

Hello all!

There is much to report on this time:

Upcoming Opportunities to Provide Insights

Public Board Meeting, Tuesday, May 26

http://www.epsb.ca/board/may2609_agenda.shtml

This will be a very rich meeting and includes

- Reports on Special Needs Education Plan for 2009-10 (including some information on FASD research and work, which one or two people have asked me about, see page 5) and an Inclusive Education update
- District work being done with community partners to provide “more time” for some kids with respect to education related activities (i.e. after school and summer programming) “More time” has been linked to increased success in schools. (Look under KIPP report, item 8.)
- Information on possible Ward H realignment for the next election (Look under Responses to Board Requests for Information, Item 15). This realignment would see the voting areas of Brander Gardens, Brookside, Bulyea Heights, Rhatigan Ridge and Ramsay Heights become part of Ward F, which is currently stewarded by Trustee Don Fleming.
- Looking at Revenues, Resources and Spending: Introduction to the Budget , our Interim Financial Statement, our Financial Reporting profile, Leasing Summary for 08-09, and Non Resident Fees for Next Year
- Honouring those people who have had a 2010 school named after them and honouring this year’s Margaret T. Stevenson Talented Young Writer Award recipient
- Understanding the School Resource Officer program better and what it contributes to our district

This list is not exhaustive! If you have thoughts to share, please send them along.

Two Key Policies: Your Input is Needed!

Visit <http://www.epsb.ca/policy/policyReviewListings.shtml> to provide input to the proposed **Multicultural Education Policy** until May 28 and on the **Early Years Policy** until June 11

Here is one comment I received with respect the Multicultural Education Policy

The policy mentions "enabling parents and families to be involved in and make informed decisions concerning their child's schooling." I wonder if some additional clarity should be placed on the question of parent input which conflicts with the multicultural education policy. For example, if a parent or group doesn't want their school holding a specified cultural celebration or ceremony, is the policy over-ruled? I would like to see our schools recognize and celebrate our community's diversity, even if such approaches are opposed by less tolerant members of our community.

I would like to see the policy emphasize the importance of recognizing minority cultures and lifestyles, even if -- especially if -- the minority is small. Students with Jewish, Buddhist, or Agnostic religious views, for example, or students who have two Moms or two Dads at home, should be supported as fully as the larger number of Christian and Muslim students in more common family arrangements.

The final look at the policy is tentatively scheduled to come to Public Board on June 9.

Trustee Budget Reviews:

You (the public!) are welcome to join the trustees in discussing the plans of schools and central departments for the upcoming school year and how the budget will be allocated to support those plans . This year all meetings will be held at the Centre for Education, One Kingsway (the blue building opposite the Royal Alex on May 27, May 28, and June 5. If you come, fantastic, and I would appreciate your presence and then, your feedback. Please be sure to introduce yourself to me. You can find the schedules here: http://www.epsb.ca/mediareleases/090520_4.shtml

Bill 44

Several people wrote to me about Bill 44 after my last Insights email. I am pasting in their comments for your reflection. This bill is tentatively scheduled to be dealt with on the evening of Tuesday, May 26 in the Legislature, so if you have a strong opinion on this subject, NOW is the time to share it with the Premier and our MLAs. The Board of Trustees has already done just that and shared our concerns on the bill with the Minister and our MLAs as have a number of other school boards from across Alberta.

Regarding Bill 44, we are opposed to any amendment that would allow parents to remove students from "controversial" subjects. This is a policy that would start with the removal of students and eventually proceed to the removal of the subject matter in order to appease a minority. Those of us with science backgrounds find this to be a step backwards. Just because a subject such as evolution (which is the cornerstone of all biology) happens to offend some parents, this does not mean it should be removed from a curriculum or that the students should be removed from the classroom. Should astronomy or geology (age of the earth issues) also be removed because they offend?

Evolution, by the way, is not a controversial subject in the well educated scientific community. And shouldn't the well educated be consulted on what is "controversial"? A good science education is vital and dumbing down a curriculum will only do harm. Jobs have now become international commodities and we cannot let Alberta be regarded as an intellectual backwater.

Catherine, as a former public school teacher who's teaching curriculum included dedicated courses and / or serendipitous discussions in other courses on sexuality education and/or evolution; parents as education partners advocate; past school council chair of three councils I think; past board chair of an EPS alternative program; and Edmonton, Alberta and Canadian citizen...I am NOT in favour of Bill 44....as I understand it anyhow.

Although the Alberta Education guidelines for "controversial issues" might need some tweaking and more definition, I largely agree with them. As a former teacher of sexuality education, I already sent advance notice out to parents that provided them an opportunity to pull their student and provide alternative education at home or provide them with my teaching materials and use it to cover the curriculum themselves at home. As well, providing advance notice of even touching on this content as it might come up in a discussion etc. in a related or unrelated class is completely unrealistic and unacceptable to me....If parents want these accommodations and rights as I understand them in Bill 44...they already have them...by supporting and enrolling their child in separate school education or alternative programs offered within their school board that provide their bent on these topics.

Public education is both democratic and pluralistic....I want to be able to count on that as a public school taxpayer and parent...don't I have rights too? I do not want my provincial government or public education tax payer money or personnel's time and energy used to litigate cases that I foresee from Bill 44.

What plans are underway to respond to our Stelmach government's initiative to allow the religious right (including all denominations) to determine the content of our school curricula? If I still had children in school, could I insist that the teacher exclude them from any teachings that indicate our political leaders are sane or have our best interests at heart?

P.S. Please add my voice to the collection of those against Bill 44, with the same concerns voiced in the statement by the school board.

(from a conversation) Isn't critical thinking a key part of what we want to teach children in the 21st century? Why can't the materials and perspectives on an issue be presented fairly and then let the students make up their own minds?

Other thoughts/information you may wish to look at

<http://www.edmontonjournal.com/Life/Enshrining+parental+rights+defended/1599308/story.html>

Dave Hancock's blog on this issue... <http://www.davehancock.ca/2009/05/the-origin-of-the-specious.html>

To review what has been said in the Legislature on Bill 44, visit

<http://psbaa.wordpress.com/>

My original comments that sparked the above can be found at the bottom of my home page catherineripley.ca

Public School Boards Association of Alberta (May 30- 31) and Alberta School Boards Association meetings (June 1-2).

Due to a work conflict, I am not able to attend these meetings this year, but FYI, one topic of debate and conversation at the PSBAA meeting will be the current School Act – strengths and weaknesses. If you have any thoughts on this topic, please let me know.

At ASBA, school boards from across the province will be discussing School Board Governance. If you are interested in this topic, check out the Three Perspectives on Governance that will be presented to trustees from Patricia Mackenzie, Ken Chapman

and Steve Cymbol. You can access them here:

http://www.asba.ab.ca/news_index/sgm09/index.html

Recent Past

- **Community Conversation a success... what now?**

Thanks to those on this list (and those who aren't) who attended my Community Conversation this past Wednesday. We had parents, current students, school council members, teachers (present and past), city librarians, City Community Recreation Coordinators, members of several faith communities, grandparents, a few people from the Mayor's Taskforce on Community Safety, community organization and league representatives, and elected officials (Councillor Don Iveson and MLA Fred Horne). As a result of this cross section of people, I have to say there was an energetic buzz in the room and it was difficult to get people to stop talking and move on to the next segment. The buzz has translated into 30 plus flip chart pages to go through and coalesce into a single document, and I will get to that just as soon as I can (but probably not for two weeks).

So, what next? I committed to the group that I would be sharing their thoughts and ideas with my fellow trustees (so as to inform our decision making into the future), the Minister of Education and the Inspiring Education co-chairs, the Public School Boards Association of Alberta, visitors to *catherineripley.ca*, and YOU (the readers of my Insights emails). Stay tuned! And then we'll see where we go from there.

- **Welcome to Ward H, Esther Starkman and Johnny Bright Schools!** It was great fun to attend the naming ceremonies for Esther Starkman School in Terwillegar Heights and Johnny Bright in Rutherford last Thursday. You can read about Ms. Starkman and Mr. Bright in Item 1 of Tuesday's Board meeting. When taken as a group, the honourees for all six new 2010 schools in Edmonton Public Schools represent "the village that it takes to raise a child." The names remind us how important the contributions of many different people – from teachers to principals to specialists to trustees to professors/MLAs to volunteers – are to building an excellent public education system.
- **Alberta's Excellence in Teaching Awards**– My sincere congratulations to all the semi-finalists from the district whom the Board celebrated a few weeks ago! And a special congrats to our very own Ward H teachers who were part of that group: Ronda Borchert and Marcie Syme from George P. Nicholson, Yannick Jean-Proulx and Diane Fischer from Harry Ainlay, and Joyce Holden from Duggan. The finalists have just been announced and congratulations to Marcie Syme and Diane Fischer for being two of the 23 finalists from across the province. Wonderful to see just a few of our fine teachers recognized in this way!

In conclusion, as always, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns, questions, or ideas.

Catherine

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