

**DATE:** September 7, 2021

**TO:** Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

**SUBJECT:** Strategic Plan Update: Governance and Engagement

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## ISSUE

The purpose of this Strategic Plan Update Report is to provide a summary of the Board of Trustees' leadership and governance throughout their four-year term, which comes to an end this fall.

## BACKGROUND

In 2018, Edmonton Public Schools formally reaffirmed the District Strategic Plan for the 2018-2022 term. The District Strategic Plan has three priority areas with supporting goals and outcomes. The plan provides common direction and alignment between the work of the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent of Schools and Division staff. The plan serves as the foundation for a Division culture of evidence-based decision making, assurance and accountability.

To demonstrate the Division's commitment to transparency and accountability, Strategic Plan Update reports were introduced in 2016–2017 as an extension of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR). The reports are intended to provide the Board of Trustees with detailed progress towards the goals and outcomes of our Strategic Plan.

## CURRENT SITUATION

This Strategic Plan Update report highlights the work and governance of the Board which reflects the collaboration and commitment shared between the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent and senior leadership in its efforts to fulfill Priority 3 Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan, which states "the Division is committed to ongoing communication, participation and engagement that enhances public education".

## KEY POINTS

This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of the Board's engaged and effective governance, knowing that sound governance is a key means to a thriving public education system and fostering success for every student.

## ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Strategic Plan Update: Governance and Engagement

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# Strategic Plan Update:

## Governance and Engagement

September 7, 2021

## Introduction

The Edmonton Public Schools' Board of Trustees is committed to engaged and effective governance, knowing that sound governance is a key means to a thriving public education system and fostering success for every student.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Board of Trustees' leadership and governance throughout their four-year term, which comes to an end this fall. The [Division Strategic Plan](#) has served as clear direction for their work and all efforts have been grounded in the Division's Cornerstone Values of Accountability, Collaboration, Equity and Integrity.

The work and governance of the Board also reflects the collaboration and commitment shared between the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent and senior leadership.

## Edmonton Public Schools Governance

The Government of Alberta uses the [Education Act](#) to delegate a portion of responsibility for education to locally elected school boards. At Edmonton Public Schools, the Board of Trustees have a representative for nine wards (geographic areas) across Edmonton. The Board appoints the Superintendent of Schools, who carries out duties assigned by the Board and laid out within provincial legislation. The Superintendent's oversight includes responsibility for all Division schools and school programs, programming for approximately 106,000 students, central supports and operations and a staff of over 9,400 full-time equivalents across the organization.

The Board of Trustees' leadership to the Division is carried out through:

1. *Fiduciary* obligations and legal responsibilities identified in common law and legislation including, but not limited to, the *Education Act* and its regulations.
2. *Generative* direction through engaging the community and increasing public education's profile as a community resource.
3. *Strategic* vision through setting future direction and long-term planning for the Division and making high-level decisions about resources, programs and services.

The Board operates using a policy governance model. As such, its leadership is brought to life through:

- The establishment of the Division's strategic direction through the development of a four-year Strategic Plan; this important work is carried out during the first year of a Board's term.
- The use of advocacy and engagement as a means to support communication between educational stakeholders and constituents, the Board of Trustees and levels of government.
- The development and review of policy.

In Edmonton Public Schools, the Board of Trustees establishes subcommittees to organize their work. These committees are set annually at the organizational Board meeting and each subcommittee brings their annual work plan to public Board for review and approval by the Board as a whole. Currently there are four standing committees:

- Audit Committee
- Governance and Evaluation Committee
- Advocacy Committee
- Policy Review Committee

The Board grants authority to its committees to undertake work at their direction with recommendations for Board action returning to the Board of Trustees for decision.

In its work over its term, the Board understood that including the voice of those affected by decisions is important. They also appreciated that a key responsibility for Trustees is to stay in touch with community stakeholders so that they understand, and reflect in their decision-making what all citizens value and want from their local public schools. Therefore, the Board worked to achieve its goals by collaborating, whether internally through its working relationship

with the Superintendent, students and families or with other educational partners across the province. These partners included provincial school board associations, the metro school Divisions, all three levels of government, agencies and community partners, advocacy groups, constituents and members of the broader community.

Engaging with stakeholders serves as a source of information or data and a meaningful way in which everyone can have a role in supporting student achievement and well-being. There are many ways the Board or administration are able to engage with stakeholders to hear their voice and perspective, these include, but are not limited to:

- School council meetings: Trustees share information and are able to directly hear families' questions, concerns and hopes for their children's education.
- Division Feedback Survey (DFS): Each year, administration conducts a survey for staff, students, family and community. Data from the survey provides meaningful information to inform decision making and helps support Division reporting. For the past two school years a survey unique to the circumstances related to learning during a pandemic was developed. This feedback helped to inform the Division's COVID School Plan for both the 2020-2021 and 2021 -2022 school years.
- Advisory committees: Advisory committees provide advice that helps the Division move forward in specific areas of work, such as the development of policy or the implementation of an initiative. Examples of Division advisory committees include:
  - Inclusive Education Parent and Community Advisory Committee
  - First Nations, Métis and Inuit External Advisory Council
  - Multicultural Education Policy Review Advisory Committee
  - Anti-racism and Equity Advisory Committee
- Draft policy feedback: Before policy revisions are finalized, the Board seeks input from students, staff, families and members of the public. This is either done via an online survey or through consultation.
- Results review: These conversations provide school and central leaders with the opportunity to reflect on their results. Through results reviews, Trustees are able to gather information, notice trends and bring back their observations to administration. These conversations inform future planning at the school and Division level.
- Community consultations: The Division brings members of the community together around key topics and programming areas. These discussions used data to support the conversation and gathered stakeholder feedback around such areas as school accommodation boundaries, schools in mature communities, enrolment challenges and ward boundaries.
- Listening Circles: The Division invited students, staff, partners and families to participate in conversations where leadership staff and Trustees were active listeners. The learning from these conversations helped the Division determine critical next steps in their work towards anti-racism and equity and helped inform the Board's Anti-racism and Equity policy.

## Factors of Influence

As much as the Strategic Plan serves as the foundation to the work of the Board, its efforts and accomplishments are also influenced and achieved within the context of the broader community and current events. In the past four years, the following factors have added complexity and challenges to the governance of our large metro school Division.

- Changes in government at the provincial and federal levels
- Changes to educational funding
- Changes in both provincial and federal legislation impacting school divisions
- A global pandemic
- Increased urgency around anti-racism and equity work in our community

# Accomplishment Highlights

## Advocacy

Throughout their term, the Trustees united their voices as elected officials to advocate for a wide range of education-related issues. The following are some examples of key areas of advocacy undertaken by the Board over the course of its term:

- Public education: The Board has been a strong voice for the role of the public education system in serving all Albertans and the importance of sustainable, adequate and predictable funding to operate this system.
- Curriculum: The Board has closely followed provincial work in support of a new curriculum. At the start of their term, they advocated for funding to support implementation of the then new curriculum and more recently, advocated for a rewrite of the proposed curriculum which would be informed by sufficient and meaningful consultation with primary stakeholder groups and working with school boards and educational partners. The Board also advocated to the Minister of Education to include anti-racism as part of the draft curriculum.
- Mental health: The mental health and well-being of students is critical to their educational success. The Board has actively advocated for mental health supports for students throughout their term. These efforts have helped to influence the repurposing of provincial health funding to school divisions and supported many Division initiatives that enhance and promote student mental health and well-being, including the release of the Division's Mental Health Framework in the fall of 2019.
- Sustainable, adequate funding: Effective for the 2020-2021 school year, the province released a significantly different funding formula for publicly funded education in Alberta. This new formula, when examined in the context of a large metro school division, was concerning for the Division. The Board advocated around several areas of provincial funding, including but not limited to:
  - The negative effects of significant cuts to Program Unit Funding and the impact on programming eligibility for Pre-Kindergarten aged children.
  - The weighted moving average funding model and its detrimental long-term implications for divisions with growing student enrolment.
- Funding for new schools: Through both advocacy and the annual Capital Plan, the Board worked tirelessly to advocate for provincial funding as a response to the Division's consistent enrolment growth. In the span of the Board's four-year term, the Division's enrolment grew on average by 3 per cent annually until the 2020-2021 school year when the pandemic disrupted population growth across the province.
  - The Board's advocacy work saw provincial funding for eight new schools and a mature communities' school modernization project.
  - The Board continues to advocate for new school funding for the Division to address ongoing and anticipated enrolment challenges, with a prioritization on new high school space.
  - The work to see new schools in mature communities reflects a significant investment of infrastructure; this investment has been intentionally focused in some of the city's more socially complex areas and will result in modern learning environments for students of these communities.
  - The Board also advocated to the provincial government that consideration be given to a block funding model for capital projects.
- Pandemic response: Throughout the pandemic the Board has been focused on schools being as safe an environment as possible for staff and students, advocating for mandatory masks, funding to support costs associated with COVID-19 protocols and measures, access to vaccinations for all school-based staff, the release of pertinent COVID-19 information and date to school divisions and publicly encouraging vaccinations.
  - Under the leadership of the Board and administration, the Division quickly mobilized in response to the unique and challenging circumstances of the pandemic. This work included:
    - The Board advocating for division-level autonomy to exceed provincial safety measures based on local context and data.
    - Advocating and supporting school nutrition in the transition from school-based to family supports in the spring of 2019 when all students were mandated to be learning from home.
    - Allocating resources and supports for the online learning environment.

- Advocating for equitable access to internet and devices for all students and families.
  - Requesting provincial transparency around key pandemic metrics to support awareness and enable school divisions to make informed decisions related to safety.
  - Advocating to prioritize school staff for vaccinations and to minimize layoffs when the Province reduced the Base Instruction Grants to schools by 14 per cent in the spring of 2020 due to the unique disruption of in-person school operations due to the pandemic.
  - Offering schools as host sites for community vaccine clinics.
  - Advocating to the Provincial government to hold divisions harmless in the weighted funding formula for enrolment fluctuations as a result of the pandemic.
- Climate change: With an infrastructure portfolio of more than 225 buildings to maintain and operate, the Board explored and then advocated for provincial funding for initiatives that would see school facilities reduce their use of energy and their impact on the environment. During the Board's term, they advocated for solar energy and moved forward with a Division plan that saw solar panels installed in some schools. Utilizing a combination of Provincial funds received through new school construction grants, together with other available grant instruments, the Division has installed solar panels on 12 schools. Additionally, the Board has approved the use of Capital Reserves funds in the 2021-2022 budget in order to expand the Division's Solar Strategy, with funds to be recovered through an established rebate program and utility cost savings. In May 2021 the Board approved the Division's application to become a member of the City of Edmonton's Corporate Climate Leaders Program. The goal of the program is to encourage organizations to learn, adjust and improve their GHG reduction strategies over time.
  - Vulnerable and complex students: Our Division strongly believes that every student can learn, regardless of their background, needs or abilities. The Board supported this belief through their advocacy to the Province for:
    - Working towards a system where seclusion rooms are no longer needed or used, through increased cross-ministry collaboration, adequate funding for students in need of specialized support and increased funding for staff training and support.
    - Restoration of Program Unit Funding (PUF) in the 2021-2022 Education budget to at least the equivalent of the 2018 per-student amount for both Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten.
    - A call to the Province to engage parents, students, caregivers and stakeholders in the revision of the Standards for Special Education.

### Reporting, Transparency and Accountability

Throughout the Board's term, the Division participated in the provincial assurance pilot. This pilot aligned well with the Division's Cornerstone Value of accountability and the Board's commitment to transparency. The following are examples of the Board's transparent and open decision-making and reporting processes:

- Public deliberation of key Division reports: annual budget, Capital Plan, Annual Education Results Report and the Three-Year Education Plan.
- Frequent Strategic Plan Update reports highlighting progress towards the Strategic Plan goals.
- COVID-19 reporting at the Division and school community levels.
- Board-initiated annual report on operational efficiencies.
- Board initiative to maintain public class size reporting after the province ended this requirement.
- Letters home to families around key topics to ensure open and clear communication.

The Board's continuous examination of ways to support public assurance resulted in them developing a framework for policy evaluation. This work was [summarized](#) and brought forward to public Board in June 2021 and may serve as a framework to inform how the next Board thinks about and policy and evaluation.

### Distribution of Funds

Each year the Board approves the Division's overall operating budget, following the mandate and funding requirements laid out in the provincial funding manual. The majority of the Division's budget is committed to staffing and fixed operational costs. However, there is some flexibility to identify targeted funding and to strategically and intentionally

seek provincial approval to access surplus funds. Over the past four years the Board has approved funding for a range of initiatives that support the Strategic Plan, with some examples being:

- The Equity Fund: The Equity Fund was established to bridge the gap inherent in the budget allocation system by providing resources through equity fund holdback dollars to schools that encounter emergent needs related to supporting the success of their students.
- The First Nations, Métis and Inuit High School Completion Coach Model: This is a research-based model in three Division high schools focused on working with self-identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit students around their commitment to school and supporting them in their individual path to school completion and life beyond high school.
- Continuity of Learning During the Pandemic: The pandemic required the Division to be responsive to both in-person and online learning; there was also disruption to learning due to isolation and quarantine requirements and students moving between online and in-person learning. To help mitigate this disruption and support the online learning environment, the Division prioritized operational reserve funding to develop resources to be responsive to both the online and in-person learning environments. Along with the prioritization of resource development, there was an intentional focus on professional learning to build teacher confidence and capacity for teaching in the online learning environment.
  - The resources were used, free of charge, by 41 other school divisions across the province.
- High Social Vulnerability Achievement Project: This is an initiative involving 41 Division schools serving students from high socially vulnerable communities. The Board has prioritized operational reserve funds to bring research-based supports into these schools, with a focus on high quality literacy and numeracy learning, wrap-around supports, early intervention, tutoring and school nutrition.
- Infrastructure Projects: The Board has strategically invested in the Division's infrastructure portfolio. These investments have addressed several areas not fully funded by the province, such as projects to address deferred maintenance and improve learning environments in a number of schools, as well as the approval to use Capital Reserve Funds to:
  - Support the construction of new schools resulting from the mature community discussions with the Westlawn school cluster.
  - Purchase portable classrooms required to support enrolment growth.
  - Fund energy retrofits to replace aging building systems.
  - Provide matching funds for a solar installation rebate program.
  - Provide purpose-built child care space in the Mill Creek replacement school, to be recovered through tenant lease payments over time.

It must be noted as well that in order to maximize allocations to schools, the Board of Trustees reduced their own budget allocation in the 2020-2021 budget by approximately five per cent, which mirrored the average reduction faced by schools that same year.

## Policy Review and Development

This Board has taken an ambitious approach to policy review and development. They have been timely and responsive in their work to review and develop Board policy. This work has been accomplished through careful review of existing legislation and policies and a commitment to stakeholder engagement. Highlights of this work include:

- The rescinding of Board Policy GGAB.BP Multicultural Education and development of Board Policy HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity.
- The review and revision of Board Policy GGAJ.BP Early Years.
- The review and revision of Board Policy HAA.BP First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education.
- The revision and annual review of Board Policy HG.BP Student Behaviour and Conduct.
- The review and revision of Board Policy EM.BP Alcohol, Tobacco and Cannabis on and in Division Property and at Division Functions in response to the legalization of cannabis.
- Work to support policy alignment with the *Education Act* that came into effect in 2019.

For a complete summary of all policy work accomplished over the Board's four-year term, click [here](#).

## Other Notable Accomplishments

During their term, the Board also demonstrated their vision and leadership during complex times through the following key initiatives:

- Student Senate: The Board, in partnership with students, has continued to explore effective youth governance and refine the role of the Student Senate. The Board has been actively engaged with the Student Senate, collaborating to bring to light educational issues important to students and ensure student voice is included in Board decision-making.
- Revised school calendar: Based on feedback from students and parents, the Board brought into being school calendars for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 that increased the number of professional development days and created greater clustering of days in which students are not in school. This initiative both reduced operational costs and provided more regular breaks in support of student and staff health and well-being.
- Treaty Six and Métis Flags: In recognition of Treaty 6 Territory and the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4 and the Board's commitment to truth and reconciliation, the Board passed a motion that all Division schools would receive both a Treaty Six and Métis flag. The flags are used in the school community to support awareness and understanding of the history of Indigenous peoples in Alberta and amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton).
- The Board has taken leadership in acknowledging September 30 as National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and declaring it a holiday day in the school calendar.
- Anti-racism and Equity: One of the strengths of Edmonton Public Schools is the diversity of the community we serve. In 2020, the Board acknowledged that racism exists in our Division and committed to addressing racism and discrimination. To support this work several actions were initiated through the shared leadership of the Board and the Superintendent.
  - Released [a statement](#) in June 2020 acknowledging that racism and discrimination exist in the Division and committed to listen, learn and collaborate, so that our schools are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe places for every one of our students, staff and families.
  - Initiated work to develop a model to support the collection of student race-based data and established an Equity Advisory Committee to help inform next steps in this work. The committee was made up of representation from the following stakeholder groups: parents, community members, staff, Student Senators and Trustees.
  - Hosted listening circles to gain a better understanding of the lived experience of students, staff and families and their time with Edmonton Public Schools.
  - Collaborated with the community to help develop a multi-faith calendar as a resource for schools to promote awareness around special days and events and enable schools to plan around these special days when possible.
  - Prioritized resources towards anti-racism and equity work for the 2021-2022 school year.
  - Initiated the renaming of two Division schools whose existing names did not reflect an anti-racist legacy in our community.
- Free Menstrual Products: In spring of 2021, the Board passed a motion supporting the provision of free menstrual products in Division schools. The Division has partnered with the United Way on a pilot that will see the introduction of these products in a group of schools serving some of our most socially vulnerable families. Lessons learned from the pilot will help to inform expansion to additional schools.
- Declaration of Pride Week: At the May 28, 2019, Board meeting, a motion was brought forward to declare the first week of June Pride Week in Edmonton Public Schools. The motion was passed unanimously.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The work of a school board is complex and therefore, it is important that it be undertaken in collaboration with a range of public education stakeholders.

The next Board of Trustees will begin their term by examining current context through the lens of student well-being and school success. This work will enable them to set a Strategic Plan that is responsive to the needs of the students and families they are in service to. Additionally, the plan will serve as a foundation to support the shared leadership between

the Board and the Superintendent. The incoming Board will have the opportunity to build on the current Board's strong precedent of advocacy, stakeholder engagement and transparency.