

Any Wisdom to Share?

Catherine Ripley, Vice Chair and Ward H Trustee, Edmonton Public Schools

In 2004, a friend gave me a book called *The Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki. We had had many conversations before, during, and after my 2004 trustee campaign about the importance –and challenge – of trustees connecting with community members of all ages and stages (aka the crowd) to capture their “wisdom” on improving public education. Today, our conversation still continues, and the challenge remains.

In an interview Mr. Surowiecki summed up the four key qualities that make a crowd smart. “It needs to be diverse, so that people are bringing different pieces of information to the table. It needs to be decentralized, so that no one at the top is dictating the crowd’s answer. It needs a way of summarizing people’s opinions into one collective verdict. And the people in the crowd need to be independent, so that they pay attention mostly to their own information, and not worrying about what everyone around them thinks.”

<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/wisdomofcrowds/Q&A.html>

Given that one of the Board’s goals during the 2007-10 term is to develop a public engagement policy or process, so we will better understand when and how to invite the public into work of growing a superb school district, I am asking for your wisdom.

- Would you like to be involved in the work of public education and contribute your time and ideas? If yes, how?
- If you’d like to be involved and are not, what is preventing you?
- How do you currently find out about what’s happening in our schools? How would like to find out?
- What would you like to know about? What would you like to contribute ideas on?

Please let me know. You can reach me at 780-887-1002 or at Catherine.Ripley@epsb.ca. Also, watch for me in coffee shops around the ward during the winter months. Please don’t be shy – come up, say hello, and let me know what you think. Finally, in advance of most board meetings, I circulate an *Insights* email that proactively lets people know what decisions are upcoming so people may offer their advice and opinions as they wish. I would welcome your participation on this email list.

Mr. Surowiecki also states that “together all of us know more than any one of us does.” That speaks to the value of nine elected trustees setting the direction for our public schools on behalf of the community – together the nine of us know more than any one of us! It also speaks to the value of you contributing your thoughts and ideas to trustees so that the Board may be better informed and make better decisions. Please don’t delay...join my *Insights* email list or contact me today. I look forward to hearing from you.