

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

A Monthly Report to the Eastern School Board

May 2008

Welcome New Trustees

Education Minister Joan Burke recently announced the appointment of two new trustees to the Eastern School Board: Ms. Anne Marie Furlong, representing Zone 4 in the Bonavista area and Mr. Jeffrey King, representing Zone 12 in St. John's. We are pleased to welcome Anne Marie and Jeffrey to the Eastern School District and look forward to working with them to improve education for our students.

Budget 2008

By now most people are aware of the continued investments being made in public education through Budget 2008 announcements. The provincial budget included funding to implement the recommendations of the ISSP and Pathways Commission Report as well as the new teacher allocation model.

For the Eastern School District, the investments in education include additional funds to increase secretarial hours, funding for additional substitute hours to enhance teacher professional development, as well as increases to repairs and maintenance budgets for schools.

Teacher Allocation 2008-09

The HR Division is working with the staff allocation for 2008-09. There have been a number of changes to the allocation based on the model derived from the Shortall Report. There were a number of redundancies identified based on changing allocations and changing enrolment projections. Teachers have been informed and all redundant teachers were given suitable reassignments. There were no layoffs.

The next stage is to advertise vacancies internally to give tenured teachers an opportunity to transfer throughout the District. The transfer round will occur in early May.

Under the new allocation model, most of our schools will receive an additional allocation for school administration. In most schools, this results in an additional .5 allocation. In nine of our schools we will be adding a second Assistant Principal position to the team.

New School Construction

Budget 2008 announced funding for four schools in our District: Torbay, Placentia, and two schools in Paradise. Letters have been prepared to property owners of land required for the proposed new elementary school for Torbay setting out terms of sale and property to be conveyed. This is to be a consolidated land purchase. Purchase of property for the new Grade 7 – Level III school for Placentia is currently being finalized by legal counsel. Final floor plans are expected to be finalized soon for both schools.

Property appraisals for the recommended sites for the two new elementary schools for Paradise are presently underway.

District Office Staffing News

I am pleased to welcome Ford Rice to the senior management team as the new Assistant Director of Education (Programs). Previously, Ford was Senior Education Officer, Human Resources and he brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to his new role.

It is with some regret that the District extends its congratulations to Larry Blanchard, Director of Financial Services, on his accepting a new position with Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro. Larry's presence will be missed by our staff.

Mathematics Strategy

On March 19, 2008 Education Minister Joan Burke announced significant changes under the "Excellence in Mathematics Strategy". The Report's recommendations focus around four key areas: new curriculum, new textbooks for all grade levels, professional development for teachers, and guidelines for homework. The new math strategy is aimed at striking a balance between building basic math skills and understanding math concepts. Beginning in September 2008, students in Kindergarten and Grades 1, 4 and 7 will begin using the new curriculum, followed by further implementation at other grade levels in subsequent years.

Electrical Inspections

The issue of fire safety in our schools was recently raised in the media following the release of a report by the Fire Commissioners Office on health care facilities and other public buildings. We subsequently conducted a review of fire safety practices in our schools and we feel confident that there are no outstanding issues.

As regular practice, fire departments in major centres inspect our schools on an annual basis. In smaller communities, some volunteer fire departments assist schools in conducting fire inspections. A copy of the inspection report is left with the school and deficiencies are corrected by the school custodian or regional maintenance staff. A daily school fire inspection report is completed by school custodians and verified by the school principal. Fire alarms and fire extinguishers are inspected regularly, and schools conduct regular fire evacuation drills with students and staff.

Computer Security

In keeping with our security initiatives, all laptop computers in our district office and three regional offices have been equipped with security cables to prevent theft.

A security assessment (level 1) has been completed in all District schools. This review was a high level review of both the physical security surrounding the computing environment along with the technology security. This review was prompted by the theft of three computers from Acreman Elementary in late March when the school's server was stolen. Recommendations from this review are forthcoming.

Physical security at our Atlantic Place office has been improved with the implementation of a security card access system. The new system consists of picture IDs that can be used to access the 6th and 7th floor offices. This system was activated on April 8, 2008.

Collective Bargaining Update

Contract negotiations with CUPE Locals 1560 (East) and 2033 (Burin) have concluded. Major issues have been resolved by Treasury Board and conciliation. A vote will take place in the next one to two weeks towards ratification of these contracts.

Negotiations are continuing with NAPE for the student assistants' collective agreement and the NAPE support staff. Meetings are scheduled well into May with both groups.

Paradise Elementary Update

In mid April, I was pleased to report to the Paradise Elementary school community that the entire school population will be accommodated at the Newfoundland School for the Deaf site beginning September 2008. This will be the first time all teachers and students will be housed under one roof since the students were displaced in November 2006. While it is less than ideal to have students displaced from their school, this arrangement will be in effect until the new Paradise Elementary school is completed.

I would like to thank the staff and students of St. Matthew's Elementary, Mount Pearl Intermediate, and the Newfoundland School for the Deaf for working with us and welcoming our students and teachers into their buildings.

Director's Advisory Group

On Friday, May 2 I met with this year's new group of classroom teachers serving on the Director's Advisory Council. Twelve teachers from each region of the District serve on the council.

The intention of this advisory group is to meet with the Director and bring forth issues important to teachers in the field. It also serves as a communication tool as the group is a sounding board for feedback on issues and district practices. The next meeting is scheduled for late September.

Occupational Health and Safety

The District is pleased to announce the appointment of Michael Johnson to the newly-created position of Human Resources Manager – Occupational Health and Safety. Michael will concentrate immediately on the roll-out of the District's Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Manual.

A review has been completed of the District's draft OH&S Program Manual to identify any significant gaps, areas of concern, deficiencies and non-compliance with applicable legislative requirements and practice incentive criteria under the PRIME Program.

Draft OH&S and Return to Work policy statements have also been completed and consultation with both internal and external stakeholders is planned for May.

Medic Alert Program

On April 11, 2008 we expanded the Medic Alert – No Child Without Program in another 25 schools throughout the District. We now have a total of 45 schools in this program and further expansion is being planned for the 2008-09 school year.

Academic Support Pilot Project

The Department of Education provided \$20,000 to allow the District to extend the Academic Pilot Project to St. Andrew's Elementary. A full-time teacher was hired to provide individualized numeracy and literacy support to children who have spent time in refugee camps and, as a result, have significant educational gaps. As well, the Department provided an additional \$20,000 for English as a Second Language resources for programming in the pilot project schools.

Safe and Caring Schools:

We are pleased to announce the creation of Safe and Caring School libraries in each of the four regions. These resources will provide educators with hands-on materials for addressing topics such as bullying, conflict resolution, respect for diversity and empathy. Teachers will have the opportunity to borrow the resources and infuse them into their day-to-day teaching. The resources were funded by the Department of Education's Safe and Caring Schools Initiative.

Choral Connections 2008

Choral Connections has been an annual event for many schools in our District. This year we are pleased to host this event in all four regions with over 2500 students from 46 school choirs involved. Students and teachers participate in sessions that focus on choral singing techniques, traditional music and dance, Irish dancing and instrumental performance.

These sessions are facilitated by some of the best and brightest professional artists that Newfoundland and Canada has to offer. During the week of May 5-9th, sessions will be held in St. John's at Memorial University's School of Music. School choirs will also be performing in evening concerts at Holy Heart Auditorium on May 5th and 6th.

Monday, May 5th was also designated Music Monday by the Coalition for Music Education in Canada to celebrate the importance of music in our society and to demonstrate the vital role music education plays in the lives of all Canadians.

All the World's a Stage

Our annual regional drama festivals were held during April. Intermediate and senior high school students and teachers have been engaged in preparing theatre productions over the past few months. The student talent and teacher leadership was obvious in each play. Community support was also evident and we were pleased to partner with local theatres for the performances in several regions.

Students also participated in workshop sessions that focused on theatre arts. Local clinicians led sessions in areas such as improvisation, stage makeup, dance and technical production. Events such as these do not happen without excellent teamwork and leadership from our school communities and regional offices. Their work is truly appreciated.

Congratulations to Random Island Academy, Mount Pearl Senior High, Carbonear Collegiate and John Burke High School. These regional winners will participate in the Provincial Theatre Arts Festival being held in Carbonear May 8-11th.

Eastern Active Schools

On Monday, April 7 students at Rennie's River Elementary celebrated the expansion of the Eastern Active Schools program. Eastern Active Schools is a non-competitive, simple and fun program that brings 20 minutes of physical activity into the classroom. Students in 24 schools in the Eastern School District are now enjoying the benefits of this program, thanks to the District's partnership with the City of St. John's Department of Recreation.



Cabot Academy Reopens Gymnasium

On Friday, April 18, staff and students of Cabot Academy held a long-awaited celebration: the grand reopening of the gymnasium which had been closed since early August. The reopening was filled with physical activities which included a basketball game between students, staff and parents, a skipping competition, and a Dance Dance Revolution competition to name just a few.



Applause

Congratulations and best wishes to all students who won awards in the provincial Skilled Trade and Technology competitions and who will be participating in the 14th Annual Skills Canada National Competition being held in Calgary, Alberta from May 24-28.