

DATE: February 25, 2020

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee Ken Gibson

SUBJECT: Motion re: Proposal for Fewer Trustee Positions

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

ISSUE

Notice of motion was served at the February 11, 2020, Board meeting.

BACKGROUND

The Minister of Education has directed that school boards maximize classroom funding. A reduction in the number of Trustees is one such measure but also necessitates a change in ward boundaries. Edmonton Public Schools is obligated to submit proposed ward boundaries by September 2020 to accommodate City of Edmonton preparations for the 2021 civic election.

RELATED FACTS

- Following the October 24, 2019, Provincial Budget, Edmonton Public Schools confirmed with stakeholders the Division's concerns about significant funding shortfalls while experiencing continued enrolment growth and increased classroom complexity such as more students requiring specialized supports and more English language learner students.
- As a consequence, the Division is exploring ways to reduce costs while maintaining high-quality teaching and learning opportunities for students.
- A reduction in the number of Trustees, along with no change in compensation or expense allowances would free up a small amount of funds for the classroom.
- Section 78 of the *Education Act* requires the Minister to specify the number of Trustees.
- Edmonton Public Schools provides ward boundary information to the City of Edmonton in advance of each civic election. A change in the number of Trustees would require a change to ward boundaries. The City of Edmonton needs the ward boundaries by September 2020 to prepare for the 2021 civic election.
- Board and Trustee statutory responsibilities are specified in Sections 3 and 34 respectively of the *Education Act*.
- The Governance and Evaluation Committee has the responsibility to recommend to the Board changes in Trustee responsibilities. Approved changes are enacted in the Trustees' Handbook in advance of civic elections so that all candidates are aware.

RECOMMENDATION

That Edmonton Public School Division seek permission from the Minister of Education, prior to September 1, 2020, to reduce the Board of Trustees to a maximum of seven Trustees, exclusive of any future appointments permitted under the *Education Act*, and that Governance and Evaluation Committee be assigned the task to propose changes to trustee roles as necessary.

OPTIONS

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

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS*Parents & Community:*

The Board of Trustees approved on January 28, 2020, consideration of an adjustment to the 2020-21 school year calendar that would add five additional days when school won't be in session, while acknowledging that it can be a challenge for many families to plan for non-school days. Cost-saving changes proposed by Edmonton Public Schools such as the school calendar impact parents. Parents may appreciate that Trustees are also accepting the challenge of doing their part to direct more dollars to the classroom while continuing to fulfill their responsibilities.

Staff:

The Superintendent has established a Change Team to support the staff in realigning responsibilities. Staff may appreciate that Trustees are also accepting the challenge of doing their part to direct more dollars to the classroom while continuing to fulfill their responsibilities.

Government:

Section 78 of the *Education Act* contemplates boards having as few as three trustees. The Provincial Government has, with the reduction in the number of Directors of the Workers Compensation Board, signaled that smaller Boards mean more money for services ("A leaner WCB board means more money for services" (<https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=64313EEF54779-F970-F096-5D9240CAFFAA436D>)).

Trustees have statutory obligations of a fiduciary nature, quite apart from their desire to be advocates for public education. Edmonton Public proposing to reduce the number of Trustees strengthens the credibility of the Board with the Provincial Government in tackling our shared fiscal challenges.

Trustees:

The Calgary Board of Education has been able to undertake its statutory obligations with a seven trustee Board, while serving a larger student and civic population and a larger number of schools.

Trustees have a history of stewardship for all the students of the Division, not just of their own ward. Trustees demonstrate this commitment through their support of the Equity Fund and in selecting projects as part of the Division's Three-Year Capital Plan. This motion is another opportunity for Trustees to live the Division values of collaboration and of equity, rising to the challenge as we ask others to.

Tasking Governance and Evaluation provides an opportunity for all Trustees to shape workable solutions.

NEXT STEPS

Should the motion be approved, the Board Chair immediately write the Minister of Education requesting a reduction in the number of Trustees to seven effective as of the October 2021 civic election, and that the Minister respond by September 1, 2020, to facilitate preparation for the 2021 civic election. Once the Board has reviewed the recommendations of the Governance and Evaluation Committee in spring 2020, and with the concurrence of a majority of the Board, the Chair may write the Minister prior to September 1, 2020, with a request to further reduce the number of Trustees.

KG:km