

November 22, 2008

Quickly, two important upcoming discussions to let you about...

- 1) A very rich and interesting Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 25, and
- 2) Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta consultation begins....

For more detail on these, read on. As always I welcome your comments and feedback.

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING: Tuesday, November 25, 6 pm

The full agenda and associated reports are online at
http://www.epsb.ca/board/nov2508_agenda.shtml

For those interested in technology, read about the new TIPS team (Technology Integration Planning Services). http://www.epsb.ca/board/nov25_08/item02.pdf.

For those interested in how the district is working on managing its space in the upcoming year, the final version of the Annual Implementation Plan is coming to Board (the draft report came in June). There will be a couple of program reviews this year, and also, the piloting of a sector based approach for facing the challenges of excess space in the district, soon to be exacerbated by the opening of six new schools in 2010 and three more in 2012. http://www.epsb.ca/board/nov25_08/item04.pdf

For those interested in Aboriginal Education, find out how the Aboriginal Education Policy (passed in June 2007) and subsequent Implementation Plan is playing out and read about the highlights and lessons learned from the first year:
http://www.epsb.ca/board/nov25_08/item05.pdf

For those interested in environmental leadership and stewardship, find out about the many actions and initiatives throughout the district:
http://www.epsb.ca/board/nov25_08/item06.pdf

For those interested in Special Needs Education, see Trustee Requests #134 and #153:
http://www.epsb.ca/board/nov25_08/item07.pdf

For those interested in fiscal accountability, our financial statements for 2007-08 and Audit Committee Report are found here: http://www.epsb.ca/board/nov25_08/item09.pdf

For those interested in the overall picture of our schools and district are doing, the final version of the Annual Education Report (mentioned last time) is also coming for approval and is online, and last but not least, trustees will discuss what they heard at the recent Results Reviews they attended and possible implications for current and future planning.

RE: Results Reviews. My two cents!

I was privileged to review all schools in Ward H, except for the Blue Quill Outreach Store and New Directions, 12 schools in Millwoods, and 8 in the northwest, plus the central departments of the Superintendent's Area, Communications, and Legal Counsel; Student Information, District Records, Surveys & Information Analysis; Consulting Services, Student Achievement, Student Assessment, Leadership Services; and Programs, Archives & Museum, Bennett Centre, International Programs, and Metro Continuing Education.

I can't speak for my fellow trustees, but a few key points for me include:

- There are many success stories to celebrate, and the reasons for this success include consistency and length of time in class/school, providing small group support and/or more teacher assistant time, increasing "time on task," having kids practice their skills (reading, math) every single day in a concerted and regular way, and the talent, commitment, and skill of teachers to connect with children and engage them in learning. There is also the creative and innovative support from Central Services for the work in schools (for example, the English Languages Services Support Centre was mentioned many times).
- The quickly diversifying student population was cited over and over again. English Language Learners (ELL), "at risk" kids, special needs kids are all on the rise and provide both opportunities for growth and challenges for staff to effectively meet the needs.
- Transience presents very real problems for student success in their learning – I believe we need to think about how to better scaffold these children plus their teachers.
- In some schools, particularly in the southwest, some classes are overflowing and there is no room for expansion. The two new schools coming in 2010 will help to alleviate these conditions, but in the interim, principals and teachers are working hard to ensure all children (even in high class sizes) are getting the support they need. Some schools are using pull-out groups; others are hiring more teaching assistants; others are setting up team-teaching situations.
- The power of Reading Recovery and early intervention strategies ("Data indicates that through this type of early intervention 70% of students reading below grade level can be brought up to grade level in 16 – 18 weeks.")
- The potential impact of Consulting Services "re-inventing" itself – i.e. What would we build if we could re-build Consulting Services?
- The potential of technology to increase student excitement about learning and engagement in learning.

- In terms of broadening the measures of success beyond diploma exam results and PATs (a particular interest of mine), I was very interested to hear about the work at Crestwood School in exploring how to measure growth in learning as opposed to just achievement. New to their Junior High this year is the concept of a portfolio in which students will track an academic goal, a “passion” goal, and a goal related to the “ethic of care.” Portfolios are already in use at the K-6 level. Really interesting, and food for thought!
- From parents I heard frustrations about fundraising and the lack of equity between schools that do and those that don’t. Also, the desire for the district to realize that our children are very technologically savvy, so schools and teachers need to keep up and use this tool to enhance learning and teaching. It can be really difficult for both parents and students to go from a school where technology is used widely (including School Zone) to a school where it is not.

UNTIL DECEMBER 31: What is Your Vision for Special Education in Alberta?

In my September 20 Insights email, I informed you about the establishment of a steering committee under MLA Naresh Bhardwaj that will thoroughly examine Special Needs education in Alberta. There will be three phases to the initiative now called “Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta.”

As of this month, Phase 1 is underway. At this time the Committee is asking your thoughts about what an education community that truly meets the needs of each student ought to look like. “We want to create a fresh vision for providing those additional support services and interventions. We want the principles that should guide education policy decisions to ensure that each young person has the opportunity for success.” The Committee is holding public consultation sessions across the province, and two sessions will be held in Edmonton this coming Wednesday, November 26. You can sign up online to participate and/or you can also contribute your thoughts online at <http://education.alberta.ca/departement/ipr/settingthedirection.aspx>. You have until December 31 to contribute your thoughts online.

Phase 2 will take place in February and March 2009 and will see the Committee seeking everyone’s input on options for special education policy, accountability, and funding. The Phase 2 consultation will invite Albertans to participate through community meetings (to be once again held across Alberta) and/or through a survey on-line or in print form.

The third and final phase of the consultation takes place at a Minister’s Forum scheduled for June 8-9, 2009 in Edmonton.

FOLLOW-UP ON LAST BOARD MEETING

In response to the news about the Board’s Multicultural Task Force, I received this email from a teacher and ward resident. I believe it gives some great insight into what is happening “on the ground” in many schools.

I am very excited that there is a Task Force looking at our multi-cultural challenges. It is very difficult, in a class of 35 or so kids of varying abilities, backgrounds, etc. to add a non-English speaking child into the mix. I have proposed before, and I am sure specifically to you-----that all

students should have a minimal amount of English speaking and comprehension ability before they are integrated. This would take pressure off of the child themselves, the teacher of the "regular classroom", and the rest of the children in the class. I'm not sure how it can be handled but it is worth pursuing. Ask an ...ESL teacher ...how heart-breaking it is when these new students come to our school. They are sad, uptight, frightened, etc. etc. Is full immersion the right thing to do?

As I said at the outset, as always, if you have an idea or comment to share, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thanks!

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