



THE BUGLER

A publication of the Elk Island Local #28 ATA February 2006

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Karen Wilson

It's difficult for me to believe how quickly this school year is passing by. The end of February is already here. I'd like to extend a warm welcome to our new superintendent, Egbert Stang who "hit the ground" running when he started. He visited the best high school (that would be Salisbury Composite) on February 2nd and met the best English teacher (that would be me).

I was sorry to hear about the upcoming retirement of our Associate Superintendent of Instructional Services, Brian Carbol. I have been extremely fortunate to have had Brian as a principal when I taught at F.R. Haythorne and when I started teaching at Salisbury. I'd like to thank Brian for all the encouragement and guidance he's given me over the years (in spite of how irritating I can be at times). I've learned so much about effective leadership from Brian and I will miss seeing him at Central Office and at the various functions we both attend. Enjoy your retirement! This is going to be an especially tough year for me, retirement-wise, for a couple of reasons. One reason is that I'm not retiring and the other reason is that a number of my close colleagues will be saying goodbye to the classroom at the end of June. I won't embarrass them by naming names since I'm sure they already know how much I will miss them.

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President's Report (Cont.)

There were two sessions that I really enjoyed at Teachers' Convention. The Operation Respect/Don't Laugh at Me Thursday afternoon session was especially interesting in light of our focus on character education. The other session I found extremely enlightening was the speaker, Gabor Mate, at the trustee luncheon. The title of his session foreshadowed boredom but I was riveted to every word Dr. Mate said. I was especially pleased to attend the luncheon with the trustees, the superintendent and two of the associate superintendents as well as most of the executive. Don't forget that the health spending account comes into effect on March 1st. There will be information sessions (as advertised) along with printed information to answer any questions about the account. I already know what I'll be using my \$250.00 for.

I hope everyone keeps doing random acts of kindness throughout the year (rather than just the one week since planned random acts is definitely an oxymoron). Spring break is quickly approaching and I am looking forward to visiting my friends in Maui. If you or your staff have questions or concerns or special events don't hesitate to call or email me here at Salisbury

An Old Farmer's Advice:

Words that soak into your ears are whispered...not yelled.

Meanness don't jes' happen overnight.

Do not corner something that you know is meaner than you.

It don't take a very big person to carry a grudge.

You cannot unsay a cruel word.

Every path has a few puddles.

When you wallow with pigs, expect to get dirty.

The best sermons are lived, not preached.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Carrie Huculak, PD Chair

I have a tradition (for the last three or so years anyway) that I like to end Convention with. As a trained science teacher and a nature lover at heart, I love to hear Brian Keating's keynote on the Friday afternoon. This year's topic, "**A Little Sex, A Little Adventure, And a Bit of Passion**", definitely caught my eye and piqued my interest when I first flipped through the pages of the convention booklet. Like a little child waiting for a big surprise, I impatiently waited to hear of his latest adventures.

Now, normally I arrive pretty early for this particular keynote, as I know how quickly the hall will fill up with other Brian enthusiasts. This year, however, I was delayed a bit by an impromptu discussion with one of the displays. I had only intended to have a five minute discussion about why I am ethically against the direction this particular business is leading our students. Well, that five minutes turned into a 25 minute heated discussion with very valid points (some more than others) from both of us. I can honestly say that I never imagined that I would feel so intellectually challenged and intrigued while looking at the displays! Anyway, by the time I left and entered the hall for Brian's keynote, it was starting to fill up.

I felt that it was a perfect fit to have Lindy Mair (VP of Program for Convention) introduce Brian, as she has been an integral part of what has made our Convention experience so successful. Thank you Lindy for another great year! Brian spent the next hour (although it felt like only a few moments) enthralling us with anecdotes from as near as the Calgary Zoo and as far away as Africa. One moment we were laughing at a chubby penguin chasing his mother for food and the next minute we were awed by the birth of a giraffe. I am always so amazed at how similar animals and humans are. Their capacity for curiosity, compassion and tenderness mirror our own for these same characteristics. I could not help but think about some of my students while watching a curious four year old gorilla intrigued by a female gorilla giving birth. The mother gorilla displayed the same kind of patience and compassion for the overly-curious four year old that we often display in our classrooms. I could go on and on talking about how much I enjoy this keynote each year. I will end by saying that I hope the Convention executive is able to continue bringing Brian Keating to speak with us. He is the cherry on top of an already fabulous two days!

TBAC REPORT

Deneen Zielke, Chair

At our January meeting concerns were brought forward to our committee regarding a perceived increase in absenteeism. A question was also raised concerning participation in professional development activities. The committee decided to investigate the concerns. I spoke with Elaine Whitford, Associate Superintendent, and requested a comparison of absenteeism rates and P.D. absences from the first four months of 04/05 and 05/06. The rate of absenteeism has increased and P.D. absences have decreased.

At my meeting with Elaine it was agreed that this is a topic we should discuss at our next Teacher Board Consultation Committee meeting. At the present time a meeting has not been scheduled as Mr. Stang is busily acquainting himself with our district and his many roles in the division. We are looking forward to meeting with Mr. Stang to continue our tradition of collaboration and to discuss this current concern. We will keep you informed.

OPERATION RESPECT

By Paul Pallister, Past President

I have talked with a few colleagues who agree that this convention offered one of the best selections of quality sessions in recent memory – congratulations to all EIPS staff who contributed to this wonderful PD event. One session that was enjoyable for me was entitled “Operation Respect / Don’t Laugh at Me” presented by Steve Seskin. Steve is a very successful song writer with songs recorded by Tim McGraw, Alabama and Peter, Paul and Mary. In fact Peter, Paul and Mary recorded his song “Don’t Laugh at Me” which is at the center of the character education program “Operation Respect”.

Character education is a cornerstone of the district education plan and likely part of most school education plans. “Operation Respect” focuses on getting rid of bullying and teasing of the disadvantaged in our society. We know that when kids are teased their learning declines and many feign illness or simply choose not to attend school. Barbara Coloroso’s book *‘The Bully, The Bullied and The Bystander’* was mentioned as an excellent guide to get the bystanders involved in making the community a better place.

All of us bystanders need to fight back against a society that is becoming grounded in disrespect. *‘American Idol’* was mentioned as a show that is successful due to the manner in which people are put down if they cannot sing. Our kids watch this and think that it is cool to be cruel. If we think about the amount of time kids are spending on MSN ‘dissin’ each other or the time that is spent on graphically violent video games, we find ample evidence that this disrespect is prevalent in many parts of our students’ lives.

Teachers play a key role modeling respect and countering the effects of the negativity to which our students are exposed. Character education should not be a tack-on to our programs, but ingrained into every lesson we teach. By developing a shared vocabulary and proactive activities with our students we take a huge step in improving the emotional and social well being of our students. By getting the bystander to be emotionally strong enough to stand up and stop bullying, we will have developed a tremendous ally in the fight against a disrespectful society.

Operation Respect has learning packages, CDs and Videos that are free of charge. The website also has free downloads that can be used by students, parents and teachers. You can find the information at: <http://www.dontlaugh.org> I have already gone to the web site and ordered a package to assist in our school’s character education program. Good luck to you in developing a program that can really make a difference in the lives of your students.

MEMBER SERVICES CAN HELP

Karen Atkinson, Vice President

“Daddy, my teacher hurt me...”

These words could be uttered by any student in your care. Whether they are an accusation with any foundation in fact is irrelevant at this point. You need protection from the consequences of the statement.

Call Member Services immediately upon hearing of any accusation of misconduct. The ATA can serve its members by investigating the circumstances, seeking clarification, pursuing appropriate action on behalf of the teacher, and eventually following through with any disciplinary action required or support in dealing with the aftermath of the ordeal.

The immediate threat to you as a teacher, when a student claims you have touched them inappropriately, is to your reputation and status within the school and the community. Much ‘damage control’ can be done by the school administration. If the child is proven to have fabricated the story, an admission to the parents and some kind of ‘debriefing’ with all affected parties would go a long way towards restoring peace and trust. Once the gossip spreads, a teacher becomes guilty in name if not in deed. Hoping the issue will ‘die down’ on its own can be a dangerous choice. Ignoring the problem is not a solution.

Unfortunately, any one of us could be a victim of this sort of attack. The lingering effects can cause as much damage when the teacher is innocent as when the teacher has erred as accused.

Do not trust that you will be vindicated after a false report. Parents are often blind and deaf when told their child has done something so dreadful or if they believe the child has been hurt or abused in some way. Word-of-mouth can spread the tales and blow them out of proportion, often creating more fabrications by children who want to seem as ‘important’ as the original accuser. You know that you did nothing wrong, but that is not enough. Protect yourself and get help as fast as possible.

In looking ahead – what about some logical prevention techniques? If working with a student individually, make sure you are in an area where others can see and/or hear what is transpiring. Never work behind closed doors. If you are aware of any potential for misunderstanding with the child or the parents, make sure you are not alone with the child. If a situation with a child escalates, seek assistance immediately – call for an administrator.

It is sad that we have to consider the possibility of such vindictive action by a child, but it is reality. Be aware. Be careful. Get help.

Forum

By Karen Atkinson, Vice President

A public forum was held at Rudolph Hennig School on the evening of February 15th. Voters were able to meet the three candidates and hear them speak about relevant issues in education. Several excellent questions were asked by members of the audience and all candidates were given a chance to respond.

This forum was planned and implemented by members of this Local as part of our ongoing efforts to ensure public awareness. Educational advocacy and political engagement are important components of the Local's endeavours.

Since the election is (was) on February 27th, the results will be known at this time. I am quite interested to see whether the voters of Fort Saskatchewan met the challenge presented in an editorial in their local paper to beat the less than 4% turnout from the Sherwood Park by-election.

Readers Of New York Magazine Were Asked To Invent Country-Song Titles.

Here Are Some Entries:

"Ain't No Trash In My Trailer Since The Night I Threw You Out"

"You Wanted To Get Hitched, But My Heart Is Filled With Whoa"

"Baked My Sweetie A Pie, But He Left With A Tart"

"I Lost My Honey Bunny On A Bad Hare Day "

"She Chews Tobacco, But She Didn't Choose Me"

"The Peach I Picked In Georgia Didn't Cling To Me For Long"

"I Found The Recipe For Heartbreak In A Cookbook On Your Shelf"

"Now That We're Miserable, I Hope You're Happy"

CONVENTION 2006

Helen Cranna, Vice President

I thought that it would be fun to submit an article on this year's convention; so I decided to write.

This year, for the first time in many years, I decided to try to attend only keynote sessions. There were many to choose from. I chose to attend the session given by our education minister – the Honorable Mr. Zwozdesky. I always enjoy listening to him as he is an excellent speaker. Mr. Zwozdesky spoke, at length, on the Learning Commission. He enumerated key items which have still not been decided.

- Junior Kindergarten: This would be very difficult to enforce as many parents do not want their four-year old in school at such a young age. However, there are many “at-risk” children who would benefit.
- Bargaining at the provincial level: There have been several models presented, but no decision has been reached.
- The unfunded pension liability: Mr. Zwozdesky told us that he had tried unsuccessfully to have this issue addressed in cabinet, but has had no luck. He did express his concerns over this. He understands that there are three major areas of concern around this issue:
 - ⇒ The retention of teachers
 - ⇒ The ability to attract new teachers
 - ⇒ The taxpayers' point of view

If he is successful in having the unfunded liability resolved, it would come at a cost to teachers.

These are all things, we have heard in the past and most of us are quite tired of having no resolution on the issue. We need to continue to speak to our MLA's.

In the afternoon, I attended the session by Frank Bruseker. Frank clarified several issues mentioned by Mr. Zwosdesky.

- On bargaining: The ATA has presented a model, one in which the local associations would still be able to bargain working conditions. Working conditions must be an integral part of any collective agreement. Without an hours-of-work clause, the school boards would be able to increase teaching time. Edmonton Public has an hours-of-work clause which ends this year. Teachers in that district could potentially see their assignable time increased from 1400 to 1800 minutes. The ASBA (Alberta School Board Association) would like a bargaining model which excludes working conditions.

- **Unfunded Liability:** Currently, the unfunded liability is at approximately 6.9 billion dollars, of which the government part is 4.6 billion. This amounts to more than ten times bigger than all other pensions combined. Mr. Zwozdesky suggested that an offer had been made a few years ago, by the then minister Lyle Oberg, to pay off the unfunded liability, in return for a 10 year long collective agreement. This would have meant no increase in the first year of the deal and subsequently the increases would be tied to the cost of living. However, Mr. Zwozdesky failed to mention that this was not an offer but a verbal suggestion. The implications of this deal would be no working conditions. It would also mean that for those teachers retiring, their pensionable income would be reduced, as there would be no increase in the first year.

When my sessions were done, I headed over to the hospitality suite at the Chateau Lacombe. It is a shame that more teachers do not take advantage of this suite. It is a great place to meet with teachers from other schools and have a relaxing time.

ARA REPORT

Helen Cranna, Vice President ARA

The ARA committee met on February 22nd to view the proposed budget of our provincial ATA and to discuss some of the changes. Again, the association is wishing to increase our fees, this time by \$30 per year. Our committee voted to disagree with this increase as we feel very strongly that our fees should be decreased, not increased.

Some of the other proposed changes include:

- ◆ the establishment of a Committee on System, Process and Program Review to ensure that the Association's program and program delivery are meeting the needs of members. The proposed budget allotment for this would be \$42 000.
- ◆ To set the repayment to the Special Emergency Fund for past expenditures at \$54 per member rather than the \$81 required by administrative procedures.

CONVENTION REPORT FROM EPC CHAIR

Bill Shields, EPC Chair

I hope everyone enjoyed convention and that none of you suffered humiliation at the hands of the booklet police! My favorite part was trying to get into the display halls through a single door. No booklet; no entrance; no buy anything!

As well as other sessions, I thought it behooved the EPC Chair to attend both Gene Zwozdesky's and Frank Bruseker's presentations to get the up-to-the minute take on issues of great interest to all of us.

Minister Zwozdesky is a gifted speaker, blessed with the ability to engage and interact with his audience in a personal, self deprecating and humorous manner. He discussed major issues presented by the Alberta Commission on Learning; funding for junior kindergarten, full day kindergarten, class size initiative, and removal of administrators from the ATA. He also addressed the unfunded liability problem we all face. He took great pains to ensure us that he has spent his time in office thoroughly researching the issues and receiving input from all stakeholders. He explained that these were all complex issues and that decisions he thought would be easy to make are not so, and so his deadlines have not been met. He would not give any idea as to when some decisions would be made now and acknowledged that while some people would find this frustrating, others follow the "no news is good news" philosophy.

He assured us that he understood the problems with the unfunded liability but that, of course, his voice is only one in the caucus and that other MLA's would have to buy in for any action to take place. He made it perfectly clear that for anything to happen to eliminate the teachers' portion of the UFL, that teachers would have to be willing to deal. In other words, we ain't getting "something' for nothin'!" He also reiterated an oft stated belief by MLA's that the "deal" offered by his predecessor to the ATA (10 year deal eliminating teachers' portion, wage increases according to some agreed formula, but a total freeze on bargaining agreements, giving school boards total control over working conditions) would have been accepted by teachers had they had the chance to vote on it. He finished by fervently hoping that any future, hypothetical deal would allow teachers an individual vote.

At the end of the day it seemed to me that the minister can certainly "talk the talk" but we have not seen him "walk the walk."

Frank Bruseker's presentation highlighted many of the same issues with the UFL naturally being the main focus again. He forcefully said that the "offer" from the

government (10-year deal) was never an offer. "You were offered nothing! You were offered nothing!" He said it was a conversation that would have irreparably harmed teachers and that nothing concrete was ever on the table. The subject of teachers having a single vote on such an issue was discussed. This is not the way our governance occurs. The ARA is designed to be the voting body for teachers but a bylaw could be introduced, debated and voted on to allow such an event.

He then went on to discuss a fairly informal visit from the minister who suggested that a deal could be made to preserve "peace in the valley." From a purely personal point of view, I think that Barnett House is finally beginning to understand that the UFL is the single biggest issue for teachers in this province. I also think that finally they are beginning to work on actually brokering a deal that may suggest an answer to this problem. I hope I'm right.

FROM YOUR EPC

Bill Shields, EPC Chair

I sent this message on the EIPS Budget situation last month. It was thought that all teachers should have the opportunity to see it.

Naturally your EPC and NSC were curious as to how a projected two and a half million dollar deficit turned into 10% of that. Acting Superintendent Brian Carbol and Associate Superintendent Brian Smith invited us, on their own volition, to hear the same presentation they gave the Board about the budget. We attended a couple of weeks ago and received the following information (I'm an English teacher and math always hurt my brain, so I asked a lot of dumb questions - other members asked smart ones).

1. The budget is by its nature, a projection. December 2004 was the worst case scenario. February 2005 was the 'guess as to the fix – it scenario'. August 2005 were the real numbers.
2. Principals were very conservative with their enrollment numbers and the amount they would be able to save from their budgets. Schools apparently outdid themselves and saved a great deal more than projected.
3. Enrollment in Elk Island increased.
4. Unanticipated one time funding came from the government.
5. Transportation grants were increased.

6. Standard teaching cost savings occurred when 43 retirees were replaced by younger teachers.
7. Some retiring positions were not replaced.
8. All remaining reserves went toward deficit.
9. Central Services slashed a great deal from their funds.
10. Don't forget that the 2002 settlement was never covered by the government.

The result is that the financial position of Elk Island is in much better shape than anticipated. Did the system suffer this year to make it happen? Probably. Is there residual resentment from teachers over the fact that we got in this position? Probably. Is it time to let go of that and move on? Probably.

I'd like to be clear that the EPC does not consider that either the senior administration or the school board acted in any surreptitious manner with the budget. They have been open and accountable with the members representing you. Make no mistake - our job is to represent teachers. However, it is our intention to continue to have a professional, cordial and mutually acceptable working relationship with the board and central office. They are not our enemy. The problem in many ways lies with the improper funding from the provincial government.

Should you have any comment or question, feel free to ask me. If I don't know the answer, I'll try to find out.

