



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Edmonton Public School District No. 7

Wednesday, March 7, 2012
8:30 a.m.

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Fifth Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

Edmonton Public School District No. 7 Participants

Dave Colburn	Board Chair
Dave Fraser	Executive Director, Corporate Services
John Nicoll	Managing Director, Facilities Services
Lorne Parker	Managing Director, Planning and Student Transportation
Tanni Parker	Assistant Superintendent, Student Learning Services
Edgar Schmidt	Superintendent
Brian Smith	Executive Director, Finance and Infrastructure

Office of the Auditor General Participants

Merwan Saher	Auditor General
Jeff Dumont	Assistant Auditor General

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8:30 a.m.**Wednesday, March 7, 2012**

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call this Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order, please, and I would like to welcome everyone in attendance this morning.

Please note that the meeting is recorded by *Hansard* and the audio is streamed live on the Internet.

We'll go around the table quickly and introduce ourselves, and we'll invite the Auditor General's staff as well as those who are visiting us from Edmonton public schools to introduce themselves. Perhaps we'll start with the hon. Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Fawcett: Kyle Fawcett, MLA, Calgary-North Hill.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. Philip Massolin, committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Kang: Good morning, everyone. Darshan Kang, MLA, Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Chase: Harry Chase, Calgary-Varsity, proud 34-year teacher with the Calgary school board.

Mr. Smith: Brian Smith, executive director, finance and infrastructure, Edmonton public schools.

Mr. Schmidt: Edgar Schmidt, superintendent, Edmonton public schools.

Mr. Colburn: Dave Colburn, chairman of the Edmonton public school board.

Ms T. Parker: Tanni Parker, assistant superintendent, student learning services, Edmonton public schools.

Mr. Fraser: Dave Fraser, executive director, corporate services, Edmonton public schools.

Mr. Dumont: Good morning. Jeff Dumont, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, Auditor General.

Mr. Sandhu: Good morning. Peter Sandhu, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Xiao: Good morning. David Xiao, Edmonton-McClung.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm Heather Forsyth, Calgary-Fish Creek. Welcome.

Ms Bianchi: I'm Giovana Bianchi, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Could I have approval of the agenda that was circulated? Moved by Harry B. Chase that the agenda for the March 7, 2012, meeting be approved as distributed. All in favour? Thank you very much.

Also, approval of the minutes from the February 22 meeting. Moved by Mr. Sandhu that the minutes of the February 22, 2012, Standing Committee on Public Accounts meeting be approved as distributed. All in favour? Thank you very much.

Now, of course, this brings us to our meeting today with officials from Edmonton public school district No. 7. I would like to formally thank them for their time and their attention today. I

would remind all members that we're dealing specifically with these reports: the Edmonton public school district No. 7 audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2011; Edmonton public school district No. 7 Annual Education Results Report 2010-11; annual report of Alberta Education 2010-2011; reports of the Auditor General of Alberta from April and November of 2011; the annual report of the government of Alberta 2010-11, which includes, of course, the consolidated financial statements and the Measuring Up progress report.

With that, I believe, Mr. Colburn, if you have anything that you would like to bring forward to the committee, you have 10 minutes to do it. I would also remind you that if there are other individuals from the school board who would like to participate in the question-and-answer session that's to follow, they can just go to the microphone that's behind you, identify themselves, and supplement the answer.

Mr. Colburn: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Duly noted.

I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce two of my colleagues who have joined us today, Trustee Sarah Hoffman and Trustee Catherine Ripley.

I would begin our 10 minutes by giving the committee a brief overview of governance within Edmonton public schools. I think that an invitation to appear before the Public Accounts Committee is not often viewed as a joyful experience, but I can tell you that we are looking forward as a board to telling the story of the important work that we do within Edmonton public.

Last year was an interesting if not exciting year for the board. We had a record turnover of trustees, some six new trustees coming to the board for the first time. The year began with us giving formal approval to a policy that had been on the books and refined for a number of months, and that was our safe, caring, and respectful learning environment policy. Members of the committee might recognize the link between that language and identical language that is prominent in the new Education Act, so we're very pleased to see the Education Act embrace some of those principles.

We were the first board in the province to begin webcasting our meetings. That was a reflection of our commitment to increased accountability and transparency in our business. I should point out that those webcasts are not only available in real time but are archived, so members of our public have an opportunity to look at those videos. I believe we're archiving them for some three years, so they will have an opportunity to review discussions and decisions of the board for some time after a particular board meeting.

We participated very early in the first year of our term in an exhaustive consultative engagement process to create our district priorities, which are value statements that guide the district for the term of the board. Those priorities include some 21st century, in our view, values such as deepening students' understanding of equity and empathy, having a very considerable commitment to the health and well-being of staff and students, and being committed not only to improving high school completion and having all students within Edmonton public graduate from high school but that all students will learn to their full potential, recognizing that sometimes learning is an uneven playing field and that not all students have the same capability of achieving the conventional route of education success.

We created a special-needs task force to review special-needs education, that resulted in the creation of a special-needs policy, and regulations are being developed. At the time we believed that that initiative – and it was a board initiative; it was a trustee task

force – deepened our commitment and understanding of the best way to respond to the challenges of students who are often referred to as our most vulnerable students and certainly allowed us to be more sophisticated in understanding the best response to inclusion, which, of course, is a very important objective of the current and past ministries of Education.

We became the first board in the prairie provinces to approve a stand-alone policy designed to support and protect our sexual minority students and staff. We created an external advisory committee to advise the board on bullying. Again, I'm very pleased to see in this new Education Act quite a significant focus on the need to create respectful, caring, and welcoming environments for all students and ramped-up responses to the insidious presence of bullying in our schools.

Finally, one other board decision of note again has clear links to the current Education Act. We approved the appointment of external members to our audit committee last year for the first time. I see that that will now be a mandated requirement in the School Act. So we see much alignment with the work of the board in the past year and the direction of the government in the Education Act.

The final formal statement I would make in regard to the work of the board is that the board is committed to supporting the success of all students, good governance, and representing the views and values of our constituents.

With that, I would turn our presentation over to our superintendent to talk a little bit about our operational work.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. Mr. Chairman and committee members, it's a pleasure to be here. I would like to introduce formally the members of my executive team and senior administration who we'll call on from time to time to respond to questions. I'd like to introduce our assistant superintendents of schools Ron MacNeil, Mark Liguori, Bruce Coggles, and Jamie Pallett as well as our managing directors: John Nicoll, facilities and maintenance; Cheryl Hagen, financial operations; Lorne Parker, planning and transportation; as well as Cheryl Oxford, managing director of communications.

I'll be focusing my remarks on the educational and operational strengths of Edmonton public schools. To achieve the vision and mission priorities established by the board, I'm proud to say that as a district we have made some important gains in some key areas. Since 2006 our three-year high school completion rate improved by 3.3 per cent. The provincial rate over the same period of time improved by 1.5 per cent. The rate of improvement in relation to that is virtually double that of the province over the past five years.

8:40

Considering the five-year completion rate under the Alberta Education description, our rate of improvement is actually three times the provincial rate. When we examine the dropout rate over the past five years, our rate has declined by 1.4 per cent. For the province the rate of decline was one-half per cent. Again, we're almost triple the provincial rate.

These improvements I believe are a tribute to the dedication and commitment of district staff in all of our schools. We are all serious about seeing more and more of our students experience daily success.

The district also created a K to 12 district literacy plan, bringing together expertise to support the development of multiple literacies as required in our world today. The district literacy plan brings together intervention strategies, ongoing training of staff, and literacy leadership development. This work continues to bring

a common message about the importance of developing literacies in the lives of our students.

As has been pointed out in the Public Accounts Committee's research report, the work we are doing to support the educational outcomes of our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students is important work. We know this to be a challenge, and we are doing our part to help more FNMI students experience success.

I do need to point out to the committee members that some of the information on page 11 of the report may have been mislabeled or used out of context. In the middle paragraph in reference to the FNMI dropout rate the numbers quoted are actually the FNMI high school completion rate. Since 2006 the FNMI completion rate of 17 and a half per cent increased by 9.1 per cent to 26.6 per cent. We know that these are numbers that have to be addressed, but we'll talk about rate of improvements.

Figure (h) at the bottom of page 11 correctly points out the district, the FNMI, and provincial dropout rates. Since 2006 the FNMI dropout rate has decreased by .9 per cent. The provincial rate actually increased over that same period of time by .3 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, I and our district leaders and staff recognize that we have much to improve, but these results are certainly an indication that we are doing our part to help more and more students be successful in Edmonton public schools.

Turning to our focus on continuous improvement in our business operations, Mr. Chair, I do need to point out to the committee, to be sure that we are looking at the same numbers should questions go in this direction, that the financial information, figure (c) on page 5, is labelled as 2010-2011 data; however, the numbers are actually 2009-2010 data. We have brought the current data along should the committee wish to examine the data ending August 31, 2011.

We have undertaken internal structural changes to focus funding and supports to achieve the district priorities that the board chair has highlighted, and I've established the role of assistant superintendents of schools to work directly with principals in what are called catchment area school groupings. These catchment groups are like a family of schools working together to more effectively meet the needs of the students, that are shared between and among the schools, and to share knowledge and expertise across schools. We are seeing interschool collaboration taking on new meaning and depth like not before.

In addition, we are taking on strategic business operations reviews to guide further restructuring to ensure the most effective and efficient business practices.

Mr. Chair, in a large metro district like ours we have a lot going on, and I'm proud to say that in the midst of this complexity our students continue to learn and to experience success across the city and that in some of our key measures we are making significant gains.

With that, the board chair and I and the team that we have assembled will be pleased to respond to any questions the committee may have. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Saher, does the office of the Auditor General have anything to add?

Mr. Saher: Mr. Chairman, just a brief comment. Just for clarification for everyone present today, of course, the office of the Auditor General is the auditor of the Ministry of Education, but we are not the appointed auditor of any of the school jurisdictions other than Northland school division.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we proceed to questions, I would like to welcome Mr. Mason, who was overlooked when introductions occurred. Good morning, sir.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. For the previous two years the Alberta government first cut then eventually restored millions of dollars in funding, which caused considerable disruption to students, parents, teachers, and school boards. With the \$107 million cut in the Department of Education's budget last spring and with the funding being restored in the fall, how many teachers did your district have to let go in June 2011 and rehire in October 2011?

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Chairman, there were a number of teachers who were identified for transfer in the spring, and I would like to make the distinction between those teachers on continuing contract versus those teachers that would be on a probationary contract. The district did not release any teachers on a continuing contract. There were a number of probationary teachers for whom we were looking at being able to renew their contracts and give them continuing contracts, and we were able to meet all of those except for I believe it was about nine probationary contract teachers come October. Once the dust had settled in terms of the change in place that occurred, approximately 120 FTE teachers were added in the fall.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My first question is around the increase in your district's centralized, or system-wide, support. I think you have put in some of the central level kind of supports to schools, to principals. I can see the need and potential benefit for that. I guess my question is: how would that impact your systems allocation in terms of staffing and finance, you know, accounting for resources? That's a shift – right? – from the open boundary and this system.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To clarify, the recentralizing or restructuring of what we are calling core services to our central office does not in any way remove or take away from site-based decision-making. What we were really looking at were issues where we were sending finances out to schools and then turning around and recollecting those finances for services that we were delivering, adding another layer of administration and bureaucracy as we were simply shifting funds around. That was one layer of work that we were undertaking.

The second was through a collaborative process with our principals and our central leaders identifying: what are those practices that really make sense to have focused and provided from a central perspective? We were looking at a number of areas in relation to how we manage our facilities and maintenance, how we manage our communications and district technology, as well as how we support schools through our student learning services consultants moving out to schools to support groups of schools. In that process we reduced some of the allocations out to schools with a corresponding level of service that was provided to our schools, which was more strategically aligned. What we were finding was that some of our larger schools, larger enrolment schools, were able to access services that some of our very small schools were not, and we needed to be much more strategic and focused to create a level of equity across those schools.

The net effect for our schools is that the funding for staffing is actually increasing at the local school level. Whereas at one point in time we might have said that 85 per cent of the budget was dedicated to staffing and the rest to supplies, equipment, and services, that number is approaching 95 per cent in some cases but, again, correspondingly the level of supplies, equipment, and services that are made available at no cost to schools.

Ms Woo-Paw: A supplementary. I think you also made some changes to the cost-recovery requirement, right? Why are you proposing that change, and how will this change impact your financial planning, monitoring, and accounting?

8:50

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll begin by reiterating that what we were finding in terms of cost recovery was that – and this came directly from principals in a consultative process – what was emerging was this sense of have and have-not schools. We felt that at a district level that inequity was something that needed to be addressed centrally. So we have been continually looking at and making sure that what was cost recovery, that now we're providing centrally, is in fact being used much more strategically. We're only partway through the first year of that implementation, so we're monitoring those results carefully.

Is there anything further? Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith: From a facilities point of view all schools used to purchase maintenance services, and then we did have, as Mr. Superintendent has indicated, some inequities. What we've done now is that everybody receives the same level of service, so all schools, large or small, will receive the same amount of support from a maintenance point of view to maintain our billing. That's an example of how we are providing the services now.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kang, please, followed by Mr. Sandhu.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My questions are about the infrastructure capital plan. On page 21 of the annual report you state that "the District needs to provide new school facilities to meet emerging local needs in a growing number of new and rapidly developing neighbourhoods." My question is from page 4 of the annual report that as of the fall of 2011 two of the schools were at capacity, and two more were approaching full capacity. How many more schools would be needed to fill your district's needs, and how many of these projects have been declined by the government of Alberta?

Mr. Schmidt: I'd like to call on Dr. Parker, please.

Dr. L. Parker: Good morning, Mr. Chair. In the capital plan we've identified two top priorities for new school construction, one in Heritage Heights and the other one in Terwillegar. So those are the two pressing needs. The schools that we have just recently opened in the new areas, as you've indicated, are at capacity already, so we're looking at adding some space there as well.

Mr. Kang: Okay. My second question is: how satisfied are you with the government's P3 schools and P3 contractual obligations? Are there any complaints or recommendations that you wish to voice?

Mr. Schmidt: I'll begin, Mr. Chair. In terms of what we would see as the delivery of a school, the opening dates and the

timelines, those kinds of things were certainly met and were satisfactory. We were able to be as prepared as we could possibly be for school openings. In terms of the building functioning, for the most part we're satisfied with the overall functioning.

There are some challenges that have emerged in these schools. I will call on Mr. Nicoll to just talk a little bit about some of the emerging challenges and things that we've been able to do to address the area of our maintenance contracts, those kinds of things.

Mr. Nicoll: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The P3 school concept is relatively new for the province and definitely for us. Opening six new schools in Edmonton public schools was a challenge just due to the volume. I'm sure it was a challenge for the province, with 18 schools. We're pleased with the general quality of construction. There were some learning curves with addressing maintenance and deficiency needs, but I put it in the context that it certainly wouldn't have been any different than our own experience with opening six separate schools at one time.

One of the challenges that we face, of course, is that it is a contract that is for 30 years, and any minor change to the contract does require a change order, and it now involves getting a change order from the province and working that through. So that would be the one issue that we have noticed differently, just the process that it takes, for example, to add two modular units to the school.

At the same time, Mr. Chairman, we're also quite pleased that Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Education recognize the priority of modular classrooms and have done everything they can to expedite that process.

Mr. Colburn: If I might supplement, Mr. Chair, on that front. I would like to share with the committee that the past board that, of course, had presented P3s to us did have some concern about the rigidity of design that P3s represented. We were informed by our administration that while there were many discussions surrounding what these P3 schools would look like, there was not a great deal of flexibility or movement on the part of the government in modifying the design package. One example of that would be that we had a priority on our last board and continue to have a priority, as I mentioned earlier, in the area of supporting the health and well-being of our students. Curiously, in high schools there is no space and there was no space in these P3 schools for cafeterias. So, you know, how one can support the well-being of students and be encouraging them or, really, forcing them off-site to have their meals is a source of concern.

There were other areas, broadly speaking, indicated to us by our administration that there was not a great deal of movement in terms of the design package.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're moving on now to Mr. Sandhu, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My questions are on your goal 1, success for every student, beginning on page 8 of your three-year education plan, 2011 to 2014. With your goal of having success for every student, why on page 10 is there an overall level of concern pertaining to the percentage of students who achieved an acceptable standard on diploma exams, and what are you doing to address this?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you for the question. I will call on Ms Parker to provide that response.

Ms T. Parker: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As noted in the AERR document, the district does have concern around our overall acceptance level on diplomas. A couple of things have been working through our district. One of them has been working very hard at the school level to have students challenge the highest possible course that they can. So we have some students who may have been taking lower level streams of courses that are now being challenged and supported in the diploma courses.

What we know as well is that some of those students aren't being successful, and so we are working with our high school cohorts on a more differentiated model of both instruction and assessment to ensure that students who are challenging the higher level courses are being successful and are being supported through them.

We also know, as noted in the document, that certainly the English 30-1 continues to be a problem for us as well as for the province. I know that in talking to the assessment department, they're working very hard to find out why that is and what we can start to do strategically as a province to ensure that more of our students are being successful.

Mr. Sandhu: A supplemental. On the same page it shows that the annual dropout rate has been declining in recent years. Can you expand more on the reason for the success in this regard and whether you've ever seen the dropout rate nearer to zero?

Ms T. Parker: Mr. Chairman, I will continue. Again, our district has been working diligently on multiple fronts to look at continuing to keep students engaged in high schools. We have somewhat of a program beyond year 3s where we have groups of our principals and counsellors working with students at risk to meet with them, to talk with them, and then to provide sometimes alternate programming options through our Centre High, through Argyll, through reach out, through transition programming to ensure that those students are having perhaps more of a flexible program offering because they're not being successful currently where they are. We are continuing to look at that, and we are continuing to talk to students about what it is that is getting in the way of them completing high school and what they would need in order to complete.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would like to welcome Mr. Vandermeer and Mr. Elniski this morning. Good morning, gentlemen.

Mr. Elniski: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Vandermeer: Good morning.

The Chair: We will now proceed to Mr. Mason, followed by Mr. Xiao.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Welcome. I know that an issue of great concern to many of my constituents is the question of maintaining older schools in older neighbourhoods, and I know as well that this was a significant issue in the last municipal election both at the school board level and also at the city level. Following the election the mayor appointed a task force on community sustainability, and I'm pleased that the board has taken this question up. The question that I have is: what changes in policies do you require or hope for on the part of the provincial government and the Department of Education that

would enable you to more effectively maintain schools in older neighbourhoods?

9:00

Mr. Colburn: I'll start with that, Mr. Chair. We have a deferred maintenance deficit of some \$250 million. This has continued to rise with no relief on the horizon. These are, of course, deferred maintenance projects that are all virtually associated with older schools. We have 75 schools in the district that are 50 years of age or over, so it's absolutely critical, in the board's view, that the government be prepared to come to the table with a level of funding that would allow us to address this deferred maintenance deficit.

We also need increased funding to balance the needs of our developing areas and their need for new school construction and the needs of our inner-city schools. We're prepared. We have actually been engaged in a series of public meetings with our constituents examining the issues related to school closures and school viability issues. Funding is our greatest pressure point, so having some significant relief in this area would allow us to more effectively manage our infrastructure challenges. That would be the big ask from our perspective.

I'll ask our superintendent to supplement.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In relation to infrastructure maintenance and renewal funding that funding level has remained fairly flat over the last three years, and the funding has been consistently about \$14 million. Of course, our needs across a large district like ours certainly used that and could use a lot more in relation to that. As the board chair has indicated, this remains an area of concern to the board.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much.

Before my supplemental, Mr. Chair, I apologize. I have a very important engagement at one of my schools, so this will be my only round of questions. I've written out a list of other questions. Can I leave them with you?

The Chair: You certainly may, and we can read them into the record at 5 to 10, for sure.

Mr. Mason: Well, I won't be here at 5 to 10, but I'll provide this to you.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much.

Just the following question. I think that there's a recognition that with declining population it places the board in a difficult position, keeping schools open that have relatively low enrolments. I've seen an indication that there's an interest on the part of the city to work on community revitalization with a view to bringing population and young families back to inner-city communities. I wonder if the board has any observations with respect to those sorts of strategies.

Mr. Colburn: Well, we're very excited at the initiative of the Community Sustainability Task Force, that the mayor created last winter, and note with particular satisfaction that recommendation 1 coming out of that task force was a recommendation that both school boards and the city of Edmonton work with the city, the province, and even the federal government to deal with what was described as the urban agenda.

That aligns itself very nicely with one of the recommendations that came out of our moratorium committee report, which sum-

marized outcomes and recommendations related to the series of public meetings we had had examining school closures that I referred to earlier, and that was a continuation because the previous board had approved trilevel conversations between the city and the province to examine the issue of school closures and school viability issues. Those meetings have been on hold in recent months pending the release of the Community Sustainability Task Force report and the conclusion of our moratorium committee report.

We are extremely supportive as a board to sit down with the city and the province. We see the opportunities. Indeed, the need for breaking out of silo decision-making and silo conversations to address increasingly complex space issues and these rapidly growing urban environments is absolutely critical to our work, and we can't turn our back on the public in the public education term of reference in the world that we represent. The public clearly told us in the last election that it expects a greater level of creativity and leadership from boards to move beyond simply closing schools and saying: too bad; that's the way it goes.

That's the direction that we have undertaken as a board over the past year, to examine different opportunities. We're very pleased that the city seems to be in line with that direction, and we're looking forward to a continuation of intergovernmental discussions in the area of space management.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Xiao, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everybody. My question is related to the mixed classroom. For the last little while I've been knocking on doors. I got a lot of questions on the doorstep about the schools that have classrooms which have normal students mixed with students with some physical or mental challenges. I want to know: how do you allocate the resources to address the needs in that classroom, you know, to make sure that all those kids can learn in the environment that they are supposed to be in?

Mr. Colburn: I just want to begin by saying that the board is passionately committed to the principle of inclusion.

As to dealing with the steep challenges of how you fund successful inclusion, I'm now going to give the easy question to my superintendent and have him respond.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you for that. I think, Mr. Chairman, one of our challenges provincially as well as across Edmonton public schools is: how do we fund and allocate resources appropriately to ensure that every child and particularly those children with special education needs are appropriately programmed for? We do this in several ways. First of all, we provide additional allocations to those schools in relation to the needs of the special education students. So schools will receive differential allocations according to the number of students with special education needs in the school. But, more importantly – and this is, I believe, from an educational perspective, a key piece – we have aligned our central services resources under an inclusive learning department that works closely with our schools to ensure that from an educational perspective teachers and school staff are supported in providing high-quality educational programming.

This continues to remain a challenge. In particular, this is a new department and a new area of focus for our district, and we continue to focus our resources to make sure that we're providing the right level of support. I think there will always remain chal-

allenges as we work through this, but we certainly have a high level of commitment, both at the school level staff and centrally, to provide support and programming to our students.

Mr. Xiao: Okay. My second question is about home-schooling. These days home-schooling has become a really hot topic. I look at your report here. The ratio of the funding is about .305 – right? – versus 1 in other categories. How do you determine the funding to the home-schools, and what is the relationship between the school board and the home-schools?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Home education is a program available to students, families across the province. One aspect of our district's work is to establish the Argyll home education centre, which is really a support network of teachers and supportive staff, to meet the home education needs of students in the Edmonton area and certainly beyond. What we've done is create an infrastructure of support, often through the use of technology, that creates a supportive environment for home education families to experience a level of success.

9:10

Certainly, we are monitoring how well students do. One of the interesting features around home education students is that for a variety of reasons they will often choose not to participate in provincial achievement tests, those kinds of things. That's maybe part of their desire to really take control and manage their own education program, so we often have some challenges in terms of tracking results over time. Having said that, we certainly are seeing a number of home education students experiencing success.

In terms of the funding question I have to admit I'm not exactly clear on which area you're referring to. We very much follow the provincial guidelines in terms of the funding we receive for home education students. We use a portion for the infrastructure that is necessary from both technology and the paper/pencil hard costs. Also, home education student families are able to access some of that funding directly for their own use within their homes. That's some general information around that.

Mr. Xiao: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. For many years now this government's antiquated pre Learning Commission space utilization formula, which includes hallways as teachable space, has put enormous pressure on our school boards to close, in particular, inner-city schools. I've attended these very passionate closure meetings in both Edmonton and Calgary. What has been the impact to date of your boards to your moratorium decision on not acting towards school consolidation or potential closures to address excess space. This comes from your annual report, page 21.

Mr. Colburn: The moratorium committee, as I indicated earlier, conducted a number of meetings over the past year, public meetings that engaged in an examination of a multitude of issues related to school closures and space viability. We came to some conclusions. Those conclusions were discussed and eventually signed off on at public board as a series of recommendations. They will over the next few months be implemented. A good number of these recommendations come in the area of advocacy for positive changes that will reduce the likelihood of school closures.

In addition, of course, again, as I mentioned earlier, we are committed to working with different levels of government to find creative solutions to address real urban issues that school closures impact. It's probably too early to say whether we are going to hit a home run or a single or a double or a triple in this world, but we certainly believe that we have, with our recommendations and our exhaustive conversations with our public, created a series of initiatives that will better support inner-city schools. What the outcome might be of sitting down with the province and the city – the municipal government – and indeed possibly the federal government to examine some of these issues is uncertain at the moment, but I'm delighted that there has been such a level of clear enthusiasm expressed by the mayor to be a full participant in these discussions. We can only hope that the province will see the wisdom in joining us in these conversations.

We have made a number of recommendations. Those recommendations will be implemented in the months to come. Probably we'll be in a better position to know exactly what the outcome of this moratorium has been a year or two down the road, when we see what response we have to our recommendations and what the outcome of these intergovernmental meetings might amount to.

Mr. Chase: I'm very aware that closing an inner-city school in terms of killing a neighbourhood is the equivalent of closing down a grain elevator or a local post office in a rural area, so I'm very pleased to hear that you've had support from the municipal level of government. What response have you had in the 2010-2011 year with regard to the government in terms of your taking the initiative to have a moratorium where the government has been pushing hard for you to continue to close inner-city schools to meet their funding formulas?

Mr. Colburn: Well, I should correct one notion that still seems to be floating around, and that is that there is a formal link between new school funding and school closures. Certainly, there was the impression and on some occasions perhaps some clear messaging from previous ministers of Education that the space issues within a school district had to be addressed in terms of underutilization before funding would be forthcoming to support new school construction. We had been told by the previous Minister of Education that that is not the case today, and we have not received any contrary views from the current minister. So I want to put that aside.

Perhaps I'll turn it over to the superintendent to supplement, and then maybe I'll come back.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe the question is: what changes have occurred in the 2010-2011 school year in relation to the board's stance on the moratorium on school closures, and has anything changed? I think in terms of funding there have been no significant shifts or changes other than the ongoing educational support and increases that would have been applied to all school jurisdictions across the province, as has been indicated. So for us as a school district those pressures remain.

The moratorium committee has certainly listened extensively and gained a much deeper understanding of the complexity of the issues and the interrelationships between where students live, enrolment numbers, age of buildings, and what's required to maintain and keep them going. So we've certainly gained a lot more information and knowledge with a view, I believe, that the board will be taking that into account as we move forward beyond the moratorium of two years and in ongoing decisions in relation to managing space for educational purposes as well as managing

space for community purposes, which is a new element that the board has certainly brought strongly to the front and center.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Colburn: Mr. Chair, if I could just offer one final statement.

The Chair: I think we are going to just move on to the next question, with no disrespect, please.

Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. My challenge here is that I have five questions along these lines, but I have to stick with two. My questions are around the FNMI student issues. I know that these are complex and that there are lots of challenges. I would also like to say that it is not just your issue. I think it's our issue as a province.

On pages 18 to 19 of your report you do have a list of all the different strategies and programs that you have in place to provide support to FNMI students. My first question is: could you talk about the aboriginal commitment coach pilot, the Way In, and the mentorship program, that you mentioned in your report, how these programs are doing, whether they are yielding the kind of outcomes that you are expecting and whether these kinds of programs are actually really connecting some of the students who are disconnected, you know, to that support system? To me I think having expectations for our young people is extremely important in ensuring that they succeed in life. I think that for a lot of the students who are having challenges in the education system in society today it is because they don't have that circle of people who actually are there to set expectations and provide support to them. So I'd like to know how these programs are working for the FNMI students.

9:20

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you for the question. I will call on Ms Parker to respond.

What I will say in relation to two of the programs that were mentioned, the Way In project and the STAR project, is that these are projects that were initially established to meet the needs of students dealing with mental health issues, and we're very proud of some of the impacts that have happened. What we've found as well is that the benefits derived from staff understanding and bringing in experts to work with staff and with students have built some capacity across a number of schools, where we are sharing that knowledge and expertise to identify early intervention strategies and approaches with our students as well as, when necessary, to engage crisis supports as required and that we are able to do that much earlier and much more effectively. A key element, in fact, is ongoing mentoring and support for students through this. What we're finding is that although this is available to all of our students, we certainly are providing support to FNMI students.

I will ask Ms Parker to talk about the commitment coaches because that's a very key program specifically for many of our FNMI students.

Ms Woo-Paw: So they're not specifically for FNMI?

Mr. Schmidt: I'll call on Ms Parker.

Ms Woo-Paw: That was not my supplemental.

Ms T. Parker: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. The Way In project runs in the area of Mill Woods and is housed in Dan Knott

and really is a partnership exploring that whole idea of wraparound service. How do we use multiple ministries to access students who need help at the school level? What we're finding with the Way In project, as Mr. Schmidt had mentioned, is that we are having some success because it is targeted, it is funded. Unfortunately, it is funded by a grant, so at some point we won't be able to continue with the full amount of service we're providing those students. As a district we're looking at: how do we learn and be able to afford what we can moving ahead around the wraparound?

The commitment coaches do exactly as the notion that we heard, which was an opportunity to have somebody to connect with, to have somebody who is able to talk to the students one-on-one and their parents, many times not in the formal school setting but at a coffee shop or something like that, to keep students and parents engaged in school. What we find not only with our FNMI students but with many students is that as they move up through the grades, they become less engaged. They feel that there are fewer people to talk to who care about their education and their schooling.

They are both our projects and, unfortunately, both of them have grants attached to them. We are working very hard as a district to find ways to sustain that, learn from it, and build some capacity.

Ms Woo-Paw: My supplemental.

The Chair: Be concise, please.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. This is your third goal, and you have seven performance measures around this. I was curious – and I'm not really targeting this one school system. The word you use in terms of outcomes is to engage these students. I think that's a very low expectation. While it may work to assess the performance of the school system, I think we are not setting a high enough expectation for the students. You know – I'm trying to be succinct – I came to Canada at 14 without knowing any English. My parents' expectation was that I would go to university, and I went to university. These students are born and raised in Canada, in their own country. They should be doing better, and we should be doing better in supporting these students.

The Chair: Do you have anything to add?

Mr. Schmidt: Very briefly, Mr. Chairman, and that is that we recognize that there are multiple factors that come into the success of families, and of course expectations from families and the surrounding support is one key element that is essential for student success. Through some targeted areas, specifically with junior highs and with the transition between grades 9 and 10, our FNMI staff as well as school-based staff have been working much more diligently at creating relationships, which are an essential first piece in creating the high academic expectations that we need. So we certainly are approaching this from multiple dimensions in order to achieve better results for our students.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kang, please, followed by Mr. Elniski.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My questions are around the special-needs funding. What are the consequences for your district of the five-year funding freeze for special-needs students? How did this affect your efforts for action on inclusion? Annual report, page 3.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you for the question. The freeze in special education funding certainly has created some challenges for us. What's actually happened in our district is that we've used a whole range of educational funds to support the needs and demands in our schools for special education funding. In fact, we would describe it as supplementing what our needs are from a whole variety of areas. I'll call on Mr. Smith to give us the exact number, but it certainly has created challenges. What we have been able to do, though, is continue to work with our school-based staff through our central services to work at building our own internal capacity for including children in the regular classroom. As well, we're undertaking reviews of our special education sites to make sure that we're really hitting the mark and creating those environments for greater levels of success.

In terms of the funding, Mr. Smith can speak to that directly.

Mr. Smith: In this current year we actually were supplementing to the tune of almost \$29 million to meet the needs of our special-needs students, and we used money from different grants throughout.

Mr. Kang: My supplemental is: what are the recommendations of the special-needs task force, when will they be implemented, and do you believe you receive enough funds from the government to go forward with this project?

Mr. Colburn: Well, we're in the process of finalizing policy and regulations – the superintendent will speak to that – and I would expect that that work will be completed very shortly, within the next few months. In the area of funding I don't think we as a district are clear on what the funding implications are of the recent focus by the ministry in the area of special-needs education. So we're very interested as a board in hearing the particulars of how special education students will be funded in the future. That information, frankly, has been a little slow coming out of the Legislature. We look forward to those specifics.

Mr. Superintendent.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that with this funding coming into the 2012-2013 year there were some changes made and, certainly, some increases in special education funding. As the board chair has indicated, we are now working through what the implications of that are, and the need for ongoing assessment of special education students appears to be shifting as well. We believe that to be a good move, that we're spending our resources on programming for students versus assessing them on a regular basis for identification and coding for a special education funding amount. So we are working through that. We believe this to be a good move, and we have some work to do in establishing the right kinds of programming and funding for our schools in relation to that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Elniski, please.

Mr. Elniski: Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Dave, Lorne, Edgar, Brian, ladies, and gentlemen. A couple of quick questions for you. On page 5 of your audited financial statement, rental of facilities, you show 2010 gross rental revenue of \$4.1 million. I'm curious as to – because I can't find it anywhere in your financials, so if you could provide it for me, please – what your accounts receivable are with respect to your nonprofits not paying the full shot on their rental revenues.

Mr. Smith: We don't have that detail. Sorry.

Mr. Elniski: Okay. If you could get back to me on that, that would be good.

The second question I have follows along the same line. It has to do with schools where you have multiple organizations within the same facility and whether or not you typically operate those with head leases or with a master lease or whether you operate with individual leases for individual agencies. I'm just trying to determine some cash-flow patterning here.

9:30

Mr. Schmidt: I'll call on Dr. Parker, please.

Dr. L. Parker: Mr. Chairman, most of those leases are single leases with the district. We have very few that would actually be under a head lease.

Mr. Elniski: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt, if you could provide the answers in writing through the committee clerk to all members, we'd be grateful.

Mr. Schmidt: No problem.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My questions have to do with the Alberta initiative for school improvement, AISI, funding. The government website states:

Since 1999, the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) has been at the forefront of encouraging and promoting creativity and innovation in Alberta schools. AISI supports projects that focus on student engagement, inquiry, critical thinking, 21st century learning, assessment, differentiated instruction, literacy, personalized learning, and much more.

Of course, I agree with that statement.

In 2008 your board had made incredible progress in reducing class sizes thanks to the Alberta initiative for school improvement. Self-esteem as well as grades improved tremendously, especially in most socioeconomic areas. In 2010-11 the funding for AISI went from \$79.59 million down to, for 2011-12, \$56.56 million. How has your organization been affected by the declining funding for that program over this time?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the question. With the funding that was reintroduced, the \$107 million that was reintroduced to school boards earlier this school year, our decision was to restore some of those AISI funds and continue the projects that were already under way. We know, going forward, that the AISI funding will be reduced, so we are currently planning how to manage those resources and maintain the intent of the AISI program around building our own internal staff capacity and knowledge and expertise to address some of the educational demands that are going forward.

The focus on creativity, the focus on critical thinking and building the assessment capacity of all of our staff will certainly continue to remain strong although the rate at which we might be able to achieve that will certainly be impacted.

Mr. Chase: This is potentially putting you in a position where you're damned if you do and damned if you don't, but do you believe that these cuts will – and I'll give you the source of the quote – “undermine schools' ability to innovate and enhance

student learning and is a decided step backward”? This was a comment that came out of the *ATA News* February 28, 2012.

Mr. Colburn: Well, let me begin by saying that the board is very concerned about the reduction of AISI funding. It’s our understanding that although some funds, obviously, were returned to districts with the Premier’s decision to return the \$107 million shortfall, there has not been a long-term commitment to maintain the level of AISI funding consistent with where it was at two years ago.

I think it would be fair to say that our board shares the very high value associated with AISI funding that was identified on the government website. Any diminution in funding for AISI and the professional development that’s so vital to having the most effective teachers possible in the classrooms is raised with some significant concern on the part of the board.

We always have the opportunity, of course, to supplement the current levels of AISI funding, but we’re under significant financial pressures in a number of areas, so to find the funds somewhere to ensure that AISI funding continues to be at historical high levels is a great challenge.

Mr. Superintendent.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. Only to supplement, Mr. Chairman. What AISI has done is provide the targeted funding which really supports and brings into focus staff learning and staff capacity building. Of course, it did give rise to opportunities to examine innovations and different types of projects. Certainly, we’ve learned from those. So there is some value that’s being derived from that.

With a reduction, I think what is true about the staff in our district is that we certainly continue to look for innovative ways and bring focus to staff learning and development. The challenge will be what I’ve said before. The rate at which we would be able to do that will certainly be impacted because of other constraints that are pressing in on that desire and ability of our staff.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The definition for dropout rates has changed in recent years. When I look at your report on page 5, when you add up the dropout rate and the completion rate, it adds up to about 72 per cent. It’s the same for the provincial figures; it adds up to 76 per cent. I’m sure we agree that ensuring that our young people receive the critical basic education is important for the future of the students in our society. Are we truly making meaningful gains in terms of school completion, or are we just juggling numbers?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you for the question. It would certainly be unfortunate by any measure of success of an educational institution that we’d be juggling numbers to achieve hoped-for outcomes.

At the end of the day the key element is: can we ensure that every student experiences enough daily success in order for them to keep returning to school on a daily basis to complete their work? Certainly, from our districts’ supplemental data, that we look at as we do our work, there are some key measures that are very important to us. One of them at the high school level is course completion at the grade 10 level. We know that if students are not successful in one to two courses at the grade 10 level, they immediately become at risk of not completing high school. We’ve placed a significant amount of emphasis on appropriate course

selection although we challenge students to the highest levels. We’ve been noticing that course completion rates across our high schools have continually moved up, and that for us is one key measure that we monitor as an element. Our goal is to make these real numbers and to have real success for our students.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Colburn: The board believes it’s critical as well to create the most supportive environment possible for students to give them the greatest incentive to remain in school. You will see in our priority statement and, again, in the new Education Act repeated references to creating inclusive, equitable learning experiences, creating school environments that are welcoming, respectful, accepting, and supportive of all students. I think that by ramping up our commitment to creating the school environment that we want to create, that will make students feel secure, welcome, and supported in that environment, we do have the capacity to make inroads to reduce our dropout rate significantly over the years.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. I’m not opposed to changing definitions if it’s helpful. I just don’t fully understand what that really means right now.

I’m just wondering whether there is anybody that is really looking at the whole picture – what’s happening to the 20 per cent? – and whether it would be helpful for the public and stakeholders in education to have a fuller understanding of what happens to that 20 per cent, whether anyone is tracking them. Are they coming back to the system? Are they going to continuing education? Would it be helpful if institutions like yours were able to provide that full picture to the public when you report so that we understand that you have 69 per cent that are completing high school and 10 per cent that are dropping out and then what happened to the 20 per cent?

Mr. Schmidt: Just briefly, one of our challenges is that we’re meeting the reporting requirements in the format that Alberta Education has provided. We certainly know that Alberta Education provides long-term, ongoing information beyond three years of high school, up to five years, and that there are many students that, in fact, complete high school according to a broad definition that gives them enough credentials to move on to some level of postsecondary work.

9:40

A high school diploma is actually fairly narrowly defined in terms of very specific areas that have to be demonstrated to earn that diploma. But that high school completion might in fact be students meeting sufficient courses that allow them to get into university. There are a number of students who do not actually earn the graduation diploma but proceed directly to university because they’ve been very focused and targeted in their studies to be able to do that. That student has in fact completed high school, in an unusual way perhaps, but that’s exactly what’s happened.

Some of our students who are able to achieve a level of success through our registered apprentice program may not achieve the actual diploma per se but have sufficient credentials to move on and become successful, perhaps in a trade and those kinds of things.

The definition of high school completion, I think, has now become broad enough that we’re capturing what is evident in our school population, that the traditional, regular way we provide education programming meets the needs of most of the students most of the time and that for those that it doesn’t, we have to provide greater flexibility and opportunity. That’s what we’re seeing emerging.

The actual numbers can be tracked. Alberta Education does track some of that information although we don't necessarily have access to all of that once the students leave our school system.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kang, please, followed by Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My questions are around the board of trustees' priorities for 2010 and 2011.

From the Edmonton public school board's website, page 2, it states that one of the board of trustees' goals was a "re-prioritized capital plan to place high priority on modernizing existing schools." To what extent has this been accomplished?

Mr. Colburn: Last year during the determination of our capital plan the board approved attaching greater priority, increased priority, to modernization needs as opposed to new school construction. That was a document that the board signed off on and that was forwarded to the provincial government.

Our new capital plan will be coming before the board, I believe, next Tuesday, so we will have an opportunity at that time to affirm the particulars of what that capital plan will look like. I should point out that one of the recommendations approved by the board, coming out of our moratorium committee's work, was to continue to prioritize the modernization needs of our aging school inventory over new school constructions.

It's safe to say that whatever the language looks like and whatever the identification of priorities will look like in our capital plan next week, we expect to continue prioritizing modernization needs over new school construction.

It should be mentioned for people who think that Edmonton public perhaps has gone soft in the area of school closures that we have closed 13 schools in the past eight years, so we have been fairly active if not aggressive in this area.

Addressing greater balance: the board sees that as delivering a clear message to the government that in the area of our aging infrastructure, our needs are not being met. Increased priority has to be given to that, and we are committed to doing that in our capital plan.

Mr. Kang: Maybe you touched on my second question a little bit. Are there any sacrifices being made in other areas to achieve these goals?

Mr. Colburn: I would ask the superintendent to comment in that regard. We do certainly have a significant operating maintenance deficit, some \$26 million last year. I mean, certainly, it could be addressed if we closed a number of schools, but school closures are, as I'm sure the committee can appreciate, quite a complex initiative. The board did make a formal decision that we were going to pause in our activity of school closures and examine in greater depth the whole issue of school closures and school viability.

Mr. Kang: That's another concern, when we are closing schools. It's going to affect the student population of those areas.

Mr. Colburn: Absolutely. It's a very complex issue.

Mr. Kang: Yes. So if you are trying to achieve this by closing more schools, then that will put pressure on the parents and the students to ride the buses far, far away.

Mr. Colburn: Well, we have a moratorium in place until November 2012, this year, so we're certainly not expecting any school closure considerations to come before the board in the next

few months, and where the board will go following the conclusion of the moratorium has yet to be determined.

Mr. Kang: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In Calgary there has been a lot of conversation in regard to the board's role in financial control and oversight at the governance level, so my question would be: what policies and procedures do you have at the governance level with the board in the areas of financial control and oversight?

Mr. Colburn: Last year, as I identified at the beginning of our meeting today, we approved a motion to add external membership to our audit committee, which we viewed as a very positive step forward, to ensure that a qualified independent perspective came to the table to be part of the audit process. So we have two qualified external auditors, who began their work on our audit committee this past year. As well, we engage in conversations prior to and during the presentation of the budget to identify the board's values that it wants to see implemented in the budget and to examine exactly where the allocations fit within the board-identified values and priorities.

Finally, of course, we have the overall authority, as every district does in the province, and responsibility to approve, modify, or – well, I don't think boards are in a habit of rejecting budgets, but certainly they have the capacity to modify a budget or ask for a budget deferral for further consideration if they're not satisfied with it. So the board is fairly active in this area, and we regard the addition of external membership to our audit committee as a clear strengthening of our efficiency in this area.

Mr. Fawcett: Okay. My supplemental would be: what authority does the board retain in regard to threshold of expenditures that the administration must get board approval for in regard to any expenditures? What's the threshold that the board has?

Mr. Colburn: Mr. Superintendent, would you like to comment on that?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The current structure and authorities provided by the board to the superintendent are such that there is a high level of authority provided to the superintendent. What that means is that the board determines what the actual distribution of funds is going to be in relation to the overall budget. We provide in response to that in-depth information to the board about how those funds are actually expended at the school and district level, indicating how much of our resources are going to staff, supplies, equipment, and services and so on. So there's a significant range of information that's provided.

There is no identifiable threshold per se that the board has established in terms of changing those funds, although it has been the practice and would continue to be the practice within our district that any significant adjustments or changes from the planned, approved budget – information would be brought forward to the board so that there are no surprises on the part of the board in relation to any changes or adjustments in the planned expenditure of those funds.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by, if there's time, Mr. Sandhu.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My next question has to do with school lunch programs. The report on children and family poverty has recently released that in 2009 more than 73,000 children across Alberta were living below the poverty line. That's from their annual report, page 3. My colleague Dr. Kevin Taft has frequently stressed the connection between nourishment and educational success. Does Edmonton public have either a free or subsidized school lunch program for students living particularly in impoverished districts?

9:50

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Chairman, yes, we do. We work with externally funded partners that provide a number of hot lunches and snack programs to our students.

Mr. Chase: Can you give me a sense as to how much the board itself has invested in the programs and to what extent you're hoping to extend the programs to other schools?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I wouldn't be able to provide a dollar amount in that way. We provide staff support in working with partners at the local level with the providers of the hot lunch programs. We provide the space in kind, all of those types of things. We work with volunteers as well as district staff time. So we wouldn't be able to provide an aggregated number at this point in time, but certainly we'd be able to take a look and give the committee a number.

Mr. Chase: And expanding the program?

Mr. Schmidt: At this point in time we're really looking at needs. The expansion of programs, really, is dependent on external funds and partners that are made available through our partnership work.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: In the time that we have left, I'm afraid we're going to have to read our questions into the record. Mr. Colburn and Mr. Schmidt, if we could have a response in writing through the clerk, we would be very grateful.

Mr. Sandhu, please.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I need to understand the capital planning. If you hear the city's side, the city is going to be growing faster to the northeast and southeast part of the city. In a lot of new areas houses are coming up so quickly, so fast, in the last three years. I've been door-knocking in the new areas, and they keep asking: when is the school going to be happening? Last year I was talking to your office and figuring out when the new schools will be, and your plan is to build 20 new schools, I believe, in the northeast part of the city, elementary schools. So I just need to understand how you guys are considering the growth coming to that part of the city, and as new schools are going to be happening later on, are you reconsidering the existing school boundaries to accommodate the new area students into the schools?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kang, please.

Mr. Chase, you're going to do some work on behalf of Mr. Mason, I understand?

Mr. Kang: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll go first. My questions are around fundraising. How much money is raised by fundraising over the year, and how much is the board depending on that fundraising? Do you think the department's evaluation of

the new three-year sustainable funding model will change that situation? Those are my two questions. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Elniski, please.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you very much. Just once again back to the discussion about lease agreements and some of your capital assets. I notice that in 2010 you showed losses on disposable capital assets of \$9,559, which strikes me as a curious sum in the context of your whole financials. Elsewhere in your financials you show sales of capital assets of \$3,387,000. I understand it's a complexity with respect to the disposal of school sites, but I would like to know from you ultimately what your plan is with respect to how we, I guess, codify some of the issues we have around school site disposals, where that money goes, and whether or not you're operating fair market value lease agreements for your tenants and, frankly, also, to be blunt, whether or not your tenants are paying the rent.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. One set on my behalf and then eight short ones on behalf of Mr. Mason.

As a former ESL and FSL teacher a question on ESL funding. On page 3 of the annual report you state that due to changing demographics Edmonton has seen an increase in the number of FNMI, immigrant, and refugee families. What was the impact on the Edmonton public schools of the discontinuance by the government of Alberta of the enhanced ESL grant? What other challenges have you faced due to these changing demographics, and how are you attempting to address them?

These eight questions come from Mr. Mason of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. One, what are the different types of fees that are classified under instruction resource fees?

Two, how much are alternative programs/programs of choice charging in fees on average, and what is the highest that an alternative program/program of choice is charging?

Three, what do alternative programs/programs of choice use the fees to pay for?

Four, how many schools have lunchroom monitors?

Five, how much are transportation fees per child on average, and what is the highest transportation fee charged in the district?

Six, what is the total amount of the transportation fees collected in the district?

Seven, how many school buildings in the district have asbestos?

Eight, what plans or funding are in place to remove the asbestos in those buildings?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase. I would like to clarify that the very distinguished hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Mr. Tony Vandermeer, is sitting here and that Mr. Mason is from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay. If there are no other questions, on behalf of all I would like to thank Mr. Colburn, Mr. Schmidt, and all your employees or representatives from Edmonton public school division No. 7. I would like to thank you for your time and your attention and your patience with us this morning and wish you all the best in your future endeavours. We have a couple of other

items on our agenda to conclude, so you can just feel free to go. Again, on behalf of all members, thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you.

Mr. Colburn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Now item 5, other business. Is there any other business committee members wish to raise at this time? No? Okay.

The date of our next meeting. The next meeting has been scheduled for March 14, 2012, with Alberta Seniors. We look forward to that, and I'm sure the researchers will provide us with

some interesting information from the annual report and the Auditor General's report if there is any information in the AG's report.

Thank you. I believe we can have a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Elniski: I would love to make that motion.

The Chair: Moved by Mr. Elniski that the meeting be adjourned. All in favour? None opposed?

Thank you. We'll see you next week.

[The committee adjourned at 9:58 a.m.]

