

DATE: April 7, 2015

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee Nathan Ip, ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee
Trustee Michael Janz, ASBA Issues and Resolution Committee
Trustee Cheryl Johner, ASBA Issues and Resolution Committee, Chair

SUBJECT: Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) Survey of School Boards on Core Principles from Strengthening the Provincial Voice of School Boards Task Force

ORIGINATOR: Dr. Sandra Stoddard, Executive Director Governance and Strategic Support Services

ISSUE

The Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA), as per its commitment made to school boards at the ASBA Fall General Meeting in November 2014, has prepared a survey to identify the support of school boards for the core principles identified by the ASBA Strengthening the Provincial Voice of School Boards Task Force. The ASBA has requested that school boards respond by April 27, 2015.

RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed responses as outlined in Attachment I to the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) Survey of School Boards on Core Principles from Strengthening the Provincial Voice of School Boards Task Force be approved.

BACKGROUND

The ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee met on March 10, 2015 and are recommending the responses as indicated in Attachment I.

NEXT STEPS

If the Board approves the proposed responses to the survey, the Board Chair will complete the survey before April 27, 2015.

ATTACHMENTS & APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I - ASBA Survey

CJ:mmf

**Support for Core Principles Identified by
ASBA Strengthening the Provincial Voice of School Boards Task Force**

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND TO SURVEY

PURPOSE OF SURVEY

As per the commitment made to school boards at the ASBA Fall General Meeting in November 2014, this survey was prepared to identify the support of school boards for the core principles identified by the ASBA Strengthening the Provincial Voice of School Boards Task Force.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The ASBA Strengthening the Provincial Voice Task Force understood their work was in furthering the interests of school boards in empowering ASBA to further:

- reflect the will of member Boards;
- be responsive to emerging issues;
- secure clear mandates from member Boards; and,
- encourage grassroots engagement in the association.

Previously, at the ASBA Spring General Meeting in June 2014, school boards had been asked the following questions and through informal (non-binding), unweighted voting noted their support as referenced below:

- Do you believe the ASBA needs a stronger voice with regard to political advocacy on provincial issues? – 97% support
- Do you think that ASBA needs a better process for determining which issues are “provincial” and which issues are “local”? – 83% support
- Do you believe the ASBA needs a more efficient process for taking a position on provincial political resolutions? – 83% support
- Does your board support Theme #4 of the ASBA Governance Task Force (School board chairs are leaders and should be given a mandate to represent your board)? – 90% support

In November 2014, the ASBA Board of Directors convened a special meeting to receive the report from the task force and consider its recommendations. Though the work of the task force did involve contemplations of a more detailed, potential solution, the foundational elements of the conceptual model were advanced to the ASBA Board of Directors for decision and to inform subsequent decisions by the ASBA Board of Directors.

With the belief trustees had provided more positive feedback than negative on the core elements of their conceptual model, the task force concluded their work by offering those core elements to the Board of Directors for consideration.

At that time, the ASBA Board of Directors approved the following motions:

1. That the ASBA Board of Directors offer the principles identified by the Strengthening the Provincial Voice of School Boards, and noted in this briefing note, at the ASBA 2014 FGM for member boards to endorse at a later date.
2. That the ASBA Board of Directors determine any subsequent action informed by the will of school boards.

A presentation was prepared for the Fall General Meeting and focused on the theoretical concepts developed by the task force; specifically offering the core principles for school boards and trustees to consider.

The ASBA Board of Directors is now seeking to clarify the interests of school boards in supporting these core principles.

Please consider the following core principles, discuss them as a board and provide the corporate board position in response by April 27, 2015.

Informed by the work of the task force and the feedback of school boards through this survey, the ASBA Board of Directors will determine what, if any, future steps are taken.

**Support for Core Principles Identified by
ASBA Strengthening the Provincial Voice of School Boards Task Force**

Core Principles

1. Board name (please ensure only corporate board response is submitted):

Edmonton School District No. 7

2. Any member board, Zone, the Board of Directors, or the President should have the ability to generate an issue.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
			<input checked="" type="radio"/>	

3. To determine whether an issue advances to a discussion about merit, initial vetting questions must include:

- Is the issue provincial in nature?
- Is there a desire to discuss the issue?

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
			<input checked="" type="radio"/>	

4. The ability to provide nimble, rapid responses would be helpful in certain instances.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
			<input checked="" type="radio"/>	

5. That processes which include electronic means are acceptable and would facilitate desired nimbleness (e.g. e-voting, on-line discussion/input forums on issues).

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
			<input checked="" type="radio"/>	

6. That all voting, including the initial vetting questions, should follow the 60/60 double majority voting procedures currently utilized.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
			<input checked="" type="radio"/>	

7. That school boards are prepared to empower Board Chairs to participate in a decision-making capacity.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
			<input checked="" type="radio"/>	

8. That the focus of the process should be decision-making (rather than debating) to facilitate desired nimbleness.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
			<input checked="" type="radio"/>	

9. Additional comments:

Edmonton Public Schools is supportive of the November 2014 presentation at the fall general meeting and strongly supportive of the principles recommended in this survey.

These steps would empower the grassroots of the Association, and facilitate more “bottom up” direction.

Our Board strongly believes that the ASBA is the 61 member boards and the spokesperson for each of those boards is the board chair. We favour the process of decision making (double-majority) in place at the fall and spring general meetings that encourages thoughtful debate and a clear and decisive decision. When all board chairs cast a vote, we send a message as an Association as to the will of the Association.

A recent example of member-driven success, was the movement on the diploma exam weighting. This was a grassroots and member-driven initiative by one board through our policy process that was, in turn, enabled by heightened levels of board awareness and strengthened by harnessing the collective power of all school board members. The media could clearly be told that 1) ALL boards deliberated and decided that X% of boards representing X% of students supported this direction.

The importance engaging all member boards through debate and decision is crucial. Boards must take a position on a question and bring that response forward for discussion. While soliciting feedback of member boards at zones provides an informal temperature check, it is not a preferred option. There is no binding vote and there is no clear direction given to the Executive. It is feedback by the zone representatives (usually by a show of hands, one vote per board) as opposed to a binding vote given on behalf of all board chairs. Our Board has not seen the directive for action process work nearly as effectively for the Association as the unity and direction demonstrated at the spring or fall general meetings. Zones are valuable opportunities for discussion and professional development, but they have not, nor should they be a replacement for decision-making venues.

The ASBA is both strengthened and encumbered by diversity of membership. Creating an opportunity for members to put forward policy positions directly to other board chairs would be advantageous to improving the nimbleness and responsiveness of the ASBA.

Preservation of the double-majority weighting as recommended from the ASBA Metro Study is crucial for ensuring that any vote taken is an accurate reflection of the will of the membership. Since policy positions, budgets, and bylaws are passed with a 60% of boards and 60% of students, it is crucial that we ensure that any motions or direction given to the Executive are truly reflective of the will of the membership. With four boards in the ASBA representing almost half of the students in the province, steps must be taken to ensure that the changing demographics of the province are reflected in the political processes of the Association.

Some sort of screening mechanism for questions is crucial before the assembly as a whole is faced with the question. This could be a form of “approving the agenda” and we suggest that all questions be subject to some form of screening to ensure they are provincial in nature (and not hyper-local and appropriately dealt with by individual boards) or not germane to the will of the assembly.

Kudos to the thought put into the Strengthening The Voice Task Force and the democratic reforms put forward by the Committee members. These steps would provide valuable opportunities to further engage school boards in the work of the Association. They would further empower boards to drive the political direction of their Association. The status quo is very limiting and we should be open to more opportunities to provide more leadership. In support of greater unity and opportunity for member boards to be heard in the association, the ASBA Board would be wise to swiftly enable the resolutions outlined by the Task Force.