



Education and
Early Childhood
Development

Éducation et
Développement de la
petite enfance



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Mr. Owen Parkhouse
President
Prince Edward Island Home and School Federation Inc.
P.O. Box 1012
Charlottetown PE C1A 7M4

Dear Mr. Parkhouse:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the resolutions passed at your Annual General Meeting. First, let me thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend and speak to your membership. As you know, I strongly believe that engaged parents make a significant contribution to learning.

With regard to the resolutions, I am pleased to provide the following responses:

Regarding Resolution 1/11 – White Boards and FM Systems in Elementary Classrooms

The Department recognizes that having appropriate instructional tools available is important to delivering the curriculum in an efficient and effective manner. The tools noted in your resolution are today some of the most valuable. The Department supports the resolution and is committed, as budgets allow, to making the tools available to elementary classroom teachers

Resolution 2/11 – Science Fair

The aim of science education in Prince Edward Island is to develop scientific literacy. Scientific literacy is an evolving combination of the science-related attitudes, skills, and knowledge students need to develop inquiry, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities; to become lifelong learners; and to maintain a sense of wonder about the world around them. Many of the skills used and refined in science fairs are introduced and developed in the provincial science curriculum. We believe that all students, as an integral component of their educational program, should experience science and the nature of science.

As new curriculum in all subject areas is developed, or current curriculum in all subject areas is renewed, we are embedding 21st century learning skills and themes directly into the curriculum, through the integration of project-based learning. Through project-based learning, learners are able to conduct in-depth investigations of real world issues and challenges. This type of learning engages students as they obtain a deeper knowledge of a subject area through inquiry, research, experimentation, often utilizing the expertise and mentorship of community partners. With these skills at hand, I believe students will transfer them and incorporate them into their science fair projects.

We appreciate the support of the PEI Home and School Federation as we renew our curriculum with the goal of ensuring that all students are scientifically literate, and have the skills to engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and decision-making by conducting in-depth investigations of real world issues and challenges and, thus, highlight their knowledge/skills through their science fair projects.

Resolution 3/11 – Allocation of Educational Assistants in Schools

The Minister's Directive referenced in this resolution is for the staffing formula used to allocate special education/resource teachers, but not for Educational Assistants. Our department has responded to the needs of the school boards to the best of our fiscal capacity.

The number of support staff in schools has grown from 112 positions in 1997 to 406 full time equivalent (6 hour) positions in 2010-2011. This dramatic increase has occurred while student enrolment has declined significantly.

The actual ratio is now approximately 1 support staff for every 50 children which is one of the lowest in the country.

Resolution 4/11 – Equal Access to Value-Based Educational Experiences

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is responsible for the development of provincially authorized curriculum and programs for use in Prince Edward Island schools. We are pleased that our curriculum and programs, along with supporting student and teacher resources, are accessible and available to all schools in the Province. School boards are responsible for ensuring the provincially authorized curriculum is delivered to students. School boards and schools do have some choice regarding which programs they offer to their students.

The flexibility of the curriculum allows students to learn in their communities, and to become aware of the influence of their communities on their lives. A range of life and learning

experiences are available in all Island communities, and are as unique as each community itself.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is working to find ways to encourage and recognize additional forms of learning for students:

- A new grade ten course, Career Explorations and Opportunities, will be fully implemented in all schools in September, 2011. This course supports students as they become lifelong learners, knowledge creators, and problem solvers who are informed and well equipped to live and work effectively in a global, innovation world.
- The Department is working towards flexible scheduling options for students, which may expand the boundaries of learning time and space. For example, summer learning opportunities allow students to create more flexibility in their regular high school schedules by completing a credit outside of the traditional school calendar.
- Students who choose to participate in cooperative education are able to engage in an increasingly wide variety of sector placements such as aerospace, bioscience, finance, health care, information technology, and the skilled trades.
- The recently issued External Credentialing Minister's Directive will provide greater flexibility in meeting graduation requirements by providing high school credit to students who have completed recognized courses of study external to the public school system.
- The growth of e-learning will provide more opportunities for students to learn through distance learning.

We look forward to the continued support of the Prince Edward Island Home and School Federation as we strive to expand learning opportunities for all Island students.

Resolution 5/11 – Minister's Directive and School Board Policy for Reporting Student Health and Safety Issues to Parents

The Department is a strong advocate for student health and safety. Recent events namely the closing of Elm Street, Spring Park, and Morell Consolidated have highlighted the importance of monitoring the situation on the ground at each school, taking appropriate action, and providing timely communication.

One of the vehicles for measuring the health and safety of a school is work carried out by the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee. This committee is required under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. I have requested that a parent representative be allowed to participate on this committee. This request has been forwarded to the Worker's Compensation Board for consideration. The Act mandates the composition of the committee and as such does not contemplate such a request. I am confident that the addition of a parent representative, if not already in place by the time you receive this letter, will be in place shortly.

Resolution 6/11 – Provision of Translation Resources to Support Newcomer Families

We applaud the pilot project of the Prince Street Home and School which focused on engaging parents in the home and school activities of Prince Street Elementary by providing translation services. You note its success in your resolution. It would be beneficial to learn more about the number of languages targeted for translation and what types of information were translated. As you are aware, the number of immigrants to PEI has increased a great deal over the past several years. We now have Islanders from over 60 different countries speaking more than 70 different languages. It is our desire to have our new Islanders integrate into our communities and part of doing so is valuing their language. However, it is very difficult to provide interpreter and translation services in all languages and we don't want to be exclusive.

Our EAL/FAL Reception Centre utilizes simultaneous uncertified translators to assist with the language assessment process and the registration of newcomer children into the school system. They also use uncertified translators to translate some messages needed by the school system. The budget line for this service is not extensive. As well, the use of uncertified interpreters and translators needs to be handled with caution as we need to ensure that the messages we are communicating either verbally or in text are accurate. At present, the Population Secretariat is examining the possible need for policy and regulation surrounding interpretation and translation.

While we understand that some schools have been impacted more than others by the recent increase in immigration to PEI, there are more than 40 schools that have students who do not speak either English or French. The services that we are currently providing through the EAL/FAL Reception Centre are provincial and not limited to those schools with larger newcomer populations.

We congratulate you on your integration of immigrant families into the work of the Home and School Associations. We know that integration into our island community leads to long term settlement and population growth. However, at this time, we do not have the available funding to support this resolution.

Resolution 7/11 - Academic Outcomes

Approximately 25,000 students attend PEI's publicly funded schools. The primary grades include kindergarten to Grade 3. The focus in these early years is to build a foundation in key areas such as math and literacy which will provide the basis whereby all other academic achievement will grow.

Presently, we assess all our students at Grades 3, 6 and 9. For each assessment, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has declared the expected outcome. For 2010-

2011, the expected outcome for Grade 3 reading was 68%, for Grade 3 Math, 74%, Grade 6 reading, 76%.

The Grade 6 Math Assessment is under development during this school year. The province will set the standard through a cut score session after the assessment is written in October 2012. This process is standard to setting the standard for all provincial assessments.

For Grade 9 Math the standard has not been set as there is a new assessment which has just been field tested in May 2011. The new assessment will be administered in June 2012. At this time a standard will be set for this assessment.

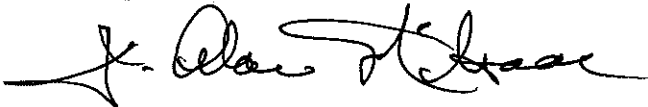
Given the fact that the province has implemented the assessment program over the past four years, the Department in collaboration with school boards is now in a better position to declare the expected PEI outcomes and thus will have clear standards for all students as we move forward.

For school boards with schools who are not meeting the expectations, a school development plan must address the need and provide a plan to address achievement gaps by October of each year for every school that is not meeting the expectation. This plan will be closely monitored by the board to ensure success.

School boards shall hold school administrators accountable, through the school development planning process, annual performance review and provincial achievement scores, for the achievement of academic outcomes and meeting the standards of academic performance as set by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

I trust that this information has responded to your 2011 resolutions. We commend the PEI Home and School Federation for its leadership and look forward to continuing our partnerships for the next school year.

Sincerely,



J. Alan McIsaac
Minister