

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

A Monthly Report to the Eastern School Board

April 2006

MULTI-YEAR PLANNING

Immediately following the public release of the draft Multi-Year School Organization and Capital Works Plan on March 3rd, your chair, Milton Peach, and I met with principals and school council representatives throughout the district to explain the board's draft recommendations.

In addition, we accepted invitations from many school councils to discuss the Report in more detail and to listen to local concerns about potential changes to school systems.

Five public hearings were also held since the release of the draft report. This was a great opportunity for trustees to hear first-hand the feedback from local communities in order to debate recommendations and make decisions.

PROVINCIAL BUDGET 2006

The 2006 provincial budget was, overall, a good news budget for education. The retention of teaching units, the increase in the instructional budget and the removal of school fees are very positive moves for the Eastern School District. There are still some details that have to be worked out as to how these changes will be operationalized in our district but overall the changes are good news for teachers, students and parents.

There was some funding announced for new school buses, extra resources for board staff and funding for major capital works projects. We require further information from the Department of Education on how this funding will be directed to our district.

We are also very pleased with government's announcement to review the ISSP/Pathways Model of student support services. This is welcome news and we look forward to advocating on behalf of our teachers to realize some positive changes that will lighten the burden of our classroom teachers.

TEACHER ALLOCATIONS/STAFFING

There was a little good news this month from government about teacher allocations. Education Minister Joan Burke announced that there would not be any teacher cuts this year and that the allocation formula would be reviewed. For the Eastern School District, this announcement means we'll retain approximately 64 teachers.

As I stated in our media release of March 21st, this move will give us a measure of flexibility with staffing our schools for the new school year. While staffing continues to be a challenge despite the retention of these units, our focus is on keeping class sizes as low as possible in primary and elementary grades.

The Senior Management Team has been meeting regularly to discuss and review staffing plans. Once the Board makes its decisions on the first phase of the multi-year plan, the district will distribute the allocation to schools. It is necessary to delay this announcement until after the Board meeting as some of the Board's decisions may impact staffing in some schools in September 2006.

I am also pleased to report that we are now able to accept teacher applications on-line. A program was designed in-house to tie in with our SDS system, and while we experienced some early problems and had to work on a few technical glitches, we are confident the new program will have a positive impact on the job application process.

TEACHER FOCUS GROUPS

Since my last report, I have met with approximately 125 teachers in seven focus groups held throughout the district. These sessions, which were also attended by Mr. Ed Hancock of the NLTA, provided an opportunity for us to hear about teachers' concerns and to explore ways to improve communication with our teachers. The sessions also provided me an opportunity to clarify some issues of concern with teachers who don't normally get the opportunity to meet with me directly.

The feedback received from these meetings will direct our efforts in preparing our strategic communications plan for the district, and will assist us as we begin our strategic planning process later this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the assistance provided by Ed Hancock and his staff at the NLTA in helping to organize and facilitate these teacher sessions.

FACILITIES UPDATE

The provincial government recently announced that it has reached an out of court settlement on the Holy Heart of Mary school property and has acquired this property for the Board. Government had previously approved necessary funding for the refurbishment of the Holy Heart of Mary auditorium and this work is now underway.

The RC Episcopal Corporation has granted permission to demolish the existing Mobile Central High and erect the new facility on the same site. Permission has now been requested of the Minister of Education to proceed on this path.

TEACHER INDUCTION

Earlier this month, through our Teacher Induction Program, I had the opportunity to speak to our new teachers and their teacher mentors. I spoke about the value of mentors in helping our new teachers establish a solid foundation for themselves as teachers, as well as the value of positive thinking in supporting teaching and learning. Our Teacher Induction Program is a wonderful means of providing support for our new teachers, and is only successful because of the commitment of our district team and teacher mentors. Thanks to all who participate and provide leadership and support for this very worthwhile program.

EDUCATION WEEK 2006

On Monday, March 6th, Christ the King School, Rushoon, played host for the launch of the provincial Education Week 2006 activities. I was pleased to bring greetings on behalf of the board and the district and to participate in this annual NLTA-sponsored event.

Congratulations to the organizing committee, host committee, volunteers, teachers and students from the six area schools for making this event a truly entertaining and enjoyable experience.

TEACHER PD

We continued to provide teachers with required inservicing for Grade 7 and 9 Math as well as for the senior high level. French teachers in our district also participated in a 2-day Core French Session and an Intensive Core French inservice was conducted for administrators. We have also begun inservices in the area of Language Arts and continued inservices for Intermediate Social Studies Grade 8 History.

A large number of our school and district office staff also participated in a two-day provincial Safe and Caring Schools workshop.

Program Specialists also continue to act as liaisons for schools on School Growth and Development.

HEALTHY AND ACTIVE SCHOOLS

On March 31st, I visited Frank Roberts Junior High School in Foxtrap to participate in their Energizer Day. This event was organized to encourage students to make healthy eating and active living choices.

The event involved a guest speaker from Eastern Health and a number of community representatives and sponsors participated. The *Virginia Vaulters* – a tumbling group from Virginia Park Elementary and St. Paul's Junior High – provided the “athletic” entertainment.

Students also participated in a wide range of activities, from Latin ballroom dancing to anti-smoking seminars. The day was a great example of a school putting the Healthy and Active Schools concept in motion! Congratulations to all who took part!

SCHOOL VISITS

March was a busy month in our schools with plenty of student activity including senior high math competitions, drama festivals, and heritage fairs.

I was pleased to participate in St. George's Elementary's Reading Relay on March 10th by lighting the official relay lantern. This lantern is brought to each classroom for a reading session for an assigned period of time. There were also shared reading sessions by invited guest readers.



Later that same day, I attended the Grade 5 graduation for the DARE Program (Drug Abuse and Resistance Education) at Topsail Elementary. Fifty-five students graduated from the program. Special thanks to the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary for helping to bring this invaluable life-skills program into schools throughout the district.

On March 18th I attended Holy Spirit High School's Fifth Annual Cabaret and Auction – *Come Dancin*. It was a wonderful evening that showcased the exceptional musical and artistic talents of our students. The organizing committee and countless volunteers and community sponsors are to be commended for their support of this first class event.

I also had the pleasure of attending the 20th Annual Central Newfoundland Regional Science Fair which was held at Christ the King School. A total of 98 science fair projects were on display from schools on the Burin Peninsula as well as from schools in the Nova Central District.

All students are to be commended for the time and effort expended on their projects. The overall winner was a team of two students from St. Lawrence Academy – Peter Walsh and Jake Slaney. The two boys will represent the region at the Canada Wide Science Fair in Saquenay, Quebec in May.

CELEBRATIONS

Congratulations to St. Bernard's Elementary on the official opening of their school extension. In September 2005, St. Patrick's Elementary and St. Bernard's Primary were combined to create St. Bernard's Elementary school. This school now houses a new gymnasium and cafeteria, something neither school had prior to the renovations.

Congratulations to the following schools on their placement in the 9th Annual Skills Canada Skilled Trade and Technology Competition:

First Place: Ascension Collegiate

Second Place: Carbonear Collegiate

Third Place: Marystown High School