data gathered through consultations, and provide input into newly identified area of communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue meeting with advisory group. Continue to inform and involve, as appropriate, parents and community from October 2009 session.
Establish staff advisory group to support implementation of the provincial <i>Setting the Direction</i> philosophy and related actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input gathered through consultations with central staff, principals, teachers and educational assistants throughout November and December 2009 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an advisory group to advise the identified action steps resulting from the key points.
Create a demonstration pilot to explore a cross-department service model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KIDS, SEST, ERECS and TLSS have been working collaboratively within the Inclusion Pilot. Work with students has been strengthened by sharing expertise and collaborating. Professional capacity has been improved as well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue the cross-department service model with the same schools next year to support students in inclusive settings. Share learnings with district staff. Provide monthly collaborative service t4am visits in 15 schools across the District at no cost to schools.
Share information learned from collaborative district initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Way In, STAR (Strength, Tolerance, Attitude and Resilience) Program and City Centre Education Partnership (CCEP) are included in the provincial wraparound research project. The STAR Program was featured at the Linkages Committee Fall symposium. On-site coaching provided for secondary students with FASD through the Wellness, Resiliency and Partnerships Program (WRAP). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share the results of the wraparound research as they become available. Inform schools of support materials created as a result of the research work.

2009-2010 Actions	Year One Status	Year Two Plan
Building Staff Capacity		
Professional development in positive behaviour supports for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team-based training model started in April 2010 in partnership with JACC. • The teams include parents, school staff, and consultants in the training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue training staff in partnership with JACC • Provide professional learning opportunities that support teaching for diverse needs in inclusive settings.
Provision of financial support for special education courses in conjunction with Human Resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eighteen staff members received support for university courses offered in supporting students with special needs in inclusive settings, students with autism spectrum disorder, and positive behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue supporting university coursework, including financial support for educational assistants.

2009-2010 Actions	Year One Status	Year Two Plan
Curriculum and Programming		
Establish staff, parent advisory committee to support the implementation of Knowledge and Employability (K&E) curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource Development Services has been working with teacher advisory groups to develop resources entitled K&E Works for the core subjects at the junior high level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High school advisory group to be coordinated to develop resources at the high school level.
Investigate the variables and trends of special needs coding, placements, programming, and achievement in relation to Aboriginal, immigrant and refugee students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examined the impact on achievement as the result of having more students with special education needs writing Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) There was an increase in achievement in the District on PATs, associated with increased participation of students with special needs. Investigated trends in the percentage of Aboriginal students identified with special needs over the last three years. November 10, 2009 Board Report highlighted progress of the key directives in the Aboriginal Education Policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to support participation in PATs for students with special needs. Explore the achievement of immigrant students in schools with high social vulnerability. Gather base-line data to investigate the impact of the transition program on immigrant and refugee students with gaps in learning.
Continue the inclusion pilot.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of schools participating has increased from six in the first year to 16 this year. Principals and lead teachers have met on an ongoing basis for professional learning and discussion around inclusive practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the number of schools involved in the pilot. Identify key learnings to share with district schools and inform district work related to the co-ordination and integration of central services. Combine ERECS and SEST support into a unified service.

2009-2010 Actions	Year One Status	Year Two Plan
Continue implementation of the Early Education, Learning Disabilities, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing reviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established working groups to support the implementation of Phase 2 recommendations from the Early Education review Meetings with school leadership to build understanding and awareness of recommendations from the reviews of Learning Disabilities and Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Vision Centre North established at Newton School. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working groups will continue to meet and provide input to support the implementation of the Early Education recommendations. Targeted support for school staff in programming for students with special educational needs, including positive behaviour supports and differentiation within the literacy framework.
Pilot Firm Foundations (Phonemic Awareness Program) for Kindergarten in schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot started September 2009 with nine schools participating. Consultant support provided through a Consulting Services pilot. External partner group and internal planning support groups working together to support the pilot. Partners involved are Programs, Consulting Services, English Language Support Services Centre (ELSSC), and the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff will continue to use Firm Foundations to support students in the pilot schools. Data gathered from first year of pilot will be used to inform programming decisions.
Assessment		
Investigate how cultural background impacts identification of students with special needs. Explore ways of involving parents and cultural groups in decision making and addressing this issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An internal working committee with representatives from Budget Services, Consulting Services (ELLSC, Field Services) and Programs (Aboriginal Education, Special Education and Multicultural Education) met regularly to review research and created a working plan for developing supports for schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share support document and gather feedback from schools and community partners. Develop a partnership with Calgary Board of Education to share expertise.

2009-2010 Actions	Year One Status	Year Two Plan
Research and Collaboration		
FASD research intervention project exploring the effectiveness of strategies to support students with FASD.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed 14 focus groups representing teachers, educational assistants, school leadership, and caregivers. Results have been shared with the U of A, Alberta and national FASD conferences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and pilot a collaborative tool for integrating effective school-driven interventions. Promote a learning team approach to supporting students with FASD.
Involvement in, and Banker for, provincial wraparound research project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve as Banker and on the steering and research committees for the initiative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share the literature review, case study report and the survey results as they become available.
Technology		
Pilot use of laptops with students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explored how to integrate the use of laptops into daily instruction with one district high school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot continuing with a focus on supporting students in the writing process. Data will be collected to inform practice within the pilot and share information with other district schools.
Promotion of assistive technology use for students with special needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A template for selecting appropriate assistive technologies was included in the Individual Program Plan (IPP) Guidebook. Collaboration with TLSS on the use of assistive technologies, and promotion of these technologies at meetings with school leadership staff. Low and mid tech assistive technology is available through ERECS and SEST. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to provide assistive technology support to all students.

2009-2010 Actions	Year One Status	Year Two Plan
Advocacy		
Continue to advocate and collaborate for all students with special needs in relation to programming, transportation, and staff capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with school and central leadership staff to support programming for students with special educational needs. (i.e., High School Special Needs Coordinators, Special Education Inter-departmental Committee, Special Education Principals Committee) • Continue developing documents to support staff in programming for diverse needs, such as IPP Guidebook and Key Contact Guide • Participated in the district transportation review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue meetings with school leadership staff. • Continue to develop documents and provide advice and assistance to consultants working in schools.
Advocate regarding pre-service training of teachers and support staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Met with representatives from Alberta Education Special Education branch about pre-service training needs. • Provided input to senior management of Teacher Development and Certification branch for the provincial review of the Teacher Quality Standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to advocate.
Communication – New for 2010-2011		
Develop a website that is easy to navigate for parents and staff to find information on supporting students with special educational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and parents identified frustration with access to information through the consultation process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build website that showcases information requested from the consultations with parents, staff and students. • Include information on conflict resolution procedures and key contacts for teaching and learning support. • Work with advisory groups to field test the website.

2009-2010 Actions	Year One Status	Year Two Plan
Promote the building of effective learning teams to support students with special educational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and staff identified the need to have stronger involvement in the learning team as a result of the consultation process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support to key contacts and lead teachers in schools on working with IPPs and learning teams. Continue working within pilots to build cross-departmental collaboration. Involve parents in the creation of a resource to support them as meaningful members of the learning team at the school.