

THE BUGLER

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Karen Wilson

I hope everyone had a relaxing and enjoyable Spring Break. I was looking forward to sun-drenched days in Maui but until the last four days of my holiday I was only drenched by torrential rains which caused a great deal of flash flooding and even a tornado. In spite of the weather I had a fabulous time visiting my friends and getting away from the massive amount of snow (that mysteriously disappeared mere moments after my departure to Maui). I'm hoping that my appearance in exotic locales does not continue to create freak weather experiences. Not only did I get a chance to spend my holiday with my friends but they returned just before Easter for a fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration, so I was able to spend part of the Easter weekend with them as well.

I would like to reiterate my thanks about the collaborative process regarding the re-opening of the collective agreement. I would especially like to acknowledge the work of Trustee Paul Dolynny and Economic Policy Committee Chair Bill Shields. The willingness and openness of the educational stakeholders to communicate makes Elk Island Public Schools a great place in which to teach. I wish the unfunded liability of our pension plan could be dealt with as efficiently and effectively. Unfortunately the

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upcoming provincial government changes seem to be putting this item on the "back burner" yet again. I'm looking forward to the creative problem-solving suggestions sure to be offered at the May long weekend Annual Representatives Assembly which is being held in Calgary.

The work has begun on the next three-year round of AISI. With the very short timeline of the budget announcement and the project start-up in September, committees are busy writing up the various project proposals.

Celebrate Education Week during April 30 -- May 6, 2006. Remember public education is the future. If you or your staff would like me to visit your school regarding any concerns or to attend celebrations, please don't hesitate to contact me.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Carrie Huculak, PD Chair

I hope that everyone had a revitalizing Spring Break! I had the wonderful opportunity to spend the week in Orlando with my husband and some family, and was blessed with great weather. I am going to part ways with what I normally write about, which is PD, and talk about something a little different.

While I was on my vacation, I felt that I needed some light reading material to get me through the 6 hour flight to Florida. I decided to pick up Oprah's magazine, as it had a few articles that were of interest to me. As I was reading through the magazine, I came across a brief article that Oprah had written. The article was about a novel that Oprah had recently read. She went on to say that reading it was something that everyone should do, as it had a profound impact on the way that she viewed the world today. The novel was titled "Night" and was written Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel.

I decided to pick up the novel and purchased it in the Seattle airport. Wiesel writes about the time he and his family spent in the Nazi death camps, more specifically, Auschwitz and Buchenwald. The novel was originally written in Yiddish, then translated into French, and just recently translated into English by Wiesel's wife, Marion. While the novel itself is only 115 pages, the power that is held within those pages is staggering. It is a story that could only have been written by a survivor of these camps. The insight into the human spirit and our will to survive is awe-inspiring. But what struck me most about his words, was the realization that human suffering continues today. Of course we all know this, but do we really KNOW this? At the end of the novel, Weisel has placed his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. He talks about

our duty to stand up and fight against evil, our duty to help the weak and oppressed and ensure that human rights are not being violated. It is so easy to turn a blind eye when atrocities are not happening right in front of us, to ignore the homeless on the street begging for spare change, or to switch the channel when the news shows us uncomfortable pictures of starving children in far away nations.

This article is not meant to point fingers at us for not doing enough. Nor is it meant to demand that we all do more. I, myself, feel that it is time for me not to ignore the realities of the world. It is time for me to stop ignoring the suffering that is happening everyday in our schools and our cities and to become more educated about what I can do to help. I can no longer walk by people who are asking for spare change and ignore them. Weisel says that all victims need to know that they are not abandoned and alone. Our freedom is not truly real while other people are fighting for theirs. His novel has put a fire in my heart to try to make a difference. Change can come in all shapes and sizes and does not have to be grand. I whole-heartedly recommend this novel to anyone who has felt like I have.

TBAC REPORT

Deneen Zielke, Chair

On April 19th we had our first scheduled TBCC (Teacher Board Consultation Committee) meeting with Superintendent Egbert Stang, as well as board representative Skip Gordon. We took the opportunity to share with Mr. Stang and Mr. Gordon positive feedback teachers have shared with committee members. These comments included appreciation of timely and open communication, and a “hands on” approach that ranges from involvement in the interview process for principals, to manning the E.I.P.S booth at the recent trade show. The board’s efforts to manage the system budget and return \$75/pupil to each school, as well as their initiative to open the collective agreement and increase salaries on the grid for Sept. 2006, have been appreciated.

Mr. Stang shared a little of his educational philosophy by stating that “Education should be a hopeful activity for children.” His first impressions of E.I.P.S. support this. Mr. Stang stated that he is impressed by the commendable achievement results of our students and stresses that our students do not attain such results without the hard work of dedicated and skilled teachers and support staff across the system. During his recent school visits he noted a very positive atmosphere in our schools with both children and teachers engaged in learning. He also noted that our district initiatives are clear and are an obvious focus in our schools.

We took time at this meeting to review committee roles and responsibilities and to discuss how we envision our work together. Your committee expressed a desire to provide feedback regarding system policies and discuss teacher concerns that fall out-

side the collective agreement. It was agreed that open discussions and shared perspectives often lead to collaborative solutions, and that this approach will guide our work together.

Recent concerns raised by TBAC, regarding absenteeism, were also shared at this meeting. We discussed the decrease in absences associated with professional development and the increase in medical/illness absences during the first four months of this school year. A number of "stressors" that may have contributed to this were shared. We are definitely in a stage of transition. We have had a challenging year; but in looking ahead, it is possible to see a more positive future. On many levels, and in many forms, change is apparent. It is felt that recent budget announcements from the Education minister will have, to some degree, a positive effect on class size (we all know "averages" are not "target" size). The reorganization of central services staff should assist personnel in their work to support students and teachers. As well, the organization of an extensive group of stakeholder representatives to study professional development should lead to a delivery model that prioritizes initiatives, is self-perpetuating, meets the needs of E.I.P.S staff, and supports our students. Our committee is hopefully optimistic that these initiatives, and those that follow, will positively impact all of E.I.P.S.

We are looking forward to our next meeting, and our continued work Mr. Stang and the school board.

WEIRD QUESTIONS ASKED OF LIBRARIANS

- * "Do you have that book by Rushdie: 'Satanic Nurses'?"
- * "Where is the reference desk?" This was asked of a person sitting at a desk who had, hanging above her head, a sign saying "REFERENCE DESK"!
- * "Do you have a list of all the books written in the English language?"
- * "I was here about three weeks ago looking at a cookbook that cost \$39.95. Do you know which one it is?"
- * "Do you have any books with photographs of dinosaurs?"
- * "Do you have a list of all the books I've ever read?"
- * "I am looking for a list of laws that I can break that would send me back to jail for a couple of months."

[From AndyChaps]

EPC REPORT

Bill Shields, EPC Chair

As you are now aware our salary increase in September 2006 will be 2.5% instead of 2%. This increase means that teachers just beginning their career will be paid \$46,735 instead of \$46,497, an increase of \$228. A teacher at four - year max will make \$74,326 instead of \$73,963, an increase of \$363. A further 1% increase occurs on February 1, 2007.

It should be noted that this increase did not come from the teacher's side. It was the school board that approached us with the notion of the raise. I can tell you that this is virtually unprecedented. Collective Agreements have been reopened for a variety of reasons in the past, but not so the board could give their employees more money (As far as we can recall, the last time it happened was in the early 80's when Edmonton Catholic was far below Edmonton Public). Their rationale is that their financial situation is much better than it was forecast at the time we were bargaining and that it is the right thing to do - hard to argue with that logic. Naturally I'm extremely pleased that the relationship between our teachers and the board is such that 'doing the right thing' is done and not just talked about. I would suggest that kudos be given to the school board for this approach.

While our agreement extends into next year, it will be interesting to see what kinds of settlements are made with other boards. The average wage increase for last year in Alberta was over 5%. Teachers will be looking for comparable results as the Alberta boom continues and other professions and occupations reap the benefits of this incredibly hot economy. I can foresee some tough negotiation sessions coming up.

Hope still exists that some agreement can be made with the government over the Unfunded Liability. The governing party seems to be concerned with other things (Bye, Ralph, you'll be long remembered by Alberta teachers) but the chance to fix this mess is still here.

I trust the Health Spending Account is working the way it is supposed to for you. Remember that we have \$250 for this year and a further \$500 coming in September. Please understand that if you access the plan before September 1, 2006, you only have \$250. You can't wait to submit the bill in September to have the overall cost covered for services acquired before then. However, if your spouse is also a teacher in Elk Island, you can combine your amounts. For instance, my wife had some dental work done that cost her \$400. She can claim the \$250 and if I don't claim anything for myself, I can use my account for the other \$150 she owes. Cool, no?

I'm sure that all of you have heard by now that former superintendent of EIPS, Rob McPhee, has filed a Statement of Claim against the school division. It is his viewpoint

that he is entitled to a SIPP (Supplementary Income Pension Plan) but the current school board disputes that assertion, contending that procedures for formalizing a SIPP were not followed. I have been told that Elk Island Public Schools does not offer a SIPP for any of its employees.

Finally, the May General meeting will provide an opportunity for interested teachers to become involved in our Local. There will be vacancies on the Economic Policy Committee so I encourage you to consider joining those of us who plan to remain.

As always, should you have comments or questions, please contact me.

REFLECTIONS

Karen Atkinson, VP

Spring

And young students fancies turn to thoughts of...

Skateboards

Bikes

Swings

Baseball

Swimming

Camping...

You recognize this, right?

Unfortunately it is also the time of year when we are trying to finish off those last two science units, review for final exams and continue all the daily chores of crowd control, instruction and marking. Somehow they just don't seem to mesh. Yet every year, somehow, we manage to make it through.

I wonder how many teachers also suffer the pangs of spring fever? Longing for the golf course, the fishing stream, the garden....

The end is in sight, folks!

Let's not wish the time away. Enjoy the moments that remain until the end of June. It is worth the effort!

Isn't it appropriate that the Month of the Tax begins with April Fool's Day, and ends with cries of "May Day!"?

The tax collectors take up so much of your earnings to balance the budget that you just can't budget the balance.

MOTHERS FROM HISTORY

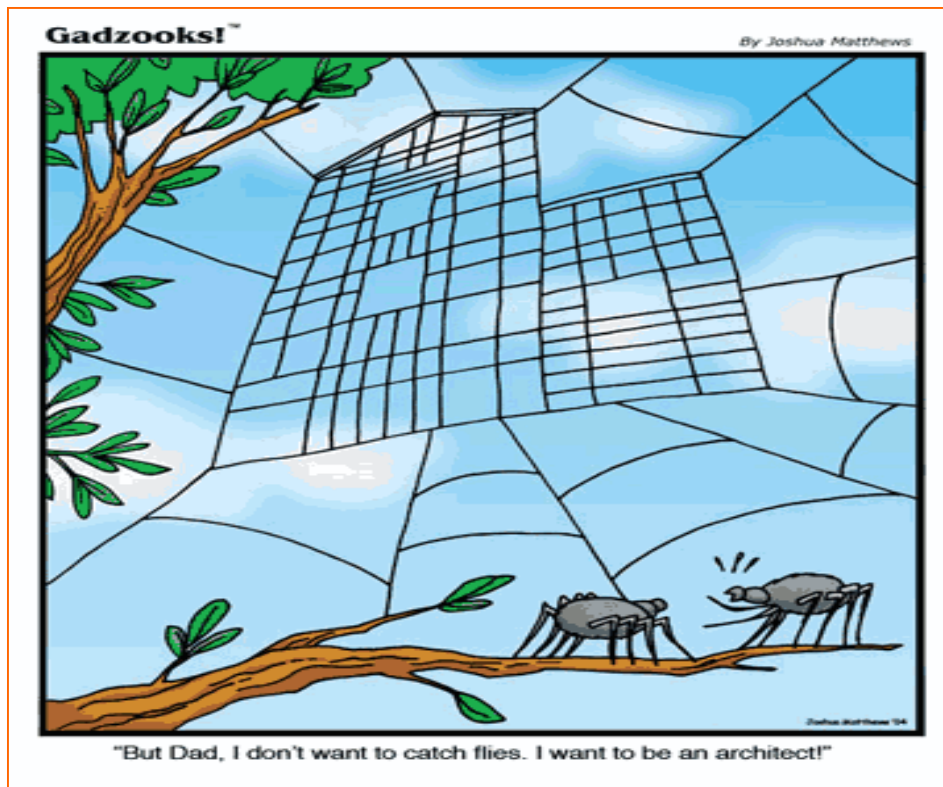
COLUMBUS' MOTHER: "I don't care what you've discovered, you still could have written!"

MICHELANGELO'S MOTHER: "Can't you paint on walls like other children? Do you have any idea how hard it is to get that stuff off the ceiling?"

NAPOLEON'S MOTHER: "All right, if you aren't hiding your report card inside your jacket, take your hand out of there and show me."

THOMAS EDISON'S MOTHER: "Of course I'm proud that you invented the electric light bulb. Now turn it off and get to bed!"

ALBERT EINSTEIN'S MOTHER: "But it's your senior picture. Can't you do something about your hair? OY! Styling gel, mousse, something...?"



Political Advocacy

Karen Atkinson, VP

The times, they are a'changin'...

But will it be enough?

The political atmosphere of Alberta is charged with change. The looming retirement of the Premier has resulted in a cascading movement as ministers resign to seek the leadership and others come up from the ranks to do the work. In this climate of political upheaval, what hope remains for immediate positive change for Albertans?

Will the 'Third Way' continue its relentless march to health-care privatization?

Will the outstanding recommendations of the Learning Commission finally be settled (one way or the other)?

Will the burgeoning debt of the unfunded liability of the Teachers' Pension Plan be recognized for what it is and its payment accepted as a means to reduce cost to taxpayers for many years to come?

Will the surplus funds of the government once again be 'divvied up' like the spoils of war or will they be directed to projects and plans that can improve conditions for Albertans?

Will these issues become the platforms upon which the leadership race is fought or will they simply fade into the background until the dust clears, only to rise as demons to haunt us for the indeterminate future?

I have no answers.

You may not even want to think about all of this right now, but it is important. The future is coming. Perhaps not quickly enough, but at least it is sooner than we had thought. If it is the future that needs to happen remains to be seen.

Please continue to keep contact with your MLA's. Remind them that the business of government must continue even through this storm of change. Even after the session ends, the work must go on. The people of Alberta must be heard on the outstanding issues of the day. Show them how much we care.