

DATE: June 9, 2020

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Student Senate – Summary of Work Accomplished and Proposed Revisions to Model

ORIGINATOR: Karen Mills, Director Board and Superintendent Relations

RESOURCES: Marnie Beaudoin, Sean Jones, Josh Karathra, Johanna Lau, Tristin Odnokon, Nancy Petersen

REFERENCE: [October 22, 2019, Board report: 2019-2020 Student Senate Work Plan](#)

ISSUE

The Student Senate is presenting a summary of their 2019-2020 work to the Board of Trustees and responding to the Board's request for revisions to the Student Senate model.

BACKGROUND

At the October 22, 2019, public Board meeting, Student Trustees brought forward a report to the Board explaining that they had decided to make the focus of their work this year the organizing of a symposium on life skills for Division high school students.

At the February 25, 2020, public Board meeting, Student Trustees provided an update on the work of their committees, struck to support three key areas of the symposium: logistics, program and promotion.

The symposium was scheduled for April 29 at Victoria School. Unfortunately, the live event had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. The Student Senate did explore the possibility of hosting a virtual symposium. Given the short timeframe and the many disruptions students were already facing due to COVID-19, Student Senators did not feel this was a viable option. However, many of the community members scheduled to present at the symposium remained interested in supporting Division students and recorded the key themes of their presentations. These messages are intended to provide students with personal perspectives and insights to support the overall development of life skills. These videos, letters and presentations are now available to all students through the Spreading Wings Life Skills Symposium [section](#) on the Student Senate website.

The last three months of the Student Senate have centred around adapting to change. Since in-person meetings weren't possible, Student Senate meetings were held via Google Meet. It took some adjustment, but there were also benefits - travel time was eliminated and cost savings were found as catering was eliminated.

At the Student Senate's April 8 meeting, Board Chair Estabrooks and Trustees Adams, Draper and Johner talked with the students about the reduced funding the Division was facing, noting that the Board, schools and central departments were cutting their budgets by up to 11 per cent. Board Chair Estabrooks reiterated that the Board values student voice and wants to continue to include it as part of the Board's decision making. However, changes in funding to the Division meant we had to look at how to do this more cost-effectively. Board Chair Estabrooks noted that youth have played a significant role in researching and developing the

Student Senate model since its very first iteration with a single student Trustee in 2014, and therefore asked for the Student Senate's help in finding a new model or approach to collecting student voice.

The Board of Trustees asked that the Student Senate research, develop and bring forward a proposed model that:

- provides the Board of Trustees with direct access to student voice to inform decision-making
- provides a means for students across the Division to gain a stronger understanding of the role of public education, and voice their perspectives about relevant educational issues
- engages students from across the Division to ensure the diversity of student voice represents the diversity of the Division's student body
- can be carried out for a maximum of \$5,000 per school year.

On May 13, 2020, the Student Senate gathered to discuss proposed changes to the work of the Senate, structure and representation in the Senate. Prior to the meeting, all Student Senators had been provided with the discussion questions and asked to reflect on them and discuss them with peers if they wished.

The discussion took the form of four conversations regarding:

1. Work of the Senate
2. Structure of Senate meetings
3. Representation on Student Senate
4. Value of Student Senate

The discussion was attended by 24 of 32 Student Senators. Each of the four conversations were framed by outlining the current state of the Student Senate, linking the question to the Board's request and reflective questions or examples to support a dialogue. These conversations were recorded by a notetaker and following the meeting, Student Senators had the opportunity to provide additional written feedback on the four topics discussed through a Google form. Written documentation was received from 21 of 32 Senators.

Based on the feedback, it was clear that the students see many benefits from the current Student Senate model for themselves, their fellow students, the Board of Trustees and Edmonton Public Schools. Rather than suggesting a wholesale change, students suggested revisions to make the model both stronger and more cost effective. The following provides a high-level summary of the suggested revisions.

Discussion One: Student Senate work

- Focus more on direct requests for feedback on issues from the Board of Trustees, Division Administration and education-related questions and concerns of youth
- Continue to provide opportunities for students to identify and address issues of importance to youth, but focus less on project/committee work
- Undertake more opportunities to engage with students throughout the year around a range of education-related topics. Additional benefits of this shift in focus include:
 - opportunities for leadership growth through positions such as task group coordinators, topic/research leads and conversation facilitators
 - Engaging with a broader, more diverse group of students from across the Division
 - Potential to create increased awareness around the work of the Student Senate and its role of providing students with a voice in education
- Include more intentional learning for Student Senators about the Division and the role of the public education system
- Continue to provide reports to the Board of Trustees at public Board meetings

Discussion Two: Structure of Senate Meetings

- Hold fewer in-person meetings, with online meetings between in-person meetings
 - The proposed meeting schedule for the 2020-2021 school year is four in-person meetings (the first two in the fall to establish relationships, one prior to the second Board presentation and then the last meeting of the year), and six online meetings
 - Students saw savings in both cost and travel time with this proposal
- Livestream meetings or portions of meetings to increase transparency and raise awareness of how the Student Senate operates
 - It was also suggested that topics to be discussed at the meetings be advertised in advance amongst the general student population to pique their interest

Discussion Three: Representation on Student Senate

- Revise Student Senate recruitment materials provided to schools to reflect the enhanced model of the Student Senate and emphasize the desire to have diverse youth voices and experiences represented on the Student Senate

Along with these suggestions, students identified things that would be important to keep in mind as changes to the model are introduced, such as:

- ensuring opportunities for relationship building on the Senate are not lost with the move to more online meetings and less emphasis on committee work
- balancing action directed by student voice to that being directed by Trustee and/or Administration requests
- being thoughtful about how best to engage with students and gather their voice or perspectives; caution around the potential for “feedback fatigue” or overburdening school staff
- being aware of challenges that may arise for Students Senators who are less extroverted or technically proficient when asking for the collection of student voice or holding online meetings
- being clear about what the expected outcomes of tasks are, what skills Student Senators need and can develop through the work, and how the work of the Senate benefits students and the Division, since these elements may not be as tangible as they are with a long-term project and committee work

Discussion Four: Value of Student Senate

The last conversation asked students to identify the benefits of the Student Senate for themselves, students, and the Board of Trustees. Key themes, supported by quotes from students, summarize this conversation.

For Student Senators, the Student Senate provides:

- Skills that are transferable to the workplace (e.g., communication, managing meetings, event planning, collaboration)
- An opportunity to understand different points of view
- Relationship building and connections across schools
- A greater understanding of the public education system
- An understanding of the importance and appreciation of student voice in education
- A way to have an impact on decisions being made both for themselves and peers
- A starting point for future participation in the community

“I have developed a wider perspective, awareness, and empathy for how issues affect populations beyond those I am directly in contact with (i.e., my school). The Senate has shown me how much can be accomplish[ed]

when we break barriers between schools/groups to collaborate under a common goal, in this case, the goal of quality education.”

For students, the Student Senate provides:

- A direct link between students and Trustees/senior administration
- An opportunity to elevate a diverse range of student voice
- Resources that students have asked for that they can use

“...it ensures that decisions made for students are also made (in part) by students”

“Many students do care about their education and policies, but do not have the right channels to express their opinions.”

“To me, the Student Senate represents a genuine and sincere effort on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Division to seek out student voice when making decisions.”

For the Board of Trustees, the Student Senate provides:

- Access to student voice and a vehicle for gathering student input and perspective regarding issues important to the public education system
- A direct line of communication back to students in schools
- A means of extending awareness of and teaching about the concept of governance

“Trustees were elected on a promise to represent and make the best decisions for our Division, hence who better to get feedback/data from than those who are directly experiencing the results of their decisions.”

“The fact that you can have interaction with people experiencing school life is very critical to the decision making process of the Board of Trustees.”

RELATED FACTS

Beyond planning for the symposium and exploring possible ways of enhancing the Student Senate for next year within limited financial resources, this year’s Student Senate has been engaged with the following requests or initiatives:

- The Student Senate provided input on a variety of education-related topics this year:
 - The Division’s exploration of a six-block schedule for high schools
 - Changes being contemplated for the Division’s transportation fees and services
 - What is essential for the basic education of an Edmonton Public Schools student and
 - Student thoughts and perspectives around Grade 12 graduation during the COVID-19 pandemic
- The Student Senate heard from advocacy students at the University of Alberta around their Period Promise campaign

RECOMMENDATION

That as a means to continue promoting the active engagement and enhanced student voice in the democratic process, the Student Senate Model proposed herein be approved.

OPTIONS

Based on the information provided in this report, the following options are considered most appropriate:

1. Approve the revised Student Senate model as presented.
2. Provide feedback to inform a revised Student Senate model that would be brought back to a future Board meeting.

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

At their April 5, 2016, meeting, the Board approved a model proposed by the students which saw all Division high schools having the opportunity to elect or select up to two students to sit on the Student Senate. These students were to represent the students of their schools (and catchment area) and serve as conduits between students, the Student Senate and ultimately, the Board of Trustees and Division Administration.

For the past four years, this model has been in place. Each year, the students have focused on up to three major projects based on engagement with their peers. They have used a subcommittee structure to both learn about governance and achieve their desired project outcome(s). In addition to their own projects, they have provided input on various Division projects (e.g., the Dr. Anne Anderson High School design) and municipal questions (e.g., lowering of the voting age).

Three times a year, the Student Senate has provided a written report to the Board of Trustees around progress on their annual work plan. This reporting has also served as an opportunity for a formal dialogue between the Board and representatives of the Student Senate. Additionally, Trustees have joined the Student Senate for a portion of their meeting two or three times in the year. This served as an opportunity for informal dialogue between Board members and the student senators.

This model has supported meaningful engagement between students and the Board and has been a forum for collecting and acting on student voice. Costs for Student Senate have ranged from approximately \$9,000 to \$14,000 per year over the last four years. Now, changes in funding to the Division compel an examination of the model to achieve these goals within an operating budget not exceeding \$5,000.

Youth engagement in public education reflects our Division's Cornerstone Values and supports the Division's Strategic Plan. The Student Senate model most clearly demonstrates a strong connection between youth governance and the following Strategic Plan priority areas:

- Priority 1, Goal Two (Success for Every Student) and Goal Three (Success Beyond Schooling)
- Priority 2, Goal One (A Focus on Well-being and Student Citizenship)
- Priority 3, Goal One (Engaged and Effective Governance)

NEXT STEPS

If adopted, the proposed model will be used as the foundation to guide the work of the 2020-2021 Student Senate.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Proposed Student Senate Model

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Proposed Student Senate Model

Division High Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each year, all Division high schools will have the opportunity to elect or select up to a maximum of two students to sit on the Student Senate. • These students will represent the students of their schools (and catchment area) and serve as a conduit for information, communication and engagement between students, the Student Senate and ultimately, the Board of Trustees and Division Administration. • To be eligible to be a Student Senate member, students must meet the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Currently registered as a full-time Grade 10 or 11 student at Edmonton Public Schools ○ Will be registered as a full-time Grade 11 or 12 student at Edmonton Public Schools in the next school year ○ Commit to working in the role as Student Senator for the entire school year ○ Demonstrate a commitment to learning and citizenship, as evidenced through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ school attendance ▪ academic effort ▪ behaviours and attitudes that contribute to a positive environment, both in the school and the broader community ○ Have the support of at least one teacher currently on staff and the principal of their school ○ Able to make a significant time commitment and participate in events outside of the school day and possibly during the school day • Student Senate members will serve a one-year term of office. (<i>Note: Student Senators from the current year who meet the criteria above are eligible to express interest for the following year.</i>) • Division high schools will develop a Student Senate selection/election process to align with existing youth leadership practices within their school. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Schools are encouraged to promote the opportunity and make the application process to serve on the Student Senate accessible to all eligible students.
Student Senate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students from across Division high schools come together to form the Student Senate. • Student Senators will hold an operational meeting prior to the end of the school year to transition from the current Student Senate to the newly elected Senate. (<i>Note: this requirement is suspended for 2019-2020, pending approval of a revised Student Senate model.</i>) • The Student Senate will meet formally after school on a monthly basis either in person or online, have a guiding role and responsibilities statement, and will elect a chair, vice-chair and two secretaries to support their governance. • Division staff will provide ongoing guidance and support to the organization and operations of the Student Senate, including, but not limited to, the senate monthly meetings, preparation for a minimum of three annual public Board

	<p>meetings, processes to support connecting with Division schools and students and the ongoing communication between the Student Senate and the Board of Trustees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Student Senate will respond to direct requests for feedback on issues from the Board of Trustees, Division Administration and will discuss and may pursue action on education-related questions and concerns of youth and youth leadership topics based on the voice of Division students. • Through a tri-annual reporting process at public Board meetings, the Student Senate will provide youth voice to the Board of Trustees and will be accessible as a source of youth voice to the Board of Trustees and Administration throughout the year. • Student Senators will support the preparation and writing of the Student Trustee report for each of the three public Board meetings. • Members of the Student Senate will reach out to students as appropriate to gain student voice or to engage students in the area of youth governance.
<p>Student Trustee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Student Senate will elect three members to serve in the role of Student Trustee. • This election will take place amongst Student Senate members and will occur during the first or second Student Senate meeting for each school year. • The Student Trustees will participate fully in the Student Senate as well as attend a minimum of three public board meetings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The dates of these meetings will be mutually set between the Board of Trustees and the Student Senate. • At each selected public Board meeting, Student Trustees will provide a written report for Trustees. These reports will reflect topics the Student Senate wishes to bring forward, a summary of Senate activities and provide youth voice/perspective to any Board of Trustee requests for information. • At each of the selected Board meetings, one of the three Student Trustees will sit in the Student Trustee chair in McCauley Chambers to actively participate in the meeting on behalf of Division students. The other two Student Trustees will sit in the audience and be available to respond to questions. • The three Student Trustees will be available to attend other Division or Board events where student voice and representation would be appropriate. • Division staff supporting the Student Senate would also provide mentorship and support to the Student Trustees.
<p>Board of Trustees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board of Trustees will identify at least two topics by September 30 of each school year on which they would like student perspective. • Trustees will invite the Student Trustees to participate in a minimum of three public Board meetings a year to report on the Student Senate’s work and/or bring student perspective to critical educational issues. • Trustees will keep the three Student Trustees in mind and will invite them to attend other Division or Board events where student voice and representation would be appropriate. • As appropriate, Trustees will reach out to the Student Senate during the school year as a source of youth voice or perspective.

Division Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each year, staff from central decision units will provide logistical support for the implementation of the Student Senate selection/election process for high schools.• Staff will provide ongoing support, guidance and mentorship to the Student Senate and the three Student Trustees, as well as act as a liaison between the Student Senate and the Board of Trustees.• Staff will provide orientation training to the new Student Trustees and Senate body each year.• Staff will coordinate the delivery of instruction to the Student Senate about the structure and role of the Division and the public education system.
Annual Budget	\$5,000