

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

CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT - DECEMBER 12, 2007

It is that time of year again. Time to briefly review the past year in School District No 23 – Central Okanagan. This is always a difficult undertaking, as so much happens every year in a school district with 41 schools, and approximately 1280 teachers, 1480 support staff and 100 administrators serving 21,850 students.

Perhaps it's best to start with the recent External Review. While we will not receive the formal written report until some time in the new year, those who visited us last month spoke very highly of our school district. Apart from their interest in our unique programs, and in our commitment to student achievement, they were, I believe, most impressed by the positive relationships which are so evident throughout our district.

We look forward to receiving their report and to their suggestions on how and where we can improve our practices so that we can reach our goals of improving literacy, numeracy and graduation rates for all our students.

2007 began with a celebration as the Board signed its first Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement. This agreement will guide us as we strive to fully support our Aboriginal students. Are we doing better now than we have in the past? Yes. Could we do better? Absolutely. While the Graduation rate for our Aboriginal students has increased to 59.5%, it is still at an unacceptable level, especially when compared to the overall graduation rate in the district which has risen to 82.4%. The Aboriginal Education Committee continues its vital work and an Aboriginal Parent and Family Advisory Council has been formed. As we consult and work together with our Aboriginal partners, focussing always on the students, we will surely see more of our students becoming successful.

During the spring, along with our partner groups, we developed new Mission and Vision statements, as well as defining our cultural values. Discussions on the wording of our Mission and Vision provided us with an opportunity to focus on why we as a School District exist, and what public education is all about. We felt quite proud of ourselves at having arrived at the purpose of our Kindergarten to Grade 12 system. Then the Ministry of Education announced that instead of being school boards, we would become Boards of Education on July 1st, and our mandate would expand to encompass Early Learning and Adult Literacy. As our Superintendent described it yesterday: "Cradle to Grave". Actually, I think he said "Birth to Death" but you get the gist.

So are our new Mission and Vision statements still relevant, considering our new mandate? I believe so. If we live by our motto, *Together We Learn* and we consider ourselves to be lifelong learners, then we are all students.

Actually, we already have a strong foundation in the area of Early Learning. We were provincial leaders in the development of our Pre-School Partnership program, and now have preschools in 13 of our schools, a Teen Parent program at Kelowna Senior Secondary and a Playschool at Rutland Senior. We have opened a Strong Start program in AS Matheson, and provide *Ready Set Learn* for 3 and 4 year olds in all our elementary schools. We have undertaken primary screeners for some years now, which provide valuable information on our young learners. We will continue to build partnerships with our child care and early learning community so that we can work towards having all children arriving at kindergarten ready to learn.

We will be talking to those who provide adult learning options in our communities. The provincial government expects us to report on all adult literacy programs, so while we do not intend to take over these programs we do need to find out about them and see if there are opportunities for collaboration.

While the Board is still learning what our new mandate means, we can be positive about the change and look forward to the prospect of the Central Okanagan becoming an integrated learning community.

While our district often receives accolades for our locally developed programs, the Board cannot take the credit for this. Each unique and exciting proposal is brought forward by someone who has a vision on how our education system can be relevant and stimulating for all students. While it may be the Board's responsibility to approve the program and sometimes to make budget decisions to provide support, we are lucky to have such forward looking and innovative staff members.

We continue to offer career based curriculum, such as the BCIT joint credit programs, apprenticeships, and job shadowing. There are five Hockey and one Soccer Academies. Advanced Placement Programs are offered at all Secondary Schools and Central School offers alternate programs including Distance Learning. We have excellent Music and Drama programs. The choices within the school district are enormous. While not all schools can offer all programs, every effort is made to accommodate each student's request for placement.

The i-Learn program has expanded so that all grade 7 and 8s and the original pilot students who are in Grade 9, have a laptop computer. While the original plan included extending the program, in the same format, into grades 10 – 12, senior staff recommended that the Board look at ways to provide the senior students with access to laptops while not necessarily following the original plan.

This recommendation demonstrates the importance of constantly evaluating our programs, and not just continuing in a certain direction. We should never be concerned about taking a second look at what we do and how we do it.

While we are proud of the programs we offer, we know there are still students who, for many reasons, do not finish their schooling. We are tracking these students, so that we can look for ways to bring them back to our schools and help them become successful. On the Westside, we opened a Storefront School for those students who want to “catch-up” and then continue their education in one of our schools. Other programs provide help for “at risk” students as we strive to meet their needs.

We have seen the continuation of our Health Promoting Schools initiative, along with the appointment of a full-time coordinator, and feel confident that we can accomplish the goals and timelines set out by the Ministry on the elimination of so called junk food.

In partnership with the City of Kelowna and the Regional District, we have hired a Traffic Safety Officer who will work in the entire school district.

Also, after many years without one, we have a new Communications Officer. I am sure this position will prove to be invaluable as we work to build communications both within the district and out to the broad community. On that note, we continue to meet regularly with the politicians and senior staff people who make up the Municipal Councils and the Regional District in the Central Okanagan. As well, we meet with our MLAs, the Boards of Okanagan College and UBCO, as well as many community organizations.

On the Capital side, we have some significant building projects underway.

The Mt Boucherie expansion should be complete in a couple of months. It has been over 5 years since the amalgamation of Mt Boucherie and George Pringle Secondary Schools, and while those schools came together some time ago, both as a student body and faculty, the opening of the new extension will signify the final union. It will also provide new opportunities for Westside students, such as the new Culinary Arts Centre.

The Dr Knox Middle School rebuild is well underway, with an anticipated opening of September 2008, and the new elementary school in the Mission has finally been approved by the Ministry of Education with a projected opening date of September 2009. As well, the Board has acquired two acres immediately adjacent to Okanagan Mission Secondary and plans to expand that school in the future.

We are, by anyone's measure, a huge corporation. Our annual operating budget is \$166 million, while our capital budget for 2007- 2008 is in excess of \$37.5 million. Notwithstanding the Ministry of Education's announcement of claw backs to school districts' funding, we are in good financial shape. Our budget development process works well, with opportunities for input from our partner groups and the public.

I began by mentioning the comments made by the members of the External District Review Team when they visited us last month. They recognised that the Central Okanagan is a great school district. I expect they know as well as we do why that is. We must look to the local level, to the classroom, the school bus, the playground, the school, to find the reasons for our successes. We believe that our employees are second to none. We know that our students' achievements in academics, in extra-curricular and in citizenship programs are because of the role models in their lives. The young people whose lives they influence look to the teachers, support staff and administrators in our district for leadership and guidance. We also recognise the role of families, at home and in the schools, and value their commitment and support, not only of their own children but, in many cases, of all the children in a particular program or school.

Throughout the District there are staff members of whom we can be very proud. Some work behind the scenes, others are more visible, some have received provincial or national recognition, but all are important to our school system. We appreciate everything they do, every day, on behalf of students.

At the Senior Staff level we are blessed by a dedicated, hard-working group of people. Our Directors are simply the best. As well as all the other work they do, they support trustees who serve as Committee Chairs. The extraordinary team that has come together under the guidance of the Superintendent, Secretary-Treasurer and Assistant Superintendent is well respected both within the district and in the broader community.

The positive relationships which the external team recognized are in a great part due to the leadership and example of our Superintendent of Schools, Mr Mike Roberts. On behalf of the entire district – thank you Mike.

On a more personal note, I want to thank the Superintendent and the Secretary Treasurer, as well as Mona Essler and Marion Stolze, for their help and assistance. I could not have taken on the extra responsibility that comes with the role of Board Chairperson without the support and patience of these four people.

To my fellow trustees, I also say "thank you". You are a great team to work with and I have truly valued your points of view, and appreciate how hard each of you works. We may not always agree, but I know that all Board Members have the students' best interests at heart as they make decisions at the Board table.

The coming year will hold challenges; there will be new programs and, I expect, new Ministry directives that we will have to deal with. However, together with our fantastic employees, our great parents, and our community, we can continue to strive to make public education in the Central Okanagan the absolute best that it can be for every single student entrusted to our care.

“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.”