

**Elk Island Public Schools
Trustee Report
Ray Welsh**

September, 2009

1. Budget/ In-Year Adjustments

The Alberta Government recently announced an adjustment to the current year's education budget. This created significant difficulty for all school boards in the province as it comes after many expenditures and commitments for the current school year have already been made. It required a rollback of some \$80,000,000 from the total education budget for Alberta. Alberta Education absorbed \$40,000,000 of the decrease in funding while the remaining cutbacks were absorbed by school boards in Alberta through the reduction and clawback of system reserves. Elk Island's share of this clawback was approximately \$1,900,000. As well, Elk Island lost an additional \$500,000 through the termination of the Fuel Price Contingency grant which was designed to offset costs associated with volatile fuel prices for school bus transportation. In an effort to minimize the impact of these cuts to the classroom and in anticipation of further cuts to education in the next year, it was decided that reserves of all Elk Island departments and schools would be centralized. Another unknown potential cost to Elk Island and all other school boards is the current dispute between the Alberta Teachers Association and the Alberta Government over the Average Alberta Weekly Earnings Index. This index, which is calculated by the federal government, originally pegged the wage increase for teachers at 4.8% but was recently recalculated to be 5.9%. Again all of the province's school boards had budgeted for an increase of 4.8%. The matter is currently being sent through a grievance process but if the AAWE index is pegged at 5.9% and the Alberta Government does not provide funding for the difference, the cost to Elk Island will be an additional \$1,300,000. The centralization of all reserves directly under the control of the Chief Financial Officer for Elk Island allows us to cope with many of these uncertainties and prepare for significant potential cuts to education in the 2010- 2011 school year which have been rumored to be in the neighborhood of \$200-\$300 million dollars. If this occurs, there will be significant impact on education and classrooms in the province.

The Elk Island school board has met with M.L.A.'s Dave Quest and Iris Evans to express our concern and to help inform the Alberta Government what these reductions in funding mean to the quality of education in this province. As well I have attached an e-mail I sent to our M.L.A. and Premier with regard to this matter and which might further clarify the urgency of necessary funding to education.

2. H1N1

The Board received for information a comprehensive overview of the district's H1N1 pandemic plan. The plan includes education about the flu and its symptoms, communication to all key stakeholders including parents, precautions to take in schools such as increased environmental cleaning practices to facilitate infection control and help stop the spread of the virus, morning flu checks, encouraged hand washing, cough/sneeze etiquette, provision of isolation rooms for students or staff who become ill, and provision of supplies to all schools including hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, tissues, gloves, and masks. EIPS' Occupational Health and Safety Specialist is liaising with the applicable health authorities to ensure EIPS takes appropriate measures to ensure the health and safety of all students and staff. An updated protocol for handling H1N1 is available on the Elk Island Website.

3. Bill 44

The implementation of Section 9 of Bill 44 has been delayed for one year. This provision in the Act would have required teachers to provide advance notice to parents before introducing any material involving sexuality or religion into the classroom. This would have also provided the parents with the ability to lay a complaint against teachers with Alberta's human rights commission. Significant opposition to the Bill by the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta Teacher's Association has resulted in the government reviewing this legislation for further clarification and consultation before it is implemented in the province.

4. School Bus Route Optimization

Route optimization throughout all of the Elk Island School Division was necessary to allow Student Transportation to operate within their budget. Had the optimization not occurred Student Transportation which transports approximately 8,000 students daily would have experienced a cost overrun of \$1,000,000. Because all

departments are expected to deliver a balanced budget the optimization and elimination of partially full buses had to be undertaken. The elimination of the Fuel Cost Contingency grant, which has occurred since the optimization project, may require further adjustments to bussing of students in Elk Island, however, further changes to bussing in Vegreville is highly unlikely as we are now running larger buses which have the maximum number of students on them.

Individual concerns relative to the school route optimization should be directed to Student Transportation at 780-417-8155

5. Summer Maintenance Projects

Approximately 2.2 million dollars worth of projects under IMR funding by the Alberta Government were completed this summer. Of note in Vegreville was the paving of the V.C.H.S. student parking lot which was long overdue. All of the funding for these projects were announced, contracted and completed prior to the In-year Budget adjustment referred to earlier in this report.

5. World Teacher Day _ October 5, 2009

World Teacher Day has been declared by the United Nations to take place on October 5. The theme of this year's day is "Peace - Teach it, Live it".

6. A Matter of Choice - September 30, 2009

Students and parents will gather at It's a Matter of Choice on September 30 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. for the largest high school post-secondary and career fair in the Edmonton area. This annual event at the Coast Edmonton East Hotel in Sherwood Park brings together more than 45 educational and association displays to offer students information about options beyond high school.

7. Read- In Week - October 5 to 9th

Schools, parents, teachers, and students are encouraged to participate in read-in week. The theme for the week this year is "Team Read" and follows a sports theme.

8. Professional Development Day- October 23, 2009

Parents are reminded of the system professional development day on October 23. Schools will be closed on this date.

If there are any questions or concerns relative to my report or other matters concerning Elk Island Public Schools, please feel free to contact me at 780-632-7119.

Dear Premier Stelmach

As a School Trustee representing Vegreville and the Western portion of the County of Minburn in the Elk Island Public School Division, I am very concerned about the In-Year Budget Adjustment recently announced by the Alberta Government and the impact on the division, the schools and the children. The removal of the Fuel Price Contingency (\$500,000) and the clawback of 8.2% of our August 2008 reserves (which could be as high as 15% of August 2009 reserves) will have a significant deleterious effect on future programming and enhancement projects both at the system level and at the schools in Elk Island. Coupled with this clawback and removal of funds is the uncertainty of the AAWE dispute with the Alberta Teachers' Association as the eventual outcome and potential economic impact is uncertain and may have further ramifications for school boards across this province.

I think it is important to distinguish between reserves and surpluses at this point. While surpluses may be viewed as being funds with no apparent end purpose, reserves are needed funding for schools and the system to offer specific programs, equipment, and other capital projects not funded by the Alberta Government which assist in delivering an education the children of this province deserve. All of these reserves were designated for specific projects which now must be cancelled or substantially delayed.

Further to my disappointment with the removal of these funds for the 2009-2010 school year, indications are that the 2010 - 2011 school year budgeting could cut deeply into class size initiatives, AISI, SHIP, staffing and WILL erode the quality of educational opportunity for the students in Elk Island and the Province of Alberta. While I realize that the Government of Alberta is facing a rather bleak economic outlook for the coming year and the foreseeable future, I implore you to not make the children of Alberta pay for this temporary economic downturn. They are the future of this province and without adequate financial support we will not have the necessary knowledge and skill base to insure the future prosperity of Alberta.

Yours for Education,

Ray Welsh