

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 24, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Responses to Board Requests for Information

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent
J. Bidulock, Assistant Superintendent
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RESOURCE

STAFF: Gloria Chalmers, John Edey, Sandy Forster, John Macnab, David Piercey, Elisa Rawe, Chris Wright, Stephen Wright

INFORMATION

BOARD REQUEST #238, OCTOBER 13, 2009, FURTHER TO RESPONSE TO BOARD REQUEST #206 PROVIDE EXAMPLES REGARDING THE PRACTICES OF OTHER DISTRICTS REGARDING STUDENT VOLUNTEERISM (EITHER MANDATORY OR OTHERWISE) Nine school districts were successfully contacted by telephone to determine the sort of practices being used by these other boards to promote student volunteerism. Eight districts indicated that while they had no official policy or administrative regulation to ensure all schools included a student volunteerism component within school practice, they all nevertheless encouraged such practices in their schools. Their practices are reportedly much the same as those utilized in our district schools (and as surveyed in response to Board Request #206), and are at school discretion.

The ninth district, Parkland School Division, indicated that it has, as one of its three district priorities “*improved student performance in demonstrating skills of Citizenship and Social Responsibility for all students Kindergarten through Grade 12*”. In implementing this district priority, first introduced in September 2006, the district has developed “Standards for Citizenship and Social Responsibility K-9” (Grades 10-12 are currently being developed), in which citizenship and social responsibility is taught and promoted. Schools may address the priority in many different ways, but measure and report each student’s growth against four expectations – how well each student demonstrates respect and integrity; shows empathy and compassion; practices independence and cooperation; and demonstrates responsibility. Student volunteerism is one of several “observable skills” that may be used to indicate success for Grades 5-9 students within their empathy and compassion domain.

BOARD REQUEST #239, OCTOBER 13, 2009, PROVIDE A STATUS REPORT REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION: PROGRESS ON REDUCING RIDE TIMES; PROGRESS ON DRIVER TRAINING TO MEET STUDENT NEEDS; AND ADDRESSING LOST INSTRUCTIONAL TIME DUE TO EXCESSIVE RIDE TIMES: Student Transportation began collecting and analyzing ride time reports from special needs carriers immediately following the September start-up.

Requests for updated ride time reports have continued, with the latest report for November demonstrating considerable improvement.

Since the initial ride time reports in September, approximately 400 special needs students have seen their ride times improve and another 300 new students have been added to the carriers' routes. As of November 9, 2009 approximately 240 out of the 2,407 students receiving special needs transportation still require further improvement in order to be within the contractual allowances for ride times of:

- Under 60 minutes for in-zone transportation, and
- Under 80 minutes for out-of-zone transportation (students attend programs outside their home zone by choice or by designation)

In order to accommodate the additional students and reduce all ride times, the carriers have added a combined seven routes since the beginning of the year, with another five routes planned for late November once drivers complete their initial training and ride-alongs.

Student Transportation will continue to work diligently with the carriers, schools, and parents to:

- Confirm that the information captured in ride time reports is accurate
- Apply additional resources where possible to further reduce ride times
- Mitigate, to every extent possible, the challenges created in isolated instances where ride times will remain longer than the contractual parameters

Pertaining to special needs training currently in place for drivers, both carriers have standard training that includes measures such as wheelchair training, non-violent crisis intervention concepts, and pre-employment ride-alongs with more experienced staff. Carriers, in collaboration with Student Transportation, will continue to augment and formalize the training provided through the addition of new material and resources.

All scheduled ride times are designed to have students arrive at school on time and ready to participate in a full instructional day. Any deviations that result in late arrivals are identified through continuing dialogue with schools, carriers, and use of the late bus website. Student Transportation continues to adhere to a zero-tolerance policy for missed instructional time and is prepared to pursue sanctions against carriers that do not demonstrate the ability to remedy instances of non-performance. Given that schools are required to provide a full instructional day to all students, Student Transportation will work to further improve carrier accountability during 2009-2010 as indicated in the recent Results Review.

BOARD REQUEST #244, OCTOBER 27, 2009: PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING PARTNERSHIPS AND OPPORTUNITIES WITH POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS THAT ENABLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO GET CREDIT AT POST-SECONDARY AND/OR EARN CERTIFICATES ENABLING THEM TO WORK. Opportunities that support students' transition to post-secondary and the world of work vary in type and benefit to students. The following highlights some of the opportunities available from other districts.

Students at Morinville High School may take a dual credentialing program in Graphic Sign Arts that provides the student with high school Career and Technology Studies (CTS) credit and a portion of the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) course. The District is monitoring the development of this program through NAIT's Special Projects department.

Students in Calgary may enrol in a high school Pharmacy Technician program which provides dual credit with Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) recognizing the high school CTS credits. Edmonton Public Schools has only had initial discussions regarding the expansion of this program to Edmonton, and will wait until the new Health Care curriculum is released for September 2010 before considering implementation.

Calgary Board of Education has created a locally developed course, Pre-Engineering 15-25-35, with recognition at the University of Calgary for entrance into the Faculty of Engineering. Edmonton Public Schools will be piloting this course in semester two of this school year and may seek similar recognition.

The Oil and Gas Production Field Operator (PFO) Program is for high school students to earn high school credits and field experience through four-to-five week paid internships with local employers as well as certification from Northern Lakes College and SAIT. This program is supported by Careers the Next Generation in Wabasca and in south eastern Alberta.

Olds College has built shared facilities to enable high school classes to locate within the college campus. A similar arrangement exists at Red Deer College, where a lab is used for a welding apprenticeship program in the morning and then by high school Fabrication Studies students in the afternoon. Although designed for increased utilization of specific learning spaces, both colleges and appropriate school districts are working on articulating their programs to provide seamless transition opportunities for students.

BOARD REQUEST #245, OCTOBER 27, 2009, PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING WHAT EVIDENCE WE HAVE THAT PROGRAMS OF CHOICE OR ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS INCREASE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS. The effect of programs of choice or alternative programs upon the achievement of all students, including those not enrolled in such programs, cannot be measured rigorously. Such a measurement would require a comparison to a similar school district with no alternative programs, or to Edmonton Public Schools (EPS) at a time when other factors were similar, but alternative programs were not offered. No such comparison is possible. However, a diversity of relevant information, illuminating this issue from several perspectives, suggests that EPS' alternative programs do enhance system-wide achievement.

The District's support for programs of choice, as stated in the *Foundational Purpose/Belief Statement for Alternative Programs (1974)*, is that a "major purpose of alternative education is to broaden the range of program offerings in order to enhance the capacity of the school system to meet the educational needs of individual students." The fundamental presumptions are that individual students differ in their interests and learning styles, that no single program is optimal for all students, that students and parents understand their particular needs, and that they will choose those programs in which they are most likely to succeed. The Board formally approves the establishment of each alternative program offered in the District.

Research plus student and parent feedback indicate that when the interests and educational beliefs of students and parents are aligned with those of the teachers and the schools which the student attends, student engagement is enhanced and impacts retention and achievement. Alternative programs, by increasing such alignment, are believed to enhance the District's retention of students who otherwise might leave EPS to enrol in another district, in a private or charter school, or in home schooling. The erosion of student population from public education is regrettable. And, because those who leave one jurisdiction for alternatives

offered elsewhere tend to be high-achieving students, such a shift in student mix would diminish a district's overall achievement. The Calgary School Board, for example, responded to the drift to charter and private schools by expanding its choice options.

Retaining more students by offering alternative program may or may not raise the District's average achievement test-scores but may increase the number of students graduating or achieving a higher level of education - a benefit in itself.

Within EPS, programs of choice are offered in each of the five categories identified in the *School Act*: Language Alternatives, Culture Alternatives, Faith-based Alternatives, Subject Matter Alternatives, and Teaching Philosophy Alternatives. Overall, students in alternative programs achieve well. Among 20 comparisons of Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) and Highest Level of Achievement Tests (HLATs) in all categories, student achievement levels exceeded district averages in 19 comparisons, and were mixed in only one comparison. However, choice, by definition, precludes randomly assigning students among programs; thus, the mix of students differs among different programs or schools. So, the levels of achievement cannot be conclusively attributed to the impact of alternative programming.

The participation rate of 25 per cent in Alternative programs, in itself, indicates a high level of support for alternatives among students and parents. Satisfaction results provide an additional measure of support. The percentage of parents who are satisfied with the opportunity for students to receive a broad program of study in EPS has, for several years, been higher than the figure for the province as a whole. Parental satisfaction with available programs and courses is very high, and has been for some time. Parental satisfaction with involvement in school decisions also is higher for the District than for the province as a whole. We continually hear from parents that choice has made a positive difference to their children's interest, attendance and achievement in school.

Choice in the District extends far beyond just the 25 per cent of students enrolled in alternative programs. Many families and students exercise their choices to attend other programs for reasons of location, size, reputation, childcare, special education or to be with siblings or friends. Thus, although 75 per cent of students are not in alternative programs, 100 per cent of EPS students learn in a choice environment where they can maximize their opportunities for success.