

DATE: June 23, 2015

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Student Trustee

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

RESOURCE STAFF: Jeremy Fritsche, Dave Jones, Nancy Petersen, Student Trustee Johannah Ko

REFERENCE: [September 10, 2013 Board Meeting – Motion re Student Trustee/ Representative](#)
[June 10, 2014 Board Report - Student Representative](#)

ISSUE

The following motion was approved by the Board of Trustees on September 10, 2013: *That the elected position of Student Representative be further outlined with the active engagement and participation of district students, and be piloted by the Edmonton Public School Board for the 2014-2015 school year. The purpose is threefold: facilitating dialogue between the student body and the Board, increasing student engagement in Board policy and planning functions and educating students about democratic governance.*

The Administration has conducted an evaluation of the pilot and is bringing forward recommendations for Trustee consideration that build upon the pilot learnings and enhance active engagement and participation of district Students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That the Board approve the continuation of the District Legacy Course to support students in building awareness of, and first-hand experience with democratic governance and leadership.**
- 2. That the Board approve that the District Legacy Course students serve as a student advisory council to the Board and that a meeting of the District Legacy Course students and Trustees be established at a minimum of twice during the school year, to facilitate dialogue on topics related to policy, planning and education.**
- 3. That, as a means to promote active engagement and enhance student voice in the democratic process, the District Legacy Course students be empowered to use the findings from this year's pilot to explore and propose an alternative governance model that builds upon the concept of an elected Student Trustee and establishes system wide student engagement process to support students *across* Edmonton Public Schools to have a meaningful voice in public education. A recommendation report that includes timelines to support a Student Trustee election process would be brought forward to the Board of Trustees in January for consideration.**

BACKGROUND

On November 25, 2014 the Board of Trustees publically introduced Alberta's first Student Trustee. The Student Trustee was one component of an initiative intended to promote meaningful youth engagement and voice. The other two components of this initiative included the Student Advisory Council and the District Legacy Course.

The Student Advisory Council was extended beyond its traditional function of providing feedback to Trustees and played a key role in the Student Trustee election process. The District Legacy Course was a new learning opportunity offered to Grades 11 and 12 students from District high schools. The key focus of the course was to provide students with a range of experiences that exposed them to governance, decision-making and community leadership.

The role of Student Trustee was intended to:

- Bring student voice and perspective to the Board of Trustees.
- Create an effective mechanism of engagement between the Board and district students.
- Bring increased attention and awareness to governance and the role Trustees play in the educational system to students.

For the past six months the Student Trustee has been a sitting member of the Board of Trustees. In this role, the Student Trustee has:

- Regularly attended all public Board meetings.
- Provided a monthly Student Trustee activity report at public Board.
- Participated in the District Legacy Course.
- Participated in a range of school, district and community events.
- Become connected and active with other youth leadership initiatives in the community (such as the City of Edmonton's Youth Council).
- Presented at the recent Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA) conference in Red Deer.

The District Legacy Course has been offered to students in term two of the current school year. It is hosted at Harry Ainlay School and is co-taught by two District teachers. Highlights from the course include, but are not limited to:

- Twenty-eight students registered in the course, and upon completion of their own community learning project, will receive up to six credits towards their high school completion.
- The course was held primarily in the evening and on weekends to help facilitate participation from youth from across the Edmonton area.
- The course utilized guest speakers, field trips and projects to support student learning and leadership.
- Learning highlights included an inspirational presentation from Sandra Woitas, a Q&A with former Minister of Health Stephen Mandel, a trip to the Calgary Zoo to understand the role of governance and community action during adverse circumstances. In addition the completion of individual community learning projects where each student had the opportunity to put the leadership and governance concepts they learned into action.
- Participants in the course provided youth voice and perspective to key issues such as the budget planning process, the development of the student version of the District Feedback Survey and input into this year's Student Trustee pilot.

- As the Legacy Course evolved, feedback from students and staff indicated this structure was a more effective means of engaging student voice and perspective than the Student Advisory structure; this was partially because the course provided a natural structure to bring students together and for Administration to reach out to.
- Students in the course reported that they developed strong relationships with students across the District and gained awareness and respect for their unique differences, their similarities and their capacity for leadership.

The formal introduction of the Student Trustee in November 2014 raised considerable external interest. Other student leadership stakeholders, such as the University of Alberta's Student Union, Student Voice Alberta, the City of Edmonton's Youth Council and the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) and PSBAA have followed this initiative and view it as a catalyst to student voice in school governance for the province. Board Chair Janz and Student Trustee Ko presented the Student Trustee story to ASBA and PSBAA members at their 2015 spring conferences in Red Deer. During their presentation they highlighted both the successes and challenges of this pilot.

The financial and human resources required to support this pilot include:

- Approximately \$6,500 to support the election and ongoing role of the Student Trustee for one school year. This includes a \$2,000 honorarium for the Student Trustee upon completion of their term and receipt of written confirmation of acceptance into a post-secondary or professional development opportunity.
- Approximately .40 F.T.E. of total staff time, from multiple Central decision units, as well as the efforts of school leaders from District high schools was required to hold the election and provide ongoing administrative support to the Student Trustee. This .40 F.T.E. translates to an approximate cost of \$55,000 annually.
- The Legacy Course has associated costs reflecting the teacher F.T.E., food to support the evening course time and supplies or materials. The course also has a source of revenue through the credits earned from course completion. It is anticipated that the course expenses and dollars generated through revenue will balance each other out. For this first year of implementation the Superintendent of Schools also provided funding to support a .07 F.T.E. of teacher time related to the planning of this new course.

To evaluate the pilot, Administration documented the election process, surveyed key stakeholders through surveys and conducted interviews to gather feedback around the success of the Student Trustee initiative. This information, combined with current context in Alberta, has been used to inform the recommendations included in this report. Key highlights or themes of the evaluation include:

- The election of Alberta's first Student Trustee was an historical moment the Board should be proud of.
- The District values youth voice and all stakeholders desire to see a structure in place to ensure the Board and Administration continue to have opportunity for meaningful engagement with students.
- There is growing interest in the province to build a provincial structure to support student participation in education governance.

- The District would benefit from time to examine alternate models of youth governance that would promote the most effective way to support genuine student participation in educational leadership and governance at this time. The voice of an individual youth cannot realistically represent the voice of 90,000 students from across the District. There is an opportunity to explore system-wide student engagement processes and a governance model that enables students from across Edmonton Public Schools to have a meaningful voice in public education would need to be developed.
- The structure and function of the Legacy Course provided for easier access, more synergy and greater diversity in respect to genuine student voice.

RELATED FACTS

The following is a summary of the evaluation feedback by stakeholder group:

Feedback from Legacy Course Students:

This group participated in a survey made up of Likert scale and open text questions around three key areas:

- The process to elect a Student Trustee;
- The Legacy Course; and
- The role of the Student Trustee.

There were 18 students who completed the survey and the following is a summary of their feedback:

The process to elect a Student Trustee high level Likert question summary:

- 17 out of 17 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the process used to support the election of the Student Trustee was fair.
- 14 out of 16 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they learned about governance and democracy through participating in the election process.
- 11 out of 15 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had fun participating in the election process.

The process to elect a Student Trustee high level open text question summary:

Suggestions for improvement:

- “Have a larger voting pool to help engage a wider variety of youth.”
- “Consider electing more than just one student trustee.”
- “I think if it included more people to vote.”

The Legacy Course high level Likert question summary:

- 15 out of 16 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Legacy Course built their capacity as a youth leader.
- 16 out of 16 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that through the Legacy Course they learned about governance and democracy.
- 16 out of 17 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the Legacy Course to other students.
- 16 out of 17 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the course set-up and structure was an effective way to operate the district course.

The Legacy Course high level open text question summary:

- “The exposure to new governance models and knowledge about management & leadership opportunities in our city is invaluable and so driving at this age.”
- “I like the friendships gained.”
- “I like the variety of speakers and challenges that were presented to me. I really enjoyed working with my board groups.”
- “Learning good leadership techniques.”

The role of Student Trustee high level Likert question summary:

- 14 out of 17 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the role of Student Trustee is an effective way of engaging youth voice.
- 3 out of 17 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that other students in their school knew about the Student Trustee.
- 16 out of 17 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the role of Student Trustee should be continued by the Board of Trustees in some context.

The role of Student Trustee high level open text question summary:

- “I think having more student trustees, one for each school.”
- “Have student trustees from each school district.”
- “Student trustee is not merely a representative. It should be a concrete and sustainate (?) role that is action-oriented and purposed.”

Feedback from the Board of Trustees:

Trustees participated in an online survey made up of nine Likert scale and one open text questions. Seven participants completed the survey. The following is a report of their feedback:

Question	Strongly Agree Respondents	Agree Respondents	Disagree Respondents	Strongly Disagree Respondents	Not able to comment Respondents
It was an exciting milestone to have the first elected Student Trustee in the province of Alberta join our Board in the 2014/15 school year	5	1	1		
Our Board values youth voice and leadership.	6				1
Having a Student Trustee sit on the Board has increased our understanding of youth voice and perspective in a meaningful way.	4		2	1	
As a Board, we were able to engage with the Student Trustee in a way that enhanced and strengthened our work and responsibilities.	1	3	3		
Having the Legacy Course for high school students is a positive opportunity to promote participation in governance.	6				1

Question	Strongly Agree Respondents	Agree Respondents	Disagree Respondents	Strongly Disagree Respondents	Not able to comment Respondents
The current model... requires an allocation of approximately \$6500 annually to implement as well as staff time to support... In total approximately a .40 F.T.E. of staff time is required annually or a staff cost of \$55,000. In total this represents an overall budget of approximately \$61,500. This is a valuable use of District resources and should continue for the 2015/16 school year.	1	1	3	1	1
As a Board we value youth voice and wish for Administration to explore and propose an alternate model of Student Trustee for the 2015/16 school year that reflects a reduced cost to the District, but retains a meaningful connection between the Board and student leaders of the District	2	3	1	1	

Open text comments themed summary:

- There was praise for the work and efforts of Student Trustee Ko.
- There was concern expressed for the limitations of the role under the current model.
- There was concern raised for the cost and staff resources required to support the initiative as it is currently structured; suggestion to explore a more cost effective model.
- There was interest expressed in “rethinking” how to have a Student Trustee that would reflect meaningful interaction between the Student Trustee and the Board.
- There was positive reference to the recent provincial election and the number of successful young candidates.

Feedback from the Student Trustee:

Administration interviewed Student Trustee Ko. The following is a summary of the key points that emerged from this process:

- The process to elect a Student Trustee was positive.
- The energy and interest around the role of the Student Trustee was confirming for Trustee Ko that members of the Edmonton community value youth leadership and voice.
- Having a single person in the role of Student Trustee is not valid representation of student voice from across the District.
- The greatest impact of youth voice and leadership was not accomplished through the participation in Public Board meetings.
- The Legacy Course was a great way of connecting with youth from across the District’s high schools; the diversity of our students was amazing.

- There is synergy in Alberta to build upon what has been accomplished here in Edmonton; it is important that this work continue in the conceptualization of a new student governance model.
- What would it look like if all District high schools had a voice and representation in student governance?

Feedback from Administration involved in this initiative:

- Through the process to elect a Student Trustee and interactions with members of the Legacy Course there was the opportunity to meet district students who are interested in governance and are passionate about their community.
- The interest from the broader community was positive and encouraging.
- In the absence of a systemic established model/structure to support the election of and ongoing engagement of youth governance participants, the role of Student Trustee runs the risk of being a token figure head position.
- In the absence of a broader systemic structure to support the concept of student trustee elections, it is challenging for the District to have an election process that reaches out to all our high school students in a manner that reflects equity and fairness in process.
- As the first and only Student Trustee in Alberta, once elected there was not a natural structure and cohort of peers for the Student Trustee to engage with in a meaningful way around education governance.
- The Legacy Course was an effective means of building student capacity around governance and offered students a genuine opportunity to experience the positive impact of youth voice and leadership.
- Meeting with the Legacy Course students provided Administration with meaningful feedback around several key District projects.

OPTIONS

The following options are selected for consideration as they are deemed the most admissible:

1. Provide direction for recommendations one through three as they are presented in this report.
2. Provide direction for recommendations one through three with clearly defined modifications from the Board.
3. Provide direction for the Superintendent of Schools to retain the current Student Trustee Process.

CONSIDERATIONS & ANALYSIS

During a pilot initiative there is the opportunity to reflect on successes and areas for growth when implementing something new in an organization. The Student Trustee initiative has provided the District with these learnings.

There are successes from this year to build upon for the go forward. These include, but are not limited to:

- The offering of the District Legacy Course.
- The concept of a Student Trustee.
- This initiative lighting a spark and conversation about student governance in Alberta.

The pilot also revealed the presence of a structural gap in the District's ability to support the role of Student Trustee. Through the experience of this pilot year, the District has the opportunity to further explore and conceptualize the following:

- What does a meaningful model of student governance look like in a District of 90,000 students?
- What does an election process look like to reflect participation from a greater number of students?
- What is the right model of engagement and interaction between the Board of Trustees and members of student governance?

NEXT STEPS

If the recommendations are approved, Administration will work with the Legacy Course teachers to support students in developing system-wide student engagement processes and a governance model that enables students across Edmonton Public Schools to have a meaningful voice in public education.

A recommendation report will be provided by the Legacy Course students with support from Administration in February 2016. This will include strategies for engagement, a potential governance model, a sustainable budget, timelines and a communication plan. An implementation plan will be developed based on approval from the Trustees.

Dates for two formal meetings between the Board of Trustees and the students in the Legacy Course will be identified along with a process for supporting joint development of educational topics for discussion.

ATTACHMENTS & APPENDICES

N/A

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