

DATE: October 25, 2011

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Africa Centre Parent Information Sessions (Information – Response to Trustee Request #120)

ORIGINATOR: David Fraser, Executive Director, Corporate Services

RESOURCE STAFF: Karen Bardy, Janice Bell, Patrick Johner, Nancy Petersen

REFERENCE: September 27, 2011 Board Meeting (Trustee Cleary)

ISSUE

The following information was requested: provide a brief report summarizing feedback received at the community engagement sessions held last October 2010 and June 2011 at the Africa Centre. Include highlights of issues raised, lessons learned, follow-up conducted and next steps.

BACKGROUND

In 2010-2011, in an effort to reach and engage more families through the District's Partners in Education events, Communications worked with district staff, Big Brothers Big Sisters and members of the Africa Centre to co-host and organize two parent information sessions at the Africa Centre. The Africa Centre is a non-profit organization that supports African immigrants new to Edmonton by creating a welcoming environment; encouraging participation in civic opportunities; and developing and coordinating programs and services in response to identified needs.

The two information sessions co-hosted by the District were held in October 2010 and June 2011. They were intended to achieve the following goals:

- To share information about the education system with parents and members of the Africa Centre community.
- To build relationships between parents and community members, and district staff.
- To increase the awareness of district staff about the needs of students and families served through the Africa Centre.

District staff were in attendance at both sessions to provide educational information to parents, students and community members. In attendance at the October session were: Karen Bardy of Programs; Linda Sui and Habiba Shurie of English Language Support Services Centre, Nancy Petersen, a district Principal; and Meheret Worku and Denise Pridmore, teachers in the district. In June the same staff were in attendance with the exception of Nancy Petersen who did not attend and Elisa Rawe from Programs who did attend. Janice Bell, from Communications, was at both events to host, organize and assist in the facilitation of the events. In June Janice was assisted by Patti Didine, also from Communications.

The October session profiled student guest speakers and district staff then acted as a panel to provide information to parents about education and Edmonton Public Schools. The June session was structured with guest speakers and district staff sat at tables amongst the participants to support the ensuing table discussion. There was no official record of the discussion from the October event; a summary of the June event was recorded. This summary reflects a developing understanding around the following areas:

- Support in schools for students who are struggling.
- Strategies to assist students who are English Language Learners, including assessment that differentiates between language and cognition; provision of programming that responds to the language needs of the student; and mentoring programs for students.
- Communication between schools and parents who are new to Edmonton and Canada, including information about program and course choices in the District.
- Supports for transition of students from elementary to junior high to high school.
- Increased diversity of teaching staff in district schools.
- Collaboration with community partners to assist in supporting the educational awareness of parents.

CURRENT SITUATION

As follow-up, the June written summary of discussion was sent out electronically to district staff who had participated in the event, trustees who were in attendance and event participants who signed up to receive an electronic record of the event. This record was sent out by Communications to the above identified stakeholders on July 22, 2011. In terms of next steps, District staff from Student Learning Services – Diversity and Policy and Partnership Frameworks will be meeting with representatives of the Africa Centre to explore other opportunities of working together in support of students and families.

KEY POINTS

- The information sessions achieved the goals of sharing information, increasing awareness, and building relationships.
- The information sessions demonstrated the importance of exploring alternative strategies to communicate with parents.
- Reflection and feedback from the two information sessions have informed future strategies for engaging educational community stakeholders.

ATTACHMENTS AND APPENDICES

N/A

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