

**"It Takes a Village!"
Supporting the EPSB Priorities for 2008-2011,
Our Children, and Excellent Education**

**Compilation of Ideas from March 18th 2008
Ward H Community Meeting**

Thank you to the 40 or so people who gave their time to contribute to the discussion and this document. Greatly appreciated!

PRIORITY ONE

Success for All Students in Their Studies

Pages 2 - 5

PRIORITY TWO

**Instilling Citizenship and Good Character in All Students
in a Positive Learning Environment**

Pages 6 - 9

PRIORITY THREE

Providing a Collaborative, Healthy and Innovative Workplace

Pages 10 - 12

Please keep in touch! I would be very interested to know how individuals, school councils, and/or community groups might use these ideas to support our students and schools and also, how people work to overcome the challenges.

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PRIORITY ONE: To ensure every student is successful in their program of studies, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy.

As a mom, dad, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbour, community member, I could personally support this priority by

- Providing positive reinforcement; having good attitudes about school and fostering enjoyment in students: school is fun!; encouraging students to treat learning as an enjoyable and challenging activity, encouraging lifelong learning and a quest for knowledge
- Engaging my child in learning games; playing games to reinforce literacy and numeracy: literacy and math can be fun!
- Helping children understand why they are learning, what they are learning
- Reading at home (5); Encouraging reading outside of school; showing reading can be fun
- Setting an example (i.e., reading) (2); it's very important for children to have parents who read
- Watching out for programs for reluctant readers (e.g., PAWS for a Story is a good example; it is offered fairly regularly at Riverbend Public Library); being aware of literacy materials for both children and adults that are available at public library.
- Encouraging real life arithmetic; pointing out practical uses of numeracy in everyday life
- Ensuring literacy and numeracy are seen in a broader context of the world
- Supporting learning at home (budget) – providing reading material; computer-based games for learning; books, activities, science projects
- Modelling for and mentoring child (2)
- Conversing with children
- Being informed about what is happening at school and in the classroom (2)about expectations at school ...about concepts being taught in class... about what the child is learning; Using strategies at home as suggested by the school; making the effort to find out what those strategies might be
- Communicating with the teacher and getting to know him or her (2)
- Encouraging teachers and staff, telling them they are doing well
- Volunteering in the classroom and/or school (3)
- Advocating for my child (for example, re: his or her specific learning styles) (2)
- Supporting/advocating for training and time for teachers to understand different learning styles (so they can improve their teaching)
- [Advocating for?] class sizes

- Using School Zone for information
- Being involved with school council ; advocate for literacy resources
- Participating in paired reading programs at the school; ; volunteering to read at school
- Choosing the right school for my child
- Encouraging the programs at school

- Voting

- Eating breakfast

As a group or organization, we could possibly support this priority by....

- Pointing out the need for and advocating for equitable access to relevant resources and the problems that come with decentralization; government should ensure equitable access.
- Advocating... for increased provincial funding.... for small class sizes
- Informing people in the community about school issues, activities, politics; providing awareness of supports available for kids (such as Kids Help Phone) and that they are worth listening to)
- Building awareness of support opportunities in the organization
- Promoting greater diversity in programs and standards of achievement

- Supporting volunteering, providing financial support (school council)
- Utilizing technology to help different learning styles
- Providing lunch programs and snacks Supporting and supplying material needs to school
- Being a school that helps other schools; Fundraising for books for less fortunate children to take home to read
- Creating school wide policy for class newsletters to keep parents informed on current curriculum
- Promoting communication between students, parents, teachers.
- Encouraging parents to be involved; Being available to school community, participating

- Providing proper support, e.g, for smaller class sizes, supports for teachers
- Linking with community leagues supporting schooling and school programs, building relationships beyond the school
- Creating safe environments in schools
- Creating/supporting “pull out” classrooms
- Integrating with Edmonton Public Library

- Encouraging students to contribute to local newsletters

- Creating student-to-student connections out in the community
- Creating safe environments and relationships, using conflict resolution models at home, role model
- Encouraging high school students to perhaps form /run clubs
- Organizing reading bees.
- Support “read in” activities
- Push for more student public speaking

Are there any challenges standing in the way of supporting this priority? If so, what?

- Funding (7)
- Huge classes / Class size (2) / need reasonable class sizes ; needs higher teacher/student ratio, particularly in high school
- Lots of diversity in the classroom
- The box does not work for every student; Kids with mild to moderate disabilities (e.g., hearing impaired, learning disabled, etc.) are “on the fringe”
- Improper labeling; Screening for special needs
- Students falling through the cracks
- Diversity of program needs; Ensuring programs of choice
- ESL programs aren’t good enough (pay for consultants); need access and useful resources ; ESL/language/learning disabilities ; Supporting English Language Learning
- Gifted programming
- Lack of adequate time for staff for instructional strategies improvement
- Curriculum resources to support new curriculum
- Programming support for students new to the district
- Outdated facilities
- Library resources (staff and materials) are limited: literacy is a priority but EPSB has cut back on teacher librarians/library technicians
- Challenging social environment for children exists in all schools; teachers, parents, administrators need to face these head on and not think this challenging environment is just in “other” schools
- Too much pressure is put on kids in the early grades instead of encouraging them to develop a love of learning
- Achievement tests, make it difficult for students, teachers; need community involvement [in talking about] inclusion vs. program of choice.
- Communication between home and school; lack of ongoing mechanisms for parent feedback on the success of individual students in their program of studies; Lack of awareness about programs

- Basic needs of some kids are not being met (i.e. no breakfast)
- Some parents have inadequate resources to help their children (language barrier, single parent, long working hours, poor skills themselves)
- PD Program of Studies : Know it, Understand it
- [Not seeing] technology as a resource that would enhance learning
- Busy family schedules / time commitments (sports, for example)
- The schools are not where students live
- Interest levels of students
- Sometimes not following the instructive methods as a parent
- Generally, lack of interest in numeracy, literacy, schools

Comments:

- Literacy needs definition: not just reading, writing, spelling; it's partly how to use and process information. Literacy needs to be looked at in a broader context: i.e., music literacy, art literacy, being able to use appropriate vocabulary as well as problem solving, social relationships (especially in this age of technology –MSN, text messaging, etc.) , critical thinking.
- Digital literacy, media literacy, etc.
- BASIC education is important (reading, writing, math) but it will not get our students to the future.
- With special needs children, parents will support students differently than regular students; it's important for parents to understand what is happening at school daily, for parents to be informed.
- Yes, we need to emphasize literacy and numeracy but still remember that other programs contribute to learning: i.e. there needs to be a balance
- Need more formal speech development
- Improving financial literacy is also important.
- Need to educate parents on value of reading as opposed to video games, etc.
- Literacy and numeracy cut across all other school subjects, thus are fundamental to skill and knowledge base

PRIORITY TWO: To instill in each student the attributes of citizenship and good character in a learning environment that promotes health, well-being and positive relationships.

As a mom, dad, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbour, community member, I could personally support this priority by

- Setting a good example! e.g., Modeling positive relationships and behaviour; modeling positive attributes in society; modeling the characteristics we want to see in our children; setting a good example wherever you are and not worrying about being popular; setting an example by volunteering at school or in community, taking part in council, etc. ; setting a good example by speaking well and positively of neighbours and acquaintances; Showing the different character traits; Working to avoid bias [in our conversations, actions, comments at dinner tabl; Defining good citizenship for children
- Engaging in the system – with school, trustee, teachers; participating in school assemblies
- Promoting community, citizenship
- Providing healthy lunches for school and also at home; being proactive in healthy lifestyle choices
- Teaching! Reinforcing and teaching where applicable; reinforcing positive relationships; Encouraging kids to have good relationships; Teaching children values and respect for self and others; encouraging my children to be supportive of their friends and peers who have learning differences; Showing that positive relationships lead to success
- Valuing the lessons learned from mistakes
- Exposing our kids to variety of cultures and religions (TV, travel, books)
- Mixing activities, at home instruction
- Teaching life skills
- Conversing with students, especially over minor conflicts arise; Interact very clearly with students in conversations
- Talking with students about economics, politics, inequalities, news, etc. at an age appropriate level and encourage the importance of voting; Making it possible for students to participate in civic events
- Working to remove the current assessment model, which fosters competition and judgment (this would help overcome barriers to achieving this priority); changing the focus from grades to *effort* and *understanding* the concepts; removing standardized testing and emphasis on marks

As a group or organization, we could possibly support this priority by....

- Modelling behaviour and real citizenship (especially school principal and teachers)
 - Connecting school, family, community through leadership
 - Hosting community dinners (these are time consuming, but tries to create community around the school. This is important because the community needs to be involved in the school in order for the development of social community to happen.)
 - Developing a school mentoring program (like Big Brother/Sister agency) or partnering with volunteer groups (U of A) to support family, child and school
 - Teaching about our responsibilities to each other and the impact of our actions on a larger scale (for society)
 - Rewarding good behaviour; focusing on each student's strengths
 - Celebrating ethnicity of population, schools/community
 - Supporting neighbourhood infill
 - Promoting and making possible (as a school) students learning together in class, between classes, between grades
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- Setting up student ambassador program from Kids Help Phone
 - Engaging and helping kids get leadership opportunities (i.e. community leagues could get jr. high students to help coach young kids' soccer)
 - Allowing students to be masters of ceremonies at events/forums
 - Inviting students to attend adult groups and express their ideas to an attentive audience that responds; i.e., dialogue.
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- Educating ourselves to be better parents (school councils)
 - Working as a team (teachers, parents); modelling problem solving and respectful adult relationships
 - Through the interests of children, trying to instill citizenship, good character, values, respect...; Applying character education
 - Creating opportunities for collaboration
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- Supporting the idea of City Hall School, classes participate in City Hall activities for a week
 - Advocating for including religious studies as part of the social studies curriculum – i.e., with education comes understanding (hopefully)
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- Providing opportunities to students to serve in their community, community outreach (2); helps build character; encouraging children in working and volunteering in the community; encouraging jr. high students to be more involved in volunteer work (i.e. group volunteering project); providing opportunities to students to be involved in environmental issues
 - Engaging in sporting and charity events (e.g., Run for the Cure
 - (Community) helping with after-school activities, spring clean-up

- Encouraging school to look further than school hours
- School giving back to community, building sense of community engagement
- Forming partnerships with local businesses, programs
- Supporting events like Terry Fox Run, Walking School Bus, sports, and initiatives to provide healthy food choices (re: health)

Are there any challenges standing in the way of supporting this priority? If so, what?

- Attitudes – i.e., narrow view of literacy and numeracy as *the only valued parts of education* (performing well in tests) ; citizenship and good character have to be seen as a valuable acumen. Not all students are strong academically but they can be seen as valuable contributors to the social fabric and need to feel worthy and valued.
- Students and different learning abilities are not valued now; need to broaden education values; Teachers need to be better role models vis a vis accepting and teaching students with different learning abilities.
- Too much emphasis on reading and writing (achievement tests)
- Students are less respectful and have a strong sense of entitlement (ME!) versus helping all
- Competition
- Lack of interagency networking and collaboration (crime, health, financial)
- [Poor] Examples in society, movies, etc.
- Lack of understanding that the challenges of youth are real and exist in every school
- Language barriers with diverse cultures; cultural differences
- Parent accountability and consequences for inappropriate behaviour
- Classes are too big: teachers get burned out plus do not have the time or resources
- Too quick to place children in programs that may not meet their needs.
- Government discussions are not modeling healthy debate
- Financial resources limit community activity and involvement
- Children not getting the support at home
- Apathy; parents are often poor role models
- Children not willing to participate outside of school
- Communities without schools; larger schools often disenfranchise kids because there is less engagement and sense of community.
- “Character” education
- Parents’ views (some might feel threatened)
- Staff do not have the time to consider how to use parent or group opportunities presented to them.
- School system is too old school

Comments:

- Local community school versus school of [programming] choice. Is there a disconnect? Yes, kids tend to do better in community school. Also, if the community wanted to organize itself to support and mentor children, how do they do this for children who don't attend their community school?
- Citizenship includes valuing ALL students
- Education system is now teaching to girls (gender bias)
- Lack of support; community becomes pseudo-family
- Ads for EPSB – why are they being run?
- Citizenship and good character have to be seen as valuable. Not all students are strong academically, but they can be valuable contributors to the social fabric and need to feel worthy and valued.

PRIORITY THREE

To provide a collaborative, healthy and innovative workplace that recognizes individual contributions and supports opportunities for growth and professional development.

As a mom, dad, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbour, community member, I personally could support this priority by

- Recognizing teacher/staff contributions to students; recognizing the good work of staff and principals and acknowledging the work of the principal; Supporting teachers and principal (resources)
- Encouraging teachers (sending positive emails); Supporting the teacher's decisions; Appreciating teachers, thank you from the board/recognition
- Encouraging and recognizing innovative ways of being effective (e.g., when teachers communicate well with parents, student assessment)
- Being positive about professional development; publicly supporting the continued learning of teachers; "Myth busting" about the hard work that educating students is

- Collaborating with school
- Improving communication even more ; giving succinct feedback
- Being "known" to teachers
- Supporting teachers in the community in the ways they identify a need
- Promoting and informing school about professional development events (outside of school)

- Volunteering at school; Volunteering, which shows respect for teachers' work
- Being active in the community; Educating the community
- Accessing the untapped, retired community members to assist in advocating for public education and increased funding

- Working with the child to take responsibility for his/her behaviour in the classroom so that the teacher can be a more effective teacher [not just have to manage behaviour]

As a group or organization we possibly could support this priority by....

- Showing appreciation for teachers (e.g., providing cappuccino machine, Pilates program for lunch hours)
- Providing scholarships for staff development opportunities through fundraising
- Advocacy
- Assisting versus criticizing
- Ensuring that schools have “the right mix” of professionals (e.g., teacher librarians, counselors, gym specialist, language teachers)
- (Educators) Ensuring collaboration across divisions (continuity of learning and instruction between grades)
- (Educators) Providing buddy “learning” opportunities (i.e. teaching technology as a tool)
- (Educators) Promoting/establishing collaboration that promotes risk taking and enhanced teaching practice, parenting, student learning
- (Educators) Job-embedded learning for staff, deprivatization of teaching ... opening the doors, literally (schools within schools)
- Acknowledging the importance of professional development for teachers as a way to maximize their teaching
- Participating in school-based events; supporting staff in major projects
- Recognizing staff member contributions to community (without burdening the staff)
- Supporting teachers and students with homework help both in person and on the web
- Being a supportive school council
- Encouraging schools to develop processes by which we could recognize and reward effective and innovative teaching practices
- Promoting smaller groups where involvement is possible
- Placing an emphasis on getting excited about learning

Are there any challenges standing in the way of supporting this priority? If so, what?

- Budget is limited; need more financial support
- Teacher politics: “permanent contract” means less experienced teachers are unrepresented; no opportunity for change in a school once a teacher is settled in a school, which can lead to lack of “specialist” teachers (such as gym specialists)
- Interagency lack of collaboration
- Cost of professional development
- Cost of facilities
- Complexity of “individual contribution”
- Improper labeling
- Teachers being out of class for PD may cause concern for younger students

- Not enough teachers.
- Public perception that teachers have it easy (need to educate the public)
- Too much emphasis on standardized testing
- Not knowing how to reward teachers.
- Does provincial funding need to be higher? Many schools have no teacher librarian, counselor, resource teacher, gym specialist

Comments:

- Need to deal with teachers and principals who should not be teaching; need accountability. How should we reward excellent teachers? How should we help teachers be better teachers when they are not good teachers?
- Need assessment at Board level of whether or not a school is healthy. Then, what happens if a school is deemed unhealthy? How is this monitored in a measurable way? What does a teacher do if concerned about the health of their working environment?
- Staff work well in smaller schools (comment from former teacher)
- Innovation requires collaboration