



Calgary Board of Education

TO: Superintendents' Team  
FROM: Brendan Croskery, Chief Superintendent  
RE: My Response to the Task Force Report on Our Relationship with Staff Association  
DATE: January 16<sup>th</sup> 2009

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I write this memorandum as my last major duty in the Calgary Board of Education prior to retirement this afternoon. On December 15<sup>th</sup> 2008 the Chief Superintendent's Task Force presented me with a copy of their Report on the Working Relationship between the Calgary Board of Education and Staff Association. The events leading up to my retirement have delayed my written response longer than I would have wished. However, I responded verbally to the Task Force Members shortly after the report was completed. Moreover, Superintendents' Team invited the Task Force members to meet with them on Monday, January 12<sup>th</sup> to review the report and to thank the Task Force for its hard work on this important project. The purpose of this memorandum is to formally express my personal response to this report, with the following recommendations to Superintendents' Team:

**Chief Superintendent's Recommendations to Superintendents' Team**

- That, subject to relevant policy-governance provisions and potential financial constraints, the recommendations of the Task Force Report be accepted in principle as an actionable template for building this important relationship between the CBE and Staff Association.
- That Superintendents' Team appoint a senior administrator with the expertise and accountability for addressing the Task Force recommendations in a time frame appropriate to the nature of each recommendation.
- That the Task Force Report be widely circulated and discussed as an exemplary effort to address long-standing organizational challenges.
- That Superintendents' Team consider attaching the Chief Superintendent's response to the Task Force Report when that report is distributed.

- That an appropriate budget line be incorporated into the 2009-2010 operating budget as a strong demonstration of CBE good faith in this Task Force process.
- That the system take seriously the Task Force’s injunction to understand Bolman and Deal’s four frame model for analyzing organizations: “The way forward is to understand these four frames and for all of us to see the people within the complex prism of the Calgary Board of Education.”<sup>1</sup>
- That Staff Association and CBE administrators strengthen the Task Force foundation for improving this relationship by building specific strategies for developing their understandings of adaptive work and followership.<sup>2</sup>

## Discussion

The Task Force has reported its findings and recommendations. It is now important for both the CBE and Staff Association to begin the work of actioning them. I have been extremely impressed by the insight, the honest commitment and the dedication of the Task Force members. It is, therefore, imperative that we do not allow this Report to gather dust on a bookshelf.

The IAP2 focused conversation technique identified five key relationship issues:

1. Lack of mutual respect.
2. Lack of knowledge and understanding.
3. Ineffective communication.
4. Tension between the need to be flexible and the way we treat staff.
5. Lack of transparency in engagement and decision making.

Page 5 of the Report identifies a “Preferred Future” for each of the five key relationships. We must find ways to forge these futures together. These are exceptionally laudable targets for constructing an improved relationship with Staff Association. I suggest we take them seriously and get on with it. At the risk of sounding too assertive I also respectfully suggest that those who cannot commit to these preferred futures need to get out of the way so that people of good will on both sides can do their work.

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<sup>1</sup> The covering letter for the Task Force Report states how critical it is for these organizational frames to be well understood by the CBE and Staff Association. I strongly agree, and I further suggest that the system develop at least four modules on “Reframing Organizations”. These modules could be offered through the Core strand of the Leadership Centre.

<sup>2</sup> If we are truly serious in our intent to take this relationship seriously there will be a massive need to engage the system more fully in the meaning and relevance of adaptive work (Heifetz, 1994) and followership (Kellerman, 2008). The position I take here is supportive of the Task Force’s efforts to underline organizational values as the prime target of our improvement efforts. This is a very different approach from technical leadership that seeks only to dispense additional resources to resolve problems. The members of the Task Force modeled their commitment to adaptive leadership throughout their work together.

## **A Word on the Twelve Specific Task Force Recommendations**

There is much to be optimistic about in these recommendations, and I believe that Superintendents should give strong support to them. Some recommendations are short-term in nature. They require the resolution of outstanding issues from the last round of collective bargaining. These issues need to be prioritized and resolved in good faith in order for the many longer-term challenges to be addressed.

One caveat I need to be explicit about pertains to the dangers of false optimism. Adaptive change takes time – by its very nature it requires adaptations in values. Additionally, we have learned from John Kotter's work that we can expect to have to deal with some organizational complacency and (probably) opposition to the work of the Task Force.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it is likely that, in this current economic environment, resources will be scarce. A strong dose of reality will, therefore, be helpful as we come to terms with taking action on these recommendations.

## **A Concluding Observation.**

Finally, I would like to express my personal thanks to each member of the Task Force for delivering on the trust that was reposed in you. To Naomi, Linda, Jenica, Cathy, Albert, Cliff, Deborah, Curtis, Hilary and Sydney:

Thank you for your commitment, your wisdom and your courage. Thank you also for your strong modeling of how we must work together in the future. You have taken the first step in an important and exciting journey. The Calgary Board of Education is deeply in your debt.

Dr. Brendan J. Croskery  
Chief Superintendent  
Calgary Board of Education

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<sup>3</sup> Kotter is a highly regarded expert on organizational leadership. I strongly recommend his two most recent books to the reader. The first is called Our Iceberg is Melting (2005). The second is called A Sense of Urgency (2008). In late 2008 we sent a team of people to be trained and certified in Kotter's change theories. This team could be an excellent resource for the system.