

Questions from *The Riverbend Ragg-Times*
to all elected officials serving the Riverbend area and My Answers

December 08

Will the fragile economic situation impact the budget for your order of government? If so, how will infrastructure projects and human services governed by you be affected in our communities?

Like all school jurisdictions, Edmonton Public Schools receives its revenue from the provincial government, which draws on both the general revenue fund and education property tax to fund excellent education across the province. For example, the funding rates that were established for the 2008-09 school year were announced in the spring 2008 Provincial Budget, and in accordance with that, schools and central departments prepared their budgets last spring. At present, there has been no indication from the provincial government that their funding for operating expenses (staff, programming, etc.) and capital needs (new schools, maintenance and renewal of older buildings, etc.) will not continue at the current level. This is not only good news but a wise and strategic course of action!

To ensure a bright future for Alberta, we need all children to succeed at school and fulfill their potential. From recent Results Review meetings with over 30 principals and central department leaders, I know that providing the opportunities for success for all children – whether they be immigrant children who have arrived with little English to gifted children who tune out quickly if not challenged appropriately to children struggling with chaotic family situations – is a challenge. To continue to meet the challenge creatively and effectively will take steady and predictable investment into reasonably sized classes where all children can receive the attention they require, professional development to support teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to engage all learners, and early intervention supports to give children the best start possible in school or whenever they run into difficulty.

October 08

Dear Newly Elected MP for Edmonton-Leduc...

Not knowing the results of the October 14 election, The Ragg asked the elected officials in working for the constituents of Riverbend Terwillegar in other orders of government what they might like to say to the successful candidate

Greetings! First I am excited to let you know how the fine work in Edmonton Public Schools directly assists the federal government in several critical areas -- including French Language education, aboriginal education, welcoming and integrating immigrant students, and improving the literacy rate. Second, I'd like to invite you to join the Board in advocating for improvements in the quality of life for all children under the age of six. Why? Because we know that quality preschool experiences have positive long-term effects on children's success both in school and in life. I look forward to working with you on this and the other areas mentioned above.

Sincerely, Trustee Catherine Ripley, Edmonton Public Schools

September 09

How do you engage people to become involved and interested in the political system (whether federal, provincial or municipal)?

Thank you for the excellent question. It is an excellent question because right now our democratic system is the best way that we – the village – can focus our collective resources and change our communities for the better. It's a never-ending cycle that involves both citizens and governments. It begins with people contributing their wisdom and aspirations during times of decision-making, carries on by governments following through on the work as directed by the citizenry, the results get evaluated by both parties, and the cycle begins all over again.

In a nutshell, engaging people effectively rests on a combination of trust, action, and good communication. It rests on 1) all citizens realizing their involvement is vital and taking the time to be involved, 2) governments valuing the involvement and creating meaningful and multi-layered opportunities for said involvement, 3) both governments and citizens providing ongoing feedback and information to each other on initiatives and policies so, together, we can track "our" collective progress toward the community's ideals.

The recent Edmonton Public School Board policies on Aboriginal Education and Multicultural Education are good examples of the rich outcomes of people being involved in the political system. The Board felt the district could better serve its aboriginal students and immigrant/refugee students, and through the striking of two Task Forces, it looked to the community for a deeper understanding of the issues. People recognized the sincerity of the Board's efforts to do a better job and participated in the opportunities for dialogue around both the challenges and dreams with respect to "our" children's educational experiences. Then the Task Forces took the wisdom gathered in those conversations and put it alongside the considerable knowledge and expertise of district staff as well as research from across the country, and developed new policies. After circulating the policies back to the respective communities as well as to the broader public through an online survey, the new policies were approved by the Board (June 2007, June 2009, respectively) and were received positively by the community. The Board has also made a commitment to annually review progress on achieving the ideals, crystallized in these policies and welcomes ongoing feedback.

At the ward level, I am committed to engaging people both before and after Board decisions through my regular "Insight" emails and my website as well as periodically hosting community conversations (such as the one held in May on Schools and Communities and the Future) and meeting for coffees. To get involved or contribute your wisdom, please visit the Board website (www.epsb.ca), my personal website www.catherineripley.ca, and/or sign up for my email list by contacting me at Catherine.Ripley@epsb.ca or 780-887-1002.