

DATE: March 20, 2018

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee Michael Janz

SUBJECT: Motion re: First School Built in New Community

REFERENCE: [Trustees' Handbook – Section 5.2.2 – Notices of Motion](#)

ISSUE

Notice of motion was served at the March 6, 2018, Board meeting.

BACKGROUND

Building on the [motion passed](#) on March 21, 2017, by the Board of Trustees, *Be it resolved that the Edmonton Public School Board advocate to the Government of Alberta to develop a framework to ensure Public schools get a fair and equitable share of schools, modernizations, portables, and capital project spending, we will continue advocating for the needs of public school families.*

RATIONALE

This motion is seeking a philosophical commitment of principle rather than singling out any particular school, district, or decision.

To be clear: this motion does not contemplate advocating that the provincial government stop building separate Catholic schools, but rather to ensure that they address the needs of public schools that support all students, staff and families.

Edmonton Public Schools' capital planning process is extensive and comprehensive, but this is not the case for all districts. By heightening requirements for evidence-based capital plans and the capital planning process, the province would be better positioned to ensure that the needs of all Albertans are met. We want to ensure multi-million dollar decisions to build schools are made in a transparent and equitable way that is informed by comprehensive demographic data and evidence, and that provides maximal choice for all families through universal and inclusive public education.

- When a new public school is built, all students have an opportunity to access a public school. It is a legal requirement of the *School Act* that all resident students must have a designated public school space. Current Catholic or Francophone students could, in future, seek a public school space and we would be legally obliged to receive them. Public schools accept all students.
- When a new public school is built, employment opportunities are provided to all members of the community—even current Catholic school teachers are eligible to apply for the teaching positions.
- When a new public school is built, all families benefit from the increased choice offered by a public school. Ensuring that ample public school space is available in new communities allows

Edmonton Public to initiate programs of choice (such as French Immersion, Cogito, Spanish, or Mandarin Bilingual). When we have met our legal obligation for a designated school, we are able to offer greater programs of choice to all families.

- A judge in Saskatchewan recently ruled in the *Theodore* case that, “[provincial government funding of non-\(Catholic\) students attending \(Catholic\) schools is a violation of the state’s duty of religious neutrality under s. 2\(a\) of the Charter](#)” and further that it was “[a violation of equality rights under s. 15\(1\) of the Charter](#).” (Note: the decision is under appeal.)

In addition to the moral and legal obligations to support public schools, sharing and collaboration provide new opportunities to reduce the burden to the education budget and increase opportunity for community. Other creative solutions exist.

- For over 20 years, it has been demonstrated in Beaumont that public schools may offer Catholic education.
- Another example of collaboration is joint leasing. Edmonton Public’s Kensington School has hosted St. Edmund School through leased space, so that both schools are operating under one roof. Edmonton Public has leased space to francophone schools as well.
- Similar to the Kensington/St. Edmund model, new schools in Saskatchewan are being built as joint facilities with public and Catholic “wings” rather than as stand-alone facilities. If the space/demographics merit it, this could include a public school operating within a Catholic school in future as well.

Collaboration could save millions of dollars in facilities costs every year across Alberta. In the meantime, we owe it to children and taxpayers to get it right by eliminating waste that stems from a lack of cooperation between Catholic and public boards. Edmonton Public is a ready and willing partner.

School boards are creatures of provincial legislation. Schools are assets of the provincial government. The Government could direct, at any time, one school district to turn schools over to another district.

As more school boards explore replacing aging schools and accommodating new, developing neighbourhoods, ensuring that public school needs or shared facilities are addressed first across Alberta could save millions of dollars in facilities costs every year, while ensuring quality learning environments for all students.

RECOMMENDATION

That the board advocate to the provincial government to obtain a commitment that the first school built in any community or neighbourhood be a public school or a shared public, separate, and/or francophone board facility.

OPTIONS

1. Approve the recommendation.
2. Provide feedback and request changes to the recommendation for consideration.

NEXT STEPS

Should the Board of Trustees approve the recommendation, the Board Chair will send a letter to the Minister of Education and the Minister of Infrastructure requesting that the first school built in any community or neighbourhood be a public school or a shared public, separate, and/or francophone board facility.

Furthermore, we will bring this item forward as an advocacy priority in our work to external partners, including the PSBAA and ASBA, and other new or emerging advocacy opportunities.

MJ:km