

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

A Monthly Report to the Eastern School Board

November 2006

Paradise Elementary

On November 16th, following extensive consultations with senior management, various professionals and the Paradise Elementary school council, we decided to close the school and relocate students and staff to three other locations for as long as it is necessary in order to complete extensive renovations to the exterior walls, replace windows and install a new mechanical ventilation system.

This decision kicked our Plan B into high gear and in just one week we relocated over 600 students to three schools: Grades K-2 to Newfoundland and Labrador School for the Deaf; Grades 3&4 to St. Matthew's Elementary and Grades 5&6 to Mount Pearl Intermediate.

This relocation effort was a massive undertaking that involved approximately 75 district employees. In addition to the movement of desks and equipment, modifications to the three receiving schools were necessary to accommodate students. Transportation was also a major undertaking with an additional 11 buses put in place and a number of bus routes and stops reorganized. The move also resulted in the additional deployment of two teaching units and an additional five hours per day of student assistant time.

The transition to the new schools was clearly a success with teachers, students and parents reporting overall satisfaction.

A move of this magnitude is not possible without the support and cooperation of many individuals. I wish to acknowledge, in particular, the incredible support we received from the administration and staff of the three receiving schools. They have gone to incredible lengths to ensure the needs of the Paradise Elementary students and staff were met during the transition

period. Also, thanks to the many dedicated district employees who worked round the clock to ensure we had the three facilities ready to accept students. And of course, a special thanks is extended to the staff of Paradise Elementary for their support and cooperation during this time.

Now that the students and staff of Paradise Elementary are settled in to their new facilities, our energies and attention are re-focused on the physical structure. We continue to meet and consult with the Paradise Elementary school council and are awaiting Dr. Rand's and Morrison Hershfield's independent analysis of the school before we take further action.

St. Lawrence Academy

In late November, we received reports of an odour at St. Lawrence Academy. On Tuesday, November 28th, we closed the school to conduct a more intensive investigation. Storm and sewer lines were flushed and lines were inspected with a camera to identify any potential blockages. The main sewer line was excavated and repairs were made to prevent odour from entering the building. Staff also reactivated the mechanical ventilation system.

On Friday, December 1st, test holes were dug on the property which produced suspect gas odours in the soil. The Department of Environment and the Town of St. Lawrence were contacted immediately. Air quality consultants were also on site to conduct air quality testing.

A parent information session was held on Monday, December 4th at which time parents were given a report of the work carried at the school as well as a verbal report of preliminary test results. Following the meeting, it was decided to resume classes on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Government Announces New School for Placentia

On Thursday, November 30th, the provincial government announced approval for funding to build a new Grade 7-12 school in Placentia.

The new school will be mechanically ventilated, have a skilled-trades suite, a home economics room, computer room, gymnasium, fitness centre, and library resource centre. It will also have a challenging needs suite, a computer network, and be fully accessible. Areas around the new school will be landscaped and paved.

Chair Milton Peach attended the news conference in Placentia and publicly acknowledged the support, cooperation and leadership from government, school board trustees, school councils, and the entire school community for supporting a new school for this area.

A special thanks is extended to Voiseys' Bay Nickel Company on their announcement to contribute \$1.8 million towards recreational facilities for the new school.

Phase II Multiyear Planning

Staff have begun work on phase two of the multi-year restructuring plan. We are currently collecting data on the 18 schools in CBS, Paradise and Mount Pearl. We hope to have an internal report and a set of recommendations for the Board's consideration by the end of January 2007.

Teacher Allocation Commission

The Teacher Allocation Commission task force recently visited each region and met with teachers, administrators, and school council chairs. They also held meetings with regional office staffs and made a number of school visits. The Eastern School District's recommendations will be submitted by December 8th. We look forward to hearing positive recommendations from the Commission regarding this very important issue.

AGR Data

Final enrolment data is now available from the Annual General Returns (AGR) and our district has experienced another decline in enrolment.

The decline of 2.8 per cent is slightly less than last year. The rate of decline varied by region with the Avalon at 2.1 per cent, the West at 3.5 per cent, Burin at 4.9 per cent and Vista at 4.2 per cent.

This information will be used to assist us in staffing while also providing a glimpse of enrolment trends.

Finance Training

Last month, district employees participated in Canada Revenue Agency-sponsored training sessions on G.S.T./H.S.T. management. This training will allow our staff to provide more direction to schools to assist in their accounting procedures. Efforts are also underway to purchase updated Simply Accounting software for schools so that all schools will have standardized reporting practices.

Community Use of Schools

The committee reviewing the draft Community Use of Schools policy has held two working sessions to discuss the implications of this policy on our schools. This committee is finalizing its report and a draft revised policy will be forthcoming to the Finance Committee once it has been reviewed by senior management.

Teacher Professional Development

Professional development continues to be a major focus in our district with a total of three professional development shut-down days held in the Eastern Region (two for K-6 and one for 10-12).

In partnership with Eastern Health, three of the five scheduled PD sessions "Creating a Living Healthy Community" were held during November with excellent feedback being received from participants.

Student Assistant Update

To date, there have been 28 student assistant positions posted and filled. We have added an additional 55 hours of student assistant time to the schools. As a result of this additional time and recent postings, we now have 10 more positions to post.

Mathematics

Ongoing collaboration continues with program specialists in planning family of schools sessions on the dissemination of provincial assessment results. An increased focus has been placed on Mathematics. Many schools have already begun implementing strategies to address some of their needs in the areas of Mathematical Language, Problem Solving, Performance Assessment and Mental Math, and Developing Number Sense.

ISSP/Pathways Commission

We plan to submit our report to the ISSP Provincial Pathways Commission by December 8th. This submission reflects our District's position on the challenges being experienced in special education programming using the ISSP process and Pathways to Programming and Graduation. As well, our submission will include a set of recommendations that we feel could address the issues that are being identified in the system.

Succession Planning

Our first training sessions were held on November 2nd and 3rd in St. John's and were well supported by board office personnel. Participants are eager to be involved in the program and are continuing their participation via the First Class forum.

A survey has been circulated to all school administrators in an attempt to gather information related to administrators' intentions on retirement, desire to move to other positions and other questions which will assist the Human Resources Division in succession planning. The survey results should be available by mid December.

Learning Disabilities Association National Conference

I recently met with Ms. Lynn Greene and Ms. Debbie Picco Garland of the Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador to discuss an upcoming national conference scheduled for St. John's in September 2007. I have pledged our district's support for this conference and future consultations will be held with the Association and school administrators and teachers in our district.

Leadership at Work for New Administrators

Approximately 35 new administrators attended our first session on November 23 and 24 at the Avalon West regional office. These administrators are very eager to be involved in professional development and sharing of ideas with colleagues. We are very encouraged by the attendance levels and quality of discussion.

Teacher Earns Space Academy Scholarship

Congratulations to Mike Tobin, Assistant Principal, Roncalli Elementary, who earned one of 200 prestigious teacher scholarships to attend the Honeywell-sponsored Space Academy for Educators Program last June in Alabama.

Mike was also one of four teachers awarded the "Right Stuff" award for his leadership and team-building skills. This award included a scholarship for a teacher of his choice to attend the same program next year. Grade five Ronacalli Elementary teacher, Angela Allen-Baker, is the lucky teacher to avail of this enrichment experience in June 2007.

Idle Free Schools Program Launched

I am pleased to report that five junior high schools in the St. John's area have partnered with the City of St. John's and the Lung Association of Newfoundland and Labrador to promote "idle free school zones" to parents and the general public. Brother Rice, I.J. Samson, Beaconsfield, Holy Cross and Leary's Brook junior high schools have designated "idle free zones" as one way to help reduce pollution caused by idling vehicles. According to the Lung Association, idling adversely affects people who suffer from respiratory problems.

School Visits

During the month of November, I had the pleasure of visiting a number of schools. These included St. Anne's, South East Bight; St. Joseph's All Grade, Terrenceville; Villa Nova Junior High, CBS; St. Kevin's High School, Goulds and in the St. John's area: Leary's Brook Junior High, Roncalli Elementary, and Hazelwood Elementary.

I also visited the School for the Deaf, Mount Pearl Intermediate and St. Matthew's Elementary on several occasions to ensure things were running smoothly for Paradise Elementary students, staff and parents.



It was an exciting day for students, teachers and parents of Paradise Elementary when they had the opportunity to view their new classrooms and facilities at the Open House at the School for the Deaf.

In the photo above, parent Mrs. Dalley and her two children, Maya and Keagan, pose with me and Kindergarten teacher Mrs. Loder in Maya's new classroom.

Rhodes Scholar

Hats off to Luke Pike, a graduate of John Burke High School, Grand Bank, who is the latest Rhodes Scholar from Newfoundland and Labrador.

Luke is a fifth-year Memorial University student completing a joint honours degree in Biochemistry and Chemistry. He will graduate from Memorial in May 2007 with a bachelor of science degree. Then he's off to the University of Oxford in England in October 2007 where he'll begin studies at the Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine and complete a graduate degree in medical oncology.