

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 27, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees
FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools
SUBJECT: District Response to School Act Review

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Trustees approve the Submission to the *School Act* Review (Appendix 1).

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Background

The Minister of Education has communicated to school boards across the province the intent to introduce a replacement for the current *School Act* in the spring sitting of the Legislative Assembly. The Minister has invited boards and others to provide input as this new legislation is being prepared. The Minister further indicates in an email to Boards (September 17, 2009):

The new legislation is intended to be an enabling, overarching framework for the broad governance structures of the education system. As such, I do not expect it to be prescriptive or restrictive except where deemed absolutely necessary. Many of the rules in the current legislation may properly belong in regulation, on which there will be further consultation once the new legislation is passed.

And

*These opportunities for input complement the work being done through the **Inspiring Education** process. It is essential that the new legislation aligns with the long-term vision and frameworks for policy and governance being developed through **Inspiring Education**.*

A discussion paper was provided to the Board and the Board requested further input from the staff and community to ensure that the final submission further reflected a broader base of input.

Survey Feedback

An invitation for input was extended to staff and parents through the Need to Know News, the District Website and a backpack poster was sent to all schools for distribution to parents. Twenty-six responses were reviewed and Summary Survey Comments (Appendix II) are provided. Where appropriate, in keeping with the intent of the original Discussion Paper, and the District Priorities and Mission, the key messages of the comments were incorporated. The majority of comments affirmed the key points presented in the original discussion paper. Some comments spoke to operational concerns, were contradictory or, in some instances,

polemic. Although these comments are not included in the final submission, some may bear further examination.

Emergent Topic: Charter School Concept Paper

The Deputy Minister of Education distributed a Charter School Concept Paper to a range of education stakeholders. A response to this concept paper is in development, however a comment has been added to the Establishing an Enabling Framework section.

The submission will be forwarded to the Minister of Education no later than October 30, 2009.

ES:cmm

**Submission to the School Act Review
Edmonton Public School Board
October 2009**

The Board believes that three main areas need to be included in any new provincial education legislation: 1) Defining Public Education, 2) A Focus on Success for All Students, 3) Establishing an Enabling Framework.

Defining Public Education

Alberta Education has recently increased funding to private educational institutions, straining the current understanding of what constitutes public education. What is it that Alberta Education understands the roles of private, public, separate and francophone education to be? The Edmonton Public School Board, in existence since 1881, holds firmly to principles and values that are hallmarks of its operations and believes that these values and principles must be embedded in the new Act.

Local Governance

Throughout this document it is assumed that locally elected school boards are vital to a responsive and effective education system. Local autonomy related to education and the delivery of programs belongs in the hands of school boards to ensure attention and responsiveness to the character and needs of the local community.

Access to quality education

The principle of access implies that all students are welcomed and included in schools and school districts. It also implies that school jurisdictions do all in their power to prevent any restriction of learning opportunities within the available funding.

Choice

It is understood that students learn in different ways. They receive, process and express new information and experiences in ways framed by personality, values and habit. Families also hold values about the role of education, how it is delivered, and what the outcomes of the education system should be. The new Act must provide the framework within which school jurisdictions provide a range of learning opportunities from which families and students choose the most appropriate pathway to success.

Equity

It is recognized that students come from diverse settings and backgrounds. These variable experiences mean that students come to school systems in different states of readiness to learn and participate in schooling. The education system must reduce the gaps between students with enriched and impoverished personal backgrounds.

Diversity

The new Act must recognize and value the diverse make up of students, families and staff members in the community and recognize that public schools will welcome any child

regardless of ability, ethnicity, culture, language, socio-economic status, gender, or sexual orientation and create safe, respectful learning environments for all.

Citizenship and Character Development

The role of citizenship and character development is crucial to social coherence and success. The Act should recognize the role schools and school boards play in developing young people prepared to fully participate socially, economically, and politically in their communities. The Act should also identify and provide ways for working with government departments and other agencies to enhance citizenship education.

A Focus on Success for all Students

The education system must ensure that the conditions for the success of all students are established and met. The following elements must be addressed:

- Ensure that the new Act is primarily focused on students and their success
- Consider both lowering the entry and increasing the exit compulsory age for schooling (i.e., make Kindergarten compulsory, increase compulsory age from 16 to 18)
- Ensure cross-ministry support for integrated services that sustain students and families (including early education services, mental health and health supports, child welfare, justice services, etc.)
- Ensure compulsory second language programs beginning as early as possible so that these students may be able to participate in the global knowledge community
- Recognize that students require flexible programs that are not bound strictly by time (i.e., students may advance their programs as they are able, or they may need longer to complete programs of study)
- Define levels of student success
- Ensure parental partnership and involvement in the education process
- Enable cross-ministry and inter-agency partnerships to address needs of the whole child and the family in support of educational success

Establishing an Enabling Framework

The new Act should address the following areas:

- Provide “natural person powers” to all school jurisdictions (This means that a board could undertake any initiative unless there is a prohibition against it in a new Act, currently boards are only allowed to do what is defined within the *School Act* and nothing more.)
- Establish enabling framework, rather than highly restrictive or prescriptive provisions (create substantial outcomes and allow school jurisdictions flexibility in achieving those outcomes)
- Define the roles, rights and responsibilities for:
 - Students
 - Parents / guardians
 - Teachers
 - Principals
 - Secretary – Treasurers
 - Superintendents

- Trustees
- Alberta Education
- Financial flexibility related to borrowing for specific projects and revenue generating mechanisms (tax levy, sale of assets and services, other sources of revenue, etc.)
- Flexibility for local decision-making (i.e., locally developed courses and programs)
- Responsibility and accountability for results
- Allow for greater flexibility in the school calendar (e.g., August to May school year)
- The new Act should replace the highly regulatory sections with overarching outcome statements. These sections would be addressed through a system of regulations as determined by Alberta Education.
- School jurisdictions should be enabled to create charters or partnerships with other jurisdictions, government departments and agencies to enhance innovation and creativity for educational opportunities for students.
- Make the values and principles for government decision-making explicit

Summary of Survey Comments

What necessary values and principles must be reflected in a new School Act?
Student right to be educated, even if controversial.
Passion for truth Value home education Tolerance of religious diversity Role of parents as primary educators must be valued
Acknowledge the whole child, who may need external support
Examine long held values and beliefs and change practices to meet current needs.
Multiculturalism, democratic values Empower parents to participate in system Public education is valuable and asset builder in province
Acknowledge different ways of learning and assessing students
Education for all. Meet international standards Address global issues
Include creation science
Mandatory French to grade nine
Agree with Discussion Paper
Greater emphasis on Canadian history, literature, values Comparative studies of other countries also important
Honesty, integrity, truth
Enshrine diversity Protect human rights
Parental choice in education Full funding for home education students (comparable to regular student funding)
Allow home education Respect religion Responsibility Encourage parental involvement
Educate for students' sakes, not for interests of educators
Parent choice
Value every culture (diversity)
Understand and value history of Aboriginal peoples of North America (FNMI) and their place in Canada
Class size cap to achieve individual attention
Incorporate values or principle based education
Appropriate time for consideration prior to legislative change
Access to education

What responsibilities for education must be retained by School Boards?
Educate all for a diverse society
Accountability of schools
Flexibility as long as students are educated
Local control
Empowerment of parents
Empower teachers to make instructional choices
Keep community schools open
Community participation
High standards of learning
Address global issues
Allow religious belief and opting in and out of classes
Diverse programs
Greater decision-making power
Critical thinking
Verbal reports
Engage students productively
Responsible fiscal management
Alternative education programs
School boards should be abolished
Authority should be transferred to schools and parents in the community
Accountability to ensure that all students are taught the curriculum
Authority should remain the same
Teacher autonomy related to teaching the curriculum
Authority remains the same, but teachers should be hired by the government
Value all students and their learning
What should the Edmonton Public School Board consider in its submission to the Minister of Education related to a new School Act?
Student right to decide about what they learn
Improve supports for students experiencing difficulty
Inform parents about progress
Educate don't herd
New school year structure (summer of June-July, Diploma exams prior to Christmas)
Government representatives should reflect the values of their constituents
Reflect local values
Allow Boards to be more responsive to issues
Emphasize global understanding and issues
Ensure proper basic education
Eliminate teaching of evolution
Eliminate grade three provincial exams
Pay teachers more

Ensure appropriate instructional tools are available in all classes
Ensure that student resources are relevant
Bring back corporal punishment
Improve funding for home education
Parental autonomy in what their children learn
Process to eliminate school boards
Develop shared governance
Work with all related agencies and government departments to support children
Not enough time to consider the task
Ensure that funding supports all aspects of education
Other ideas or comments?
Coordinate work of students and allow for some activities outside of school.
Regarding financial actions of the board, a maximum limit to tax levies must be in place, limit sales of assets to protect long term, and the sales of services for other sources of revenue should be compatible with the values promoted by the school act.
Administrative requirements are difficult to navigate for parents and students. Appropriate supports for parents and students, especially FNMI students and families are not in place. Don't kick out kids who don't fit the mold.
I will submit my comments directly to my MLA or the Minister of Education.
The school system is the same as for my grandparents. It has not changed for greater efficiency and reduced stress.
To support life-long learning, anyone should be able to complete an Alberta Education certificate. Age and immigrant discrimination are supposed to be illegal.
Empower teachers and parents to teach, lead and guide students. Allow flexibility and stop expecting standardized students to produce standardized results.
Promote community schools and small classes. Focus on individuals not dollars.
Teaching evolution theory is wrong and should be stopped.
Increased funding for home education and schools.
Do not make Kindergarten compulsory. Parents are responsible for determining the readiness of their child for formal education.
Men teach boys, women teach girls.
Do not combine attitude marks with academic marks, show student's real work.
Shorter summer break
Appropriate support for alternative programs is necessary.
Education has not changed in 100 years; it needs to change now.
Children should enjoy learning, punishment should be abolished.
Look at what our children will need to become and ensure that the system supports that.
Continue Logos program
Concern about deletion of opposing points of view.
Keep students in classes until the end of June; do not stop classes early for exam schedules.

Provide appropriate supports for students and families to help overcome effects of colonization.
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Attend and participate in the Inspiring Education forums, take the opportunity to have your say in the future of education.

No grade three provincial achievement tests.
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Allow for meaningful engagement, allow enough time
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