



**Budget Presentation to Edmonton Public Schools Board of Trustees
Trudy Grebenstein, President of CUPE Local 3550
January 13, 2004**

Mr. Chairman, Trustees, Superintendent McBeath, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Introduction

This past year has been a particularly difficult one for all district staff. Local 3550 members have again endured the ramifications of this government's disrespect for the education of the children in this province. Budget constraints that caused last years staff layoffs were devastating for support staff at Edmonton Public Schools.

Local 3550 support staff members will eternally bear the wounds of those FTE reductions for many years to come, whether they were laid off or were the staff members left behind wondering how this would affect their income, pensions and how they could possibly take on the extra workload. It is important for not only support staff, but also the district's students and other staff, that June of 2004 will not be a rerun of June 2003.

Edmonton Public Schools Focus on Supporting Teaching and Learning seeks to achieve superb results from all students at Edmonton Public Schools. Support staff, whether they are in the classroom or in an office, have an important role to play in the education of every child in this District. Student achievement soars, and teachers do their best work, when adequate numbers of support staff are on the job, as part of the educational team that supports teaching and learning, regardless of whether support staff work at a school or central services site.

The members of Local 3550 are well aware of the Klein government's position on funding public education. As education workers, parents and citizens of this province, we can only continue to say ...**shame**. As this district's budget planning for the upcoming year begins, there is already considerable anxiety amongst support staff. We can only hope that the upcoming provincial budget will follow the Learning Commission's recommendations regarding the shortfall of government funding for public education.

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When schools, central departments and the board begin budget deliberations for 2004, the members of Local 3550 would like the following considered:

Public Private Partnerships

- Continue to maintain resistance to the pretty package of public/private partnerships, known as P3's, that this government promises will offer solutions to create funding for desperately needed new schools
 - The sorcery of accounting practices associated with P3's does not change the fact that in the end, taxpayers dollars that could have been directed to the classroom, will have instead paid for the additional cost of a P3 building
 - Keep in mind, that in Nova Scotia, the auditor general reported that one P3 school cost \$900,000 more than it would have with public investment
 - Resist our government's persuasion that "In Alberta, we can do P3's smarter and better", as they are as wrong about that as they have been about their past decisions on funding public education

Support Staff Staffing Levels

- When reviewing support staff staffing levels, reflect on whether assigned duties can normally be accomplished in a 7 hour working day
 - Make sure staffing levels are appropriate to the duties and work load expectations of Edmonton Public Schools, as well as each site
 - Compare year-to-year support staff staffing levels to determine where the duties of lost positions are today, and where they should be
 - In the interests of employee wellness, ensure that full time equivalent calculations for support staff at every district site include scheduled breaks
 - If duties must be reassigned, recognize that unresolved burn-out and overwork issues will create worker health issues that will without a doubt affect the finances of this district

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- Create a joint committee to develop a base staffing formula for support staff in schools, keeping district work priorities and expectations in mind, as recentralizing this Human Resources task will provide additional time for principals and district administrators to pursue Instructional Focus work
- Ensure that all budgets include adequate dollars for support staff supply workers, as when absent from work, support staff are often not replaced or do not have their duties covered
- The local is very concerned that when supply teachers are brought into the classroom to provide coverage and/or much needed relief, they may also be faced with taking on support staff duties when there is no supply coverage for an absent support staff member
- Support staff are partners and contributors to the educational team that make it possible for teachers to deliver the best possible program to each child in their classroom

Overwork and Burnout

- When making staffing decisions, remember the causes and symptoms of overwork and staff burn-out, as well as the fact that while this does not happen overnight, its affects are cumulative, regardless of whether or not it is done with good will " for the benefit of students and the educational team"
 - Causes of Overwork: conflicting demands, insufficient training, too many additional responsibilities, worker isolation (no time to interact with co-workers), downloading of management responsibilities, no replacement workers, budget cut backs, missed breaks, no relief from loud work environments to do detailed and time sensitive work
 - Symptoms of Overwork: stress, burn-out, mental exhaustion, worker/family conflict, anxiety, depression, feelings of hopelessness, musculoskeletal injuries
 - Results of Overwork and Burn-out: valued and trained staff members may be unable to perform their duties due to increased medical appointments, sick leave, and in extreme cases, have life-long health difficulties created by overwork that may cause long term disability

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Professional Development

- Track district-wide professional development expenditures for support, custodial, and maintenance staff by creating a financial object code in the Budget Planning System Program and provide an annual report and analysis of those expenditures to trustees
 - This will provide information and assist in removing barriers to equal opportunities for support staff to take part in professional development opportunities, thereby providing opportunities for support staff to refine their on-the-job skills, as well as pursue growth in new areas of interest that will greatly contribute to their value as District employees
 - Do not lose sight of the fact that support staff are indeed district staff members expected to perform their duties to levels set by the District, yet these very same staff members often have given up asking for professional development funding since they are the last site staff group considered, due to site budget constraints and site supervisors that will only consider work-related training as important

Training

- Consider site costs for training district support staff and recentralize that training budget to offer equal opportunities to all support staff, regardless of individual site budgets; and create an ongoing training program for all support staff positions
 - The cost of training support staff is a district responsibility and should not be limited by individual site budgets as this can become punitive as staff are not offered the same training opportunities as they move from location to location
 - Support staff that transfer from one district location to another location must have equal opportunities for training and up-grading their skills
 - Inconsistent training strangles the ability for support staff to remain “on the leading edge” and certainly makes it difficult to attract and retain qualified support staff

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Mentoring

The expertise and experience Edmonton Public Schools loses as more and more support staff retire is staggering. The experiences of Support Staff filling those positions can be overwhelming, regardless of their training. As a local, we see their symptoms of overwork, anxiety; and know these members would greatly benefit from the consistent support of a support staff mentorship program, and we would love to talk with you about it.

Local 3550 applauds the training and inservices for support staff currently offered, in spite of the fact that all support staff do not have equal access. A mentorship program is a vital step towards future support staff excellence. The best practices shared in a mentorship program and the opportunities for staff new to their positions to collaborate with experienced support staff on a one-to-one basis is priceless. It is our request that funding be put in place to support such an initiative.

Conclusion

The Local is looking forward to the presence of trustees assigned to all the CUPE contract negotiations, during the upcoming 2004 bargaining process. As you know, Local 3550 members put a great deal of importance upon trustee participation during negotiations.

In spite of the Learning Commissions findings, we must all continue to stare down this government and demand that infrastructure and education funding is restored to acceptable levels, for Alberta's children. The role of school trustees is an important one. The present and future education of Alberta's children depends on school trustees that are prepared to represent the interests of parents, students and community members in the governance of our schools, in spite of any government resistance. Local 3550 continues to support the efforts of the board.

On behalf of the support staff of Edmonton Public Schools, thank you for this opportunity to outline what Local 3550 believes should be considered by schools, central departments and the board in reviewing and amending three year plans and the development of the 2004-2005 proposed budget.