

PRAIRIE ROSE SCHOOL DIVISION NO. 8
TEACHER / BOARD ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday, March 23, 2009 – 12:30 p.m.

Present: Paulette Heller, Marian Peers, Doug Nicholls, Pat Cocks,
Chris Kohlman, Rob Ficiur, Lenore Peers and Marilyn Skoda

Joined Brian Andjelic, Audrey Hill

1. Call to Order

C. Kohlman called the meeting to order at 12:30 P.M. It was agreed that the meeting would end by 3:15 p.m. to allow committee members to leave for other engagements.

2. Minutes of the October 29, 2008 Meeting

The minutes of the October 29, 2008 Teacher / Board Advisory Committee Meeting were accepted as distributed.

3. Topics Submitted for Discussion – Board / Superintendent

3.1 System Update / Initiatives

The Alternative Program at Beyond Walls has over 200 registered students so far this year. The program has expanded significantly with a particular increase in junior high students served and there may be some additional resources allocated in the 2009-10 budget. Summer programs were very successful in 2008.

A recent Medicine Hat News article on provincial achievement tests misquoted the Superintendent and D. Nicholls has subsequently clarified that the Board does support GR 3, 6, 9 testing as one tool in the toolkit and as a snapshot of a point in time but schools are not compared or ranked by the Division.

There are two joint Administrators / Board Meetings each year. They have become highly successful means of communication with small group discussions working especially well. Topics are pre-determined and there is at least one trustee per group - senior administrators generally don't participate.

The planning for the Colony Teachers Summer Conference is well underway. The two-day workshop is for beginning colony teachers with the first day focusing on colony culture and the second providing real resources that will work . especially as starting points.

Kaleidoscope of the Arts will take place on May 30 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at *The Esplanade*. The planning committee is expecting 300 projects in drama, art, music from Division students. A private donation was matched by Division funds to purchase frames that will be reused each year.

There are a number of positive things happening in all schools. The trustees have toured most of the schools and appreciate that they have been made to feel very welcome. C. Kohlman mentioned that school staffs are pleased with the number of times the superintendents and trustees visit the school and attend school events.

3.2 Three Year Education Plan Review

D. Nicholls reviewed the process used to gather input from a number of groups including school administrators and school council representatives. School Plans and senior administrators work plans are to be aligned with Division Plan.

3.3 2010-2011 DRAFT School Year Calendar

While teachers appreciate that the board contributes significantly to Professional Development, they would like to have more established PD days while maintaining the total number of days at 198. The average number of PD Days in the province is 4.7 (4 to 5 days per year).

The approved 2009-10 School Year Calendar has 2 Division PD days and 2 school-based PD days and 199 total days. The teachers goal is to have 5 PD days (2 Division and 3 school-based PD days) and keep total days at 198 days.

3.4 International Student Recruitment

D. Nicholls reviewed the presentation from B. Volkman and K. Myers trip to Mexico with Alberta Education. The Division objective is to attract a few additional students to the four senior high schools.

C. Kohlman indicated that teachers may have concerns if the additional work in preparing IPPs becomes significant. There will be an offset advantage of having additional cultural experience added to the school. There may be additional TA support required in certain situations. Most students will be coming for one year to be immersed in the language, primarily.

D. Nicholls briefly mentioned that an Oyen community group is working on a concept for a Baseball Academy. The Division has committed to a .5 fte to help with the program development. The benefit to the Division is to help increase enrollment.

3.5 AISI Update

B. Andjelic joined the meeting to provide an update on the next AISI Cycle 4. It appears that Cycle 4 may be able to expand on current cycle projects without having to start all over again. Cycle 4 will probe deeper on WHAT was included in Cycle 3. The HOW is what will be emphasized in Cycle 4. The committee continues to look for more ways to involve communities with an attempt to engage them in planning and implementation.

Seven schools have applied for AISI funding. All have presented to the Steering Committee and decisions will be made at the next meeting on April 21. Division-based strategies are also under consideration. Staffing will be quite similar to the current model with two FTE positions centered on Division projects. There has been some discussion on a three-jurisdiction project involving Prairie Rose, Palliser and Horizon . to provide professional development. The Province is aware of the joint submission for a project and seems to support the carry forward of surplus funds from Cycle 3 to fund it.

There was clarification of the current roles for L. Matsumoto and D. Blemings. They usually work together to provide assistance with Math and Social Studies implementation, Assessment for Learning and assisting schools with the implementation

of their projects. D. Blemings also coordinates the Videoconferencing Incentive Program.

Professional Learning Council is now a partnership with the ATA, Division and AISI. The benefit is the development of a long-range (three year) professional development plan that will be apparent to all staff.

With regards to Grade Level Achievement, administrators have been asked to comply with the Alberta Education requirements but statistics have not been used to evaluate, compare or report to the Board. There has been minimal discussion on the topic raised at administrators meetings.

The provincial AISI conference is well-attended by senior administration and trustees. The strong results in Prairie Rose may be a reflection of the level of support for and by AISI. R. Ficiur commented that AISI support for colony teachers was very appropriate. B. Andjelic added that AISI itself is a very small piece of the Education Plan and of the overall financial resources available but a lot of energy and interest provides a lot of results.

4. Topics Submitted for Discussion - Teachers

4.1 Real Learning First

A. Hill joined the meeting at 2:00 p.m. E. Winberg was unable to attend.

C. Kohlman presented ~~%~~Real Learning First+as a current initiative of the ATA to eliminate provincial achievement tests (PATs). The initiative received unanimous support at an ATA Local meeting. Currently, Diploma exams are~~n~~ included in the initiative except there is a preference to have 25% of final marks based on the diploma exams rather than the current 50%. A recent motion in the legislative assembly to support elimination of Grade 3 exams was passed by a majority of MLAs.

The ATA Local will be visiting each school and presenting teachers with a mug and two pamphlets . one for parents on ~~%~~Getting to the heart of learning+and the other for teachers entitled ~~%~~Time for change. Time for action.+ There will also be local media advertisements.

The ATA Local understands that the elimination of PATs will effect the Division, particularly in the Accountability Pillar and the Three-Year Plan. The plan is for public awareness . not advocacy. The ATA wants teachers to inform parents that they have the right to have their children excused from writing the exams. It was confirmed that teachers would not be advising parents to excuse their children but would be providing information on the parents~~r~~right to do so.

A. Hill commented that teachers have talked about PATs for a long time and while they generally agree that there needs to be some assessment, they would like to see diagnostic testing rather than achievement testing. The provincial administration of achievement tests is extremely expensive and it should be considered if that is the best use of the money. Instead, the province could consider Assessment for Learning and perhaps a sample testing protocol rather than a blanket approach.

The ATA Local is asking for permission from the Board to send the pamphlet "Getting to the heart of learning+home with students, or alternatively, to have it available to be picked up by parents at the school.

D. Nicholls again clarified that the Board has supported PATs as a tool to assist with improvement / assessment. There is not a perceived need for change since neither school councils nor the Board of Trustees has raised the topic as an issue. PATs seem to be an accepted part of the education culture. Parents appear to understand that it is one test . one snapshot. Parent / Teacher interviews and report card comments are likely more important to parents.

B. Andjelic commented that very few people know what diagnostic testing is and asked if the ATA had a plan for what diagnostic testing would look like. **(see note)** PATs were supposed to be used for program evaluations only . they weren't intended to evaluate students or schools. There needs to be a balanced approach to get teachers, students and parents the information they need. There needs to be some evaluation of where the student is at.

L. Peers indicated that the purpose of raising the issued was to inform the Board - not to get the support of the Board. The ATA Local understands that the Board has to follow what the province directs. The initiative is directed at the government . not the Board.

C. Kohlman suggested that the Board may not have to take a position.

D. Nicholls advised that Board members may be contacted by community members / parents about this issue, therefore, a board position may be necessary so that trustees can respond accordingly. The Board has to discuss the issue before consideration can be given to the distribution of a brochure to parents through the schools. There will also be an opportunity for trustees to review the issues with parents at a joint School Councils / School Board meeting at the end of June. C. Kohlman indicated the ATA would appreciate an opportunity to present their initiative at the meeting with school councils.

Note: Subsequent to the meeting, C. Kohlman clarified that the ATA will work with Alberta Education to develop a joint assessment if one was to be created, but most importantly though, the teacher is the classroom professional and is the best evaluator of student learning.

4.2 Student Behaviour Guidelines

Deferred to the next meeting

4.3 Calendar / PD Days

See item 3.3 . School Year Calendar

4.4 Uniform PD Funds

Professional Development Funds were discussed at the March 20 Finance Committee meeting and the topic will be discussed further with the board and school administrators. This issue also affects support staff.

4.5 E-Mailings . point of clarification

In response to a question, D. Nicholls clarified that L. Leffler is engaged as contracted service provider and has been given access to the First Class email service until the end of June to facilitate contact throughout the Division. He was advised to include a business contact on his emails to clarify his position as a contractor, not an employee.

4.6 Truancy

The intention of a discussion on this topic would be to identify the steps that can be taken to solve a truancy problem in certain schools (Burdett and Ralston were mentioned). Deferred to the June agenda.

4.7 Teacherages

Deferred to the next meeting.

5. Future Discussion Items

The Teacher / Board Advisory Committee is completing its first year of operation. It was suggested that the ATA and the Board should each review the effectiveness of the committee in preparation for discussions at the next meeting.

6. Next Meeting Dates

The next meeting date was tentatively rescheduled to **Wednesday, June 10, 2009**, in the morning.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.