

LEADERSHIP UPDATE

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Blue Ribbon Panel Finalizes Report

In February 2005, the Blue Ribbon Panel on the School Administrator presented its interim report to Provincial Executive Council. Council authorized distribution of the report to all schools, posted it on the ATA website (under the links on the right side of the ATA homepage, www.teachers.ab.ca) and asked members to respond.

On 2005 03 18 the Panel reconvened to consider feedback and to finalize their report. Member responses overwhelmingly supported

the recommendations of the Panel. Many respondents also provided written comments, which were considered by the Panel and reflected in the final document.

Before forwarding its final report, the Panel is awaiting the submission of Jimmy Clark's report on the future of administrators, which was to be provided to the minister by 2005 03 31. The Panel will undertake additional activities if warranted by Mr Clark's report.

New Education Minister Meets Administrators

Education Minister Gene Zwozdesky was the speaker and guest of honour at the Greater Edmonton Regional of the Council on School Administration dinner meeting on 2005 03 10. The minister was accompanied by the new deputy minister, Keray Henke.

Zwozdesky reiterated that his major goal as minister is to "depress schools," and he acknowledged the importance of trust and the need to improve the image of teachers. "My role is to work with you and for you," he stated to an appreciative audience of administrators. To illustrate his belief in collaboration, he noted that since taking office in November he had attended 182 meetings about education and had met with each school board in the province.

The audience was pleased to hear the minister say that school administrator leadership is key to an effective system. As a former educator, the minister also supports professional development.

As for the issue of administrator membership in the Association, the minister declined to make specific comments. Instead, he commended the Blue Ribbon Panel and said that he had read its interim report and recommendations.

Administrators were very pleased to hear the minister support the continuation of AISI. They also responded favourably to his announcements concerning daily physical activity (which no longer means an actual class period) and to slow the implementation of second language instruction. Minister Zwozdesky agreed that class size maximums are too high but explained the need to increase infrastructure if we are to create more classes.

Attendees were pleased with the opportunity to hear the new minister, and many took the opportunity to speak to him at the end of his session.

***My role
is to work
with you
and
for you.***

- the Honourable

Gene

Zwozdesky,

Minister of

Education,

2005 03 10



Book Review

- *Jacqueline Skytt, Coordinator,
Professional Development*

*On Common Ground: The Power of
Professional Learning Communities*

Edited by Richard DuFour, Robert
Eaker, Rebecca DuFour. 2005,
National Education Service,
Bloomington, Indiana

This past spring break gave me the opportunity to read *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*, the fourth book since 1997 on professional learning communities (PLCs) by frequent collaborators Richard DuFour, Robert Eaker and Rebecca DuFour. Fortunately, this book is not simply a reiteration of what has gone before. Instead, it offers a fresh perspective on developing PLCs, and features essays

written by nine other prominent writers. It should satisfy even the most hard-to-please PLC junky.

The book is organized into five sections. The first provides an overview of the conceptual framework for PLCs and identifies the common themes that emerge later in the book.

Section 2, “Critical Questions,” includes an essay by Douglas Reeves on the importance of teachers collaborating to identify focused expectations or “power standards,” developing classroom assessment practices that support assessment *for* learning and using a broad range of data to develop a holistic accountability system. Rick Stiggins delves deeper into the topic of assessment for learning and makes the case that traditional assessment—the

impending final exam, the unanticipated pop quiz—is actually counterproductive to learning. Jonathon Saphier follows with an excellent essay on student motivation, in which he states that “strong professional learning communities produce schools that are engines of hope and achievement for all students. They do not come into being by accident” (p 111). Roland Barth, founder of the Harvard University Principals’ Centre, helps us reflect on how we can “turn book burners into lifelong learners” and support teachers as professional learners.

Section 3, which is on creating PLCs, includes two essays, one by Mike Schmoker and the other by Dennis Sparks, on the importance of teacher professional development in enhancing learning and the establishment of collaborative teams in which teachers support each other in the development of their professional practice.

The section “Placing PLCs in a Broader Context” provides a historical perspective of school improvement and discusses issues of implementation. The contributing authors are Michael Fullan, Barbara Eason-Watkins and Lawrence Lezotte.

The book concludes with “A Call to Action,” written by the editors.

I found this book very worthwhile because the articles cover a broad range of topics and are written by leading experts in each area. In fact, my copy is now full of underlining, highlighting and Post-it notes for quick future reference. I recommend reading this book with your leadership team or a study group to frame important issues that will arise as you build your professional learning community.

Grants for Inclusive Learning Communities

The Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee of the ATA provides annually \$10,000 in grants for school projects that support a vision of public education committed to educating all children well in an inclusive school setting. The purpose of the grant program is to sponsor innovative projects that build inclusive learning communities by promoting the principles of diversity, equity and human rights. Such communities are characterized by cooperation, caring and respect for all people, and reflect a commitment to racial harmony; gender equity; First Nations, Metis and Inuit education; the alleviation of poverty; peace and global education; and the prevention of violence.

School administrators are encouraged to work with interested staff and students to develop and submit a project proposal. Suggestions for project themes include opportunities for intercultural education, promoting global citizenship, anti-racism education, violence-prevention programs, peace-building initiatives and working with community-based support agencies.

Application forms are available on the Association website at www.teachers.ab.ca; click on Diversity, Equity & Human Rights, then on Grants, Competitions and Awards.

Act now! The application deadline is 2005 04 30.

For further information, visit www.teachers.ab.ca or contact Member Services at the Alberta Teachers’ Association, 447-9400 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (from elsewhere in Alberta).