

Creating Safer Streets for Our Students and Families
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A year ago I campaigned to become an Edmonton Public Schools trustee. I talked about 1) supporting learners of all backgrounds and abilities, 2) seeking community viewpoints and representing you in Board decision-making, and 3) collaborating and building consensus to resolve problems. Nowhere in my campaign material did I talk about student pedestrian safety! And yet in the last year, student pedestrian safety has been cited as a major concern throughout the ward by various people.

In April, wondering if this was a problem for Ward H only, given our rapidly increasing population and traffic congestion, I asked for information about pedestrian safety across the district. The answer came back as follows: "Pedestrian safety is a common issue that arises relatively equally across the district. The most common issue is related to the disregard shown by some motorists who illegally use bus loading, no parking, no stopping zones and crosswalks as places to drop off or pick up students...." Due to the unique roadway situation of each school, the report went on to say that there was no single solution or set of practices to address student safety. Instead Planning and Student Transportation staff will work with City of Edmonton personnel (such as police and traffic planners) and parents and schools who raise safety issues.

Going into my second year as trustee, it occurs to me that this problem could also be tackled through my third campaign goal: collaboration. This collaboration would involve not only the aforementioned parties but also the community as a whole. For example, promoting public transit usage and thus, having fewer cars on the roads around schools during start and finish times is one thought. Promoting "walking to school" is another. Apparently, one main reason parents prefer to drive is a concern for their children's safety. There are some good tips on the Walkable Edmonton and SHAPE websites about how to overcome this particular concern and about the multiple benefits for families to walking to school. I encourage you to check it out: edmonton.ca/walkableEdmonton and <http://www.shapeab.com/>, respectively

Given the unlikelihood of reducing traffic to a mere trickle in the mornings or late afternoons, I have come across one other initiative that may be worth of consideration by the Duggan community. In the spring the Aspen Gardens Community League and its associated schools (Richard Secord, Westbrook, St. Boniface, and Vernon Barford) developed a "Safe Streets for Schools Pledge" with the aim of "promoting awareness and respect for everyone's rights to share our roads and sidewalks safely when driving or walking our children to and from school." If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the pledge or have other ideas on how to make our streets a safer place for our students, please share them with me at Catherine.Ripley@epsb.ca or 780-887-1002. Thank you! Let's work together to enhance the children's safety in our communities.