

**THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 23 - CENTRAL OKANAGAN**

**CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT – NOVEMBER 26, 2008
Submitted by: Moyra Baxter**

It is the Board Chairperson's responsibility to provide an Annual Report to the Board, to the District and to the Community. The year of Trustee elections, the report is given at the last public meeting of the "old" Board.

To try and summarize the events of an entire year in one short report is a difficult undertaking, and there is always the chance that something really important will be left out, but I will try and give a snap-shot of the Central Okanagan School District over the past year.

2008 began with the official report from the Chair of the External Review Team which had visited our District in November 2007. I believe the report, and the comments made to the Board, far exceeded our expectations (which, based on the input we received directly from the team members when they here, were already quite high). A copy of the report can be found on the District's web-page, or obtained from the Board office, and I encourage everyone to read or re-read the report. While the report commended the District for many initiatives, for the good working relationships, and for the focus on student achievement, there were, of course, some recommendations on how we can do even better.

Those recommendations included:

- Moving forward with assessment for learning
- Simplifying and clarifying our Achievement Contract
- Embedding the goals of the Aboriginal Education Agreement in school plans and the Achievement Contract
- Reviewing grade configurations and their impact on student success.

I am pleased to report that these, and all other recommendations, have been implemented or examined.

Early in the year, the Board also received the report and recommendation from the Trustee Electoral Boundaries Review Committee. The issue of trustee electoral boundaries is not without controversy, and the debate was heated at times. In the end the Board asked the Minister of Education to change the electoral boundaries on the west side of the lake so that two trustees be elected at large for the entire Westside, including Peachland. The Minister responded by appointing a “Fact finder” who spent two weeks in the District in September. The Minister has said that she will be communicating on this matter with the 2008 - 2011 Board of Education.

The Board’s new expanded mandate, toddler to adult learning, has been implemented. Currently there are over 30 early learning programs offered in the District and submissions have been made for grants for next year’s programs. A new community literacy plan has been approved and implemented. Liaison meetings with community organizations, and the reporting to the Ministry which accompanies this new mandate, has meant extra work for our staff members. While the Board has embraced its new role, there is still concern that the resources to fully support it have not been forthcoming from the Ministry.

The Appeals procedure for parents was updated to reflect the Ministry’s new process which includes appeals to the Superintendent of Achievement (a Ministry of Education position). Brochures on the process were provided to COPAC and PACs, and are available at schools and on the District’s web-site.

The Board continues to liaise with all the Municipalities and the Regional District which are part of the Central Okanagan. We meet regularly with them as well as with our MLAs and with Westbank First Nation. We also meet with the Boards and senior staff of Okanagan College and the University of British Columbia, Okanagan.

There are many issues that are important to other authorities and to us: with regard to municipalities, these include safety around schools; gravel pits in areas where students may be walking or waiting for a school bus; the whole area of transportation.

The Board approved Guiding Principles for Transportation, and in September all Mayors and Councils were updated on our transportation system. We know that sometimes parents take their concerns about transportation or the lack of a yellow school bus in their area, to local Mayors. We encourage councils to refer these concerns to our Transportation Department or to a Trustee. With regard to

transportation, a new Transportation Supervisor was hired this past year, and the Traffic Safety Officer position (funded by the School District and the City of Kelowna) was retained full-time.

With the post secondary institutes, we discuss, for instance, how we can better prepare our students for university or college, and also plan joint-credit programs with Okanagan College. Our apprenticeship programs, joint-credit courses with BCIT as well as with the College, and our Career Prep Programs are second to none in British Columbia. This year, Rutland Senior students have completed building their second house, and we recently recognised the employers and students in the Secondary Schools Apprenticeship Program at a dinner at Okanagan College.

The Board continues to look for ways to provide more choices for our students, and to support programs which engage students in innovative ways. We are lucky that there are always teachers and principals bringing forward new courses for local Board approval, and we continue to offer Advanced Placement, and French Immersion. We have recognised that while it may not be possible to offer all choices at all secondary schools, it is important that all these schools provide options for our students. The new Culinary Arts Program at Mount Boucherie Secondary is another example of a program which has been well received by students and their parents.

The District undertook a review of the Grade Configurations in School District No. 23. Input was received from parents, students, staff members, PACs and community members. At this time, the report has only been received by the Board. No doubt the new Board will spend some time considering the results and debating whether there needs to be, or if it is even possible to make, changes to the grade configurations within our School District. Although the current configurations are not consistent throughout the District (i.e. not all areas have the middle-school model) one result of the survey which was loud and clear is that almost all respondents like the configuration that they have now. This seems to support the theory that it really doesn't matter what grade configuration is in place; what it boils down to is the teacher in the classroom, the atmosphere at the school, and students feeling they are supported and encouraged to succeed. There must also be transition programs in place, and more connection between the different levels, whether that be elementary straight to secondary, or with middle schools as part of the system.

The Grade Configuration Review was part of the Strategic Plan which consolidated the long-term plans for the District. The plan is supported by a Strategic Operational Framework which is implemented by Senior Staff.

During this past year the Board saw the completion of the expansion of Mount Boucherie Senior Secondary, and the opening of the new Dr. Knox Middle School. A name was chosen for the new elementary school in the Mission; Chute Lake Elementary is slated for opening in September 2009. The old Bellevue Creek School site will be sold to help pay for this new school. With the growth in our municipalities, families often live in areas where there are either no schools, or the ones that are there become extremely overcrowded, while schools in other parts of the District have declining enrolment. Currently there is a need for more elementary space in the Rose Valley/Shannon Lake area of the Westside, and a new school in that part of the District is a top priority. We try to predict where there will be growth or decline, and what our numbers will be like for the next school year, and while we are usually on the right track sometimes we get it wrong. For instance, we predicted enrolment for the 2008-2009 school year would be down by 129 students, but actually ended up with 67 students more than in September 2007.

Our final District operating budget for the 07-08 year was over \$165.6 million. We were able to balance our budget for this year by implementing cuts across the District. While the government will say, and it's the truth, that funding to the public education system has increased, those increases have not kept pace with our expenses. These expenses include not only those things that all citizens have experienced - the higher cost of utilities and gas for instance – but also include increased salaries of our employees which were negotiated by government. One area where we feel we are underfunded is in the transportation budget. We continue to lobby the government on this issue and recently garnered support from all School Districts in the province, through the BC School Trustees Association, in our attempt to discover what has happened to the long overdue report on the Ministry's Transportation Funding Review.

As part of our budget deliberations, and based on advice on how it could work better, the Board re-configured our technology iLearn program. There is a transition/sustainability plan for grades 7 – 12 which will continue to provide an outstanding technology program, on a one-to-one basis in the schools, while ensuring that those students who do not have access to a computer at home will be able to check out a lap-top computer as they would a library book. We will continue to monitor this program.

The concept of healthy children and healthy schools has been adopted by the Ministry, with mandated programs for Districts. In the Central Okanagan these issues have been high on our list of priorities for some time. The Health Promoting Schools Coordinator has been retained full-time, and a Health Promoting Plan has been implemented.

Our International Education Program continues to grow, and a new Principal has been hired and will take up the position shortly.

The Board has also hired a District Principal to oversee our Aboriginal Education Program. Although our Aboriginal students are doing better, with more graduating each year and with our graduation rate higher than the provincial average, there is still a great deal of work to be done. Our Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, signed in 2007, continues to guide us as we work with the Aboriginal community in a joint effort to support these students.

All in all, this has been another successful year in the Central Okanagan School District. We are on our way to meeting our goals. We have seen even greater student success in Literacy and Numeracy and our Graduation Rate rose to 82%. We focussed on improving program choice; continuing to hire high quality staff; implementing quality assessment processes for classroom practice; and implementing the health promoting schools plan.

None of these goals could have been accomplished without the teachers, support staff, administrators and senior staff, as well parents and community members. School District No 23 is a very large organization. There are over 2,500 full and part-time employees who serve, as of our October headcount, 21,669 students. Many of these employees work behind the scenes: keeping our 41 school sites in good working order; keeping our financial books straight; looking after payroll and driving our school buses. Many of our staff members volunteer as well. Some coach our students, and the BC Summer Games saw major involvement by the District with many staff members volunteering to help in the facilities we provided for the games.

So this is the end of my report on the year, but as we come to the end of the Board's three-year term, I want to acknowledge the work of my fellow board members and note a few of the accomplishments of this past term.

First and foremost, the Board appointed the new Superintendent of Schools, Mike Roberts who took over as CEO in May 2006. This appointment was followed by that of the Assistant Superintendent, Hugh Gloster, and three new directors Rod Odlum, Norm Bradley and Jon Rever. These people, as part of the Admin Council, which also includes Larry Paul, Clara Sulz, Terry Beaudry, Peter Molloy, Eileen Sadlowski and Al Cumbers are a team which provides support and advice to the Board. Many of them support Board Committee work, and all of them have portfolios which really need two people to do the work that each of them does on a daily basis.

In 2006, the Pre-School Partnership Committee created the Early Learning and Development Framework.

Along with our partner groups we developed our Operational Definitions for the District's five cultural values: Honesty, Responsibility, Respect, Empathy, and Fairness.

The District's Mission and Vision Statements were reworded, after consultation with the partner groups.

We started a tracking system of students who, for many reasons, do not finish their schooling. We continue to look for ways to bring them back to our schools and help them become successful. In 2007, we re-opened a Storefront School on the Westside for those students who want to "catch-up" and then continue their education in one of our schools

The Committee structure is in place and, I believe, working well. Committee chairpersons have put in many hours preparing for their meetings and bringing forward recommendations to the Board. Our partner groups have told us that they appreciate their inclusion on the Board Standing Committees, and it is important that, whenever possible, we continue to get their input before making decisions. Students are now invited to serve on Committees as we initiated a District Student Council.

So I believe the Board has much to be proud of over the last three years. Yet each of us knows that without all the people who make this School District the great place it is, we couldn't have accomplished anything. So to our senior staff, and to our partner groups represented here tonight, we say thank you.

On a personal note, as Chairperson of the Board I have relied on many people. First of all to my fellow trustees, thank you for your support, encouragement and advice. To the Senior Staff Members who I work most closely with, the Superintendent and Secretary-Treasurer, a special thank you. I know it's not always easy dealing with an elected Board, but you manage to do so with grace. I know that the students' best interests are always front and centre for you.

To Mona Essler and Marion Stolze, you are always helpful, knowledgeable and calm under pressure. Both of you are masters at finding obscure documents or reports for me. I expect you have nightmares wondering what I'm going to ask for next. Thanks for everything.

To the two trustees who decided not to run again for the office of trustee, I'd like to wish you luck in all your future endeavours. Shelley and Cheryl, we will miss you.

I know that there will be challenges ahead in the next year. But if we continue to work together as we have in the past, we can make our School District even better for all the students we serve. That's why we are here. That is our responsibility – all of us, together.

“Our Mission: To educate students in a safe, inspirational learning environment where every student develops the knowledge and skills to be a lifelong learner and a healthy productive member of our global society.”

“Our Vision: School District No. 23 (Central Okanagan) is a progressive leader in education, which sets the standard for educational excellence and ensures that every student has opportunities to succeed.”