



**Choice, accountability, and performance in the public schools:**

**How Edmonton does it and why it works.**

**PRESENTATION BY**

**Angus McBeath**

**Superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools**

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## Foreword

Why would AIMS, an Atlantic Canadian public policy think tank, and the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, a group committed to improving education for every student in Canada, want to bring the superintendent of Edmonton's public schools here to tell the story of what happens in their schools?

How about because, in a new book just released, author William Ouchi, professor of management at UCLA, says that Edmonton has the best-run schools compared to those of many other major cities in North America? In *Making Schools Work*, Professor Ouchi says that the educational leadership in the city has in effect led a revolution. And that revolution is one that shows the way for Atlantic Canada to escape its educational underperformance.

If Edmonton's schools are revolutionary, then Angus McBeath, who gave the Halifax talk on which this transcript is based, is the system's "revolutionary-in-chief." If you read this remarkable account of Edmonton's long experience with public school accountability and school choice, you will quickly see why parents, students, and teachers would never want to turn back the clock on the innovations Angus and his colleagues have championed.

Edmonton proves, as Angus demonstrates here, that parents can be well-informed about how their kids are doing, and they can have total choice over what school their child attends, and individual schools can be rated and held accountable for the educational attainments of their students without it meaning the collapse of the system, educational inequity or the end of self-esteem.

In fact, reading Angus's comments, it quickly becomes clear that his vision is a passionate and compassionate one. Angus and his colleagues want every child to succeed, and are willing to challenge every conceivable entrenched interest to make that happen. At the same time, Angus underlines repeatedly that the most important work in society goes on in classrooms, that

the personal relationship and bond between individual teachers and children may be one of the most important in determining whether a child will succeed or not.

That's why Edmonton battled to make individual schools, under thoughtful management by strong principals, powerful customers of the educational establishment. No longer do schools have to take what the school district dishes out in services and support. The schools control the budgets and they buy what they want, where they get the best value for their kids. Local schools and their staff know best what their kids need.

But in return for this remarkable degree of school autonomy, the schools are subjected to probing scrutiny of the results they produce. Every imaginable kind of data is collected about when and how the kids learn, when they're in the classroom, when they drop out, what their literacy levels are. And schools that don't meet the appropriate standards are quickly identified and they get the help they need.

Part of this accountability is driven by school choice. Every school in Edmonton is, in principle, open to every student in Edmonton. Schools, which are paid on the basis of the number of students they can attract, compete hard for students, and a key part of that competition is driven by school results, because parents and students want an education that will equip them to succeed. They want excellence, and are willing to seek it out.

But excellence is not the same for every student. That's why different schools have developed distinctive educational missions and specializations. Failing schools have reinvented themselves and attracted hundreds of new students, giving them a new lease on life.

So successful have the Edmonton public schools been in giving parents choice and quality that private schools there have been absorbed into the public system in an ironic reversal of the experience in most major cities, where parents are increasingly defecting from the underperforming public schools and paying high fees for higher standards and performance.

The Edmonton experience shows, in a particularly striking way, that the principles of accountability and choice in education are not destructive of educational excellence, but are its

foundation. As Atlantic Canada struggles to improve some of the poorest performance outcomes and test results in the country, we could do a great deal worse than draw inspiration from Edmonton, now justly celebrated as home to perhaps the best school system in North America. Angus, a native Maritimer, says that there is nothing that Edmonton does that can't be done here. He even talks about the strategies that are needed to make it happen.

What if we were to prove him right?

Brian Lee Crowley  
President  
AIMS  
September 16, 2003

The Halifax-based **Atlantic Institute for Market Studies** is a non-partisan, independent social and economic policy think tank founded by Atlantic Canadians to encourage and promote debate about realistic options to help build the economy. AIMS work on accountability and choice in education can be found at **[www.aims.ca/School/school.htm](http://www.aims.ca/School/school.htm)**.

**The Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education** provides non-partisan education research and information to policy-makers, education partners and the public. Our purpose is to encourage higher performance throughout Canada's public education system. Our website can be found at **[www.sae.ca](http://www.sae.ca)**.

## Angus McBeath



Edmonton has revolutionized the public schools system. Every school is now an education enterprise led by a strong principal with the power to implement change and the power to acquire the services and resources the students need when they need them. Throughout North America, Edmonton is being held up as the example of what the public schools can and should be. School choice is a central feature of Edmonton's success: the school district offers open enrolment and more kinds of schools than any other district in the continent. These options have resulted in almost half of all students attending schools outside of their neighbourhoods and achievement scores rising across the board. With their entrepreneurial spirit, Edmonton's public school system has been putting the competition out of business; unlike most major cities, the number of students in private schools in Edmonton has been declining.

As Superintendent of Schools, Angus McBeath leads the ongoing effort of Edmonton Public Schools to improve student achievement. The district is in the second year of its Focus on Supporting Teaching and Learning, in which each school develops an instructional focus that applies to every

student in every classroom. As part of the initiative, the district has enhanced opportunities for collaboration among staff, facilitated the use of research-based best practices in the classroom, and involved stakeholders in supporting the crucial work of teaching and learning. Mr. McBeath



Angus McBeath in conversation with AIMS Director George Cooper

has also introduced a number of targets for improving both high school completion rates and the achievement of students in Grades 1 to 12.

An educator for 30 years, Angus McBeath began his teaching career in 1972 in Prince Edward Island. He is in demand across North America as a dynamic speaker with a truly



AIMS Director Phil Knoll shares ideas with Brian Lee Crowley and Angus McBeath

remarkable story to tell about how public schools can reinvent themselves to meet the needs of a modern, diverse and demanding society where educational achievement is the key to success.

Below, Angus McBeath, a native Maritimer, recounts how his adopted city found the formula to revive the spirit, energy, and commitment of people to public

education. Edmonton has proven that choice, accountability and performance are *not* incompatible with the Canadian public school system, but rather are the key to its renewal and improvement.

# **Choice, accountability, and performance in the public schools: How Edmonton does it and why it works.**

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## Introduction

### **BRIAN LEE CROWLEY**

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm Brian Crowley. I'm the president of the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies. AIMS is a public policy think-tank based here in Halifax. We're concerned with a broad range of public policy issues that affect Nova Scotia, Atlantic Canada, and Canada more generally.



Those of you who are familiar with our work will know that we've done a great deal of research and publishing in areas like health care, education, equalization, fiscal policy, tax, post-secondary education, and a whole series of other things. We're going to celebrate our 10th anniversary in 2004–2005, so we're almost ten years old.

We have a tremendous interest in education issues. Some of you will know that we published the first school performance report card here for Atlantic Canadian high schools earlier this year. That's why we brought Angus McBeath from Edmonton to talk about the Edmonton public school system because we think it's a model of what a public education system can be.

Before I introduce Angus and ask him to talk about the Edmonton experience, I also want to say a word about the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, because the Society co-sponsors this visit with AIMS. The Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education provides non-partisan research, information, and communication on education issues to policymakers, education partners, and the Canadian public.

It's a research-based think-tank on education issues. Their headquarters are in British Columbia. The executive director, Helen Raham, is a former teacher and they have been doing some really wonderful research work on how to improve the quality of education in Canada.

If any of you are interested in finding out more about The Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, their website is [www.sae.ca](http://www.sae.ca).

I am the Atlantic Canadian Board member for the SAE and would be delighted to give you any information that you would like about the activities of the Society. We've handed out some material about some of the research projects they've been working on.

**In the Edmonton public schools they have a really remarkable story to tell about how public education can deliver high-quality results, choice to parents and students, value for money, and satisfaction for teachers.**

Let me turn now to Angus McBeath and the Edmonton story. In the Edmonton public schools they have, in my view, a really remarkable story to tell about how public education can deliver high-quality results, choice to parents and students, value for money, and satisfaction for teachers.

I happen to think that's a winning combination.

Edmonton's school system proves it's not just possible in theory, but something is being done on the ground in a Canadian public system in a city where a quarter of the school population falls under the poverty line, and there are 6000 Aboriginal students.

These are significant educational challenges in any public education system. Edmonton has them and Edmonton has been able to meet those challenges. While Angus will tell you he's never satisfied, they have achieved some remarkable results I think you'll be very interested in hearing about.

I'm going to let Angus tell you that story, so let me tell you about Angus. Angus is a native Maritimer. The McBeath family comes from New Brunswick. He graduated from Moncton High School, attended Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown and he went to Dalhousie for his

Education degree. He's lived throughout the Maritimes. As soon as you hear him, you'll recognize him as someone who has never left in some ways.

He went to the University of Alberta, to do a graduate degree in Educational administration, and was hired as a teacher by Edmonton Public Schools. He has stayed with the Edmonton public school system, I think, ever since, and it's been, what did we say, 28 years, Angus?

He rose through the system, eventually to become Superintendent of the Edmonton public school system, and he and his immediate predecessor, Emery Dossall, who has now gone on to become the Deputy Minister of Education in British Columbia, are responsible for the many reforms which Angus is going to tell you about.

So without any further ado, I think it's time to ask you to join me in welcoming Angus to Halifax and to the podium to tell us about the Edmonton public schools.

# Choice, accountability, and performance in the public schools:

## How Edmonton does it and why it works

### Part 1. The most important paid work in society

#### ANGUS McBEATH

Thank you Brian, I'm so grateful to be here in Nova Scotia. It's so nice to be back home. It's also pleasant to be visiting a place where people don't think your accent is foreign. When people ask me and my wife, who is from Prince Edward

Island, why we moved to Alberta from the Maritimes, we say that it was because we wanted to do missionary work. Alberta is a wonderful place, but it'll never replace growing up in the Maritimes. It will never replace for me



that wonderful part of Canada that Nova Scotia is. One of my favourite beaches in the whole world is Rissers Beach down in Lunenburg County. One of my favourite little villages in the whole world is Petite Riviere down on the South Shore of Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia is a wonderful province. People in Alberta frequently tell me that when they visit the Maritimes that they would love to live here. So that is a remarkable thing that you folks do. You're wonderful exporters of hospitality, and people just love coming to the Maritimes. That is considered a wonderful trip for people from where I live and I wanted to share that with you because you're doing something very well.

I want to talk today about the most important paid work in society. The most important paid work in society takes place in classrooms. And I often feel despair, and worry about the fact that people don't recognize that public education is the most important paid work in society and

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that quite often society doesn't give the proper kind of recognition and attention to that work. I think that teachers transform the lives of children. Teachers are so important. We cannot display enough reverence as a society for that work.

We are truly beholden to teachers because teachers determine, in many instances, who will live in poverty and who will live with some measure of prosperity. Teachers frequently determine who gets to read, write, compute, and go on to post-secondary. Teachers say things and do things that stick with you for your whole life. We remember teachers as adults, and we remember those teachers who said, "I see something in you and I will not let you go," and made us learn in spite of ourselves.

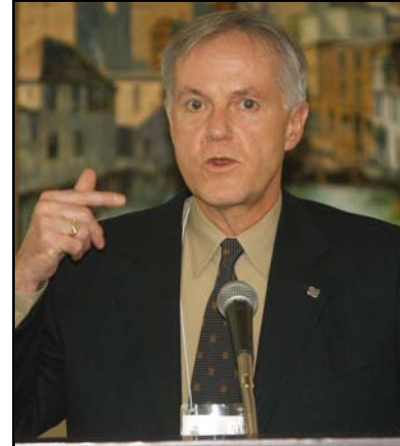
I can remember my Grade 1 teacher in a poor New Brunswick rural school room of 37 children because I was number 36 on the roll call in a split classroom and I did not know how to read when I went to school. My teacher said, "You are going to read," and she taught me to read and write. She gave me a gift that I have used to feed my family, to have a career, to be successful. And she brooked no resistance. You did not have a choice. She said, "You are going to learn to read. It is your job and I will make sure that happens." I didn't realize at the time as a student what a gift this woman was giving me. Sadly, this woman has passed away, and I have not had a chance to express my complete confidence in, and gratitude for, the work she did.

But I think we need to remember as a society, that people, when they go to school, rarely thank their teachers for the work they did for them, because it doesn't occur to them until after they're grown up, and by then it's too late. So teachers have to feed off of deferred gratification.

There are only two kinds of employees in Edmonton public schools. There are those who do the most important work in the system, which takes place in the classroom. Anyone else who works in Edmonton public provides support for that work. So you're either doing the most crucial

work, which is the work that goes on in classrooms, or you're providing support for that work. I don't do the work in classrooms, so I must be one of those providing support for that work.

Two years ago, we put billboards throughout our city, and they said, "Teachers transform lives." We had pictures of teachers and students on those billboards and some people said, "But money is short, why are you wasting money on billboards?" "Because," we said, "we don't think the public gets it. We need to remind the public that truly teachers transform lives." How many of you remember the first dentist you ever went to? I can't remember my first dentist. I can't remember my first doctor. I remember my parents, my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, my cousins, the people who helped shape me as a human being. The other people I remember from day one are teachers and I think we need to remember how important teachers are. As a society, we don't give them the recognition they deserve.



I tell the staff in Edmonton, you [teachers] often are the ones who determine which students grow out of poverty. No doctor, lawyer, engineer, wonderful as those people are, I'm sure, no accountant, no manager of McDonald's, moves children out of poverty into a life of a

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living wage. Teachers do that work. Teachers do that work by equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need in order to survive and thrive in a modern economy.

So if I might have your indulgence, I'd like to share a few stories about Edmonton with you, because we're a work-in-progress. We're not a finished work; we're a work-in-progress. Some of it may interest you.

## Part 2. Starting to make a difference

So what did we do in Edmonton to start making a difference? Most people love to tinker with systems. And I'm going to tell you that tinkering with the education system is a millennium project. And I would advise you not to tinker with systems.

If you want to create real change you have to understand how people think and behave. And, in fact, people behave naturally. Environment and need tend to drive people's behaviour. We want to tell you about an innovation we did over 30 years ago that started a major cog moving which had both expected and unexpected effects that reverberate to this day.

**Over 30 years ago it was decided that every child in Edmonton should be able to attend any school. What is the result? Sixty-two percent of high school students do not go to their home schools. Fifty-four percent of junior high students don't go to their local school.**

Over 30 years ago it was decided that every child in Edmonton should be able to attend any school within the city. That you did not need to go to your neighbourhood school, that one size doesn't fit all. The education establishment at the time disagreed that parents should be allowed to make decisions about which school their children would attend.

What is the result of that today? Sixty-two percent of high school students do not go to their home schools. Fifty-four percent of junior high students don't go to their local school. And, forty-eight percent of elementary students don't go to their local school.

Every spring in Edmonton, every student receives a passport. And their parents and the children go shopping for a school and schools compete and demonstrate what they're willing to do for their prospective students. They put their achievement results on display publicly and they demonstrate how well students learn. And parents and children actually make the choices.

Now this innovation doesn't cost a nickel. And people said initially that parents wouldn't

**In Edmonton, schools are funded based on the number of students that are enrolled. Schools compete for students. Schools that don't perform well over time may well see the school closed.**

be well enough informed or smart enough to make good decisions about which school their children should attend. It would be much harder organizing bussing routes. It would be much harder organizing the planning for buildings if we didn't know how many students were going to be in every school in any given year. We've been giving parents and students

school choice for over 30 years and we haven't shut down yet.

But once a school district has made a crucial decision of this kind, be prepared for parents to raise their expectations about the kind of service they will receive from the system. Because once people believe there's even a faint hope of choice, that will change things. Now the other criticism was that if parents were allowed to choose schools, they might not let their children go to the weak schools. Heaven forbid! In Edmonton schools are funded based on the number of students that are enrolled. So the amount of money your school has is directly correlated to the number of children served. Schools compete for students. Schools that don't perform will lose students. Schools that don't perform well over time may well see the school closed.

But we also have had an absolute renaissance of schools that hadn't been successfully attracting students. Years ago, one of our large inner city high schools had its enrolment shrink to about 300 students. This is a school that could accommodate 2,200 students. We made it an alternative program of a performing arts focus. It is full today. It has over 2000 students.

**Years ago, one of our large inner city high schools had its enrolment shrink to about 300 students. We made it an alternative program of a performing arts focus. It now has over 2000 students.**

We operate 207 schools, and we have 83,000 students. One of the things that our system did more than 30 years ago that absolutely changed the way the whole system operated was that we said we believed that we needed to build parent confidence in, and support for our system. If

the government of the day doesn't want to put more money into public education, is it better to have parents as your champions or parents as your enemies?

Parents as champions for the public school system make wonderful allies. And how do you get parents deeply engaged with your school system? I want to tell you one thing that did not go unchallenged. We told our parents, "You may send your child to any school in Edmonton. Every child in Edmonton has a local school that they're attached to, but you may choose any school you wish to go to." That caused some consternation downtown

in Central office. "What do you mean we're going to let the students go to any school they choose — how will we plan the system, what if students move, what happens if we can't keep up?"

When a parent has made a choice to send their child to a particular school, they often are much more supportive of that school than they are of a school to which their child has been arbitrarily assigned. As a result of giving parents and students choice we have a number of

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schools in Edmonton where there's over subscription to that school. So we have to have a lottery. If there are 1000 students spaces in a school and 1500 students want to go to that school, every child who lives in the neighbourhood, in the catchment area, gets an entitlement to go to the school. The 500 students who want to go to that school who live outside the catchment area have to enter a lottery

to get into that school.

Interestingly, poor children as well as affluent children participate in school choice and many, many low-income children in Edmonton go to a school other than their catchment area school. We also are in the fortunate position to be able to subsidize bus passes in Edmonton. The city provides buses and many children access school choice using city buses.

### Part 3. Follow the money: The 92-cent solution



The greatest thing we did as a school system, I think, was to move, ultimately, 92 cents on every dollar we collect from the provincial government, directly to the schools. We tell the schools, “You’re responsible for making decisions about how best to plan a program for

your students in your community.” Before, every school got the same number of everything. It was based totally on formula. You got X number of teachers based on how many students you had. You got X number of library books based on how many students you had. You had X

number of caretakers based on how many students you had. Everything was done by a formula by somebody downtown who knew very little about the students in the schools. We asked, “What if the teachers in the school know the students better than

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some functionary who works downtown? What if each of the schools in Edmonton is different from each other? What if some schools consist of affluent students and what if some schools consist of low-income students? Is that possible in a school system? And if so, are there programming implications based on the difference between and among schools. What happens if each of the communities in this city is different? What happens if the community’s heavily composed of immigrants? What happens if there are lots of students from Asia in the school community? Does that mean that one size fits all? Should one size fit all?”

So when we first sent the money out to schools, we started around 82 cents on the dollar that we sent to schools. Now you need to know initially that many people who worked in Central

office thought this was a dreadful idea. People in central office said, “You can’t give schools money, they’ll make bad decisions. You need some expert downtown who’s good with a calculator to make all these important decisions.” But practically every decision that was made downtown was an education decision, like should a school have a counsellor or not? I ask, should somebody downtown make that kind of decision or should the local school be the best place for the decision? So when the district, under the leadership of Michael A. Strembitski, first sent money out to schools, this was done with seven pilot schools. Three years later the decision was made to go district-wide.

**Once the schools got the money and the authority that goes with spending that money, staff said, “This makes a lot of sense.”**

Initially teachers and other staff were really worried this was going to end the world, as they knew

it. But once the schools got the money and the authority that goes with spending that money, staff said, “ This makes a lot of sense.” Let me tell you briefly about why schools were pleased with site-based decision-making. The staff recognized that under decentralization that if they needed to have a particular kind of teacher with particular skills they had the authority to access such a teacher. For example, in a situation where a school wanted and needed to improve reading results in their school they were able to ensure that each teacher recruited for that school brought with them excellent training in the area of reading. So schools started spending the money in a way

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that made sense for their community and the nature of the students being served. To ensure appropriate involvement of parents and staff in decisions about budget, we have always had an expectation that you need to involve staff and parents at the school in the thinking around and the planning about how to spend

that money. We believe that the involvement of staff and parents in the preparation of school budgets increases the level of support for the plans contained in the budget.

So when a school submits their plans, let's say it's a \$3-million budget and they submit their staffing plan, and then they submit how they're going to spend their supplies, equipment, and services money, they submit it to me.

Now how do we as a system exercise control with respect to school budgets? We say, "Fine, you need to make sure certain areas are mandatory. You cannot just do whatever you want. You must teach the Alberta curriculum. Your children must write the district and provincial achievement tests. You must have targets for improving your results in each of the measured areas and you need to measure things like behaviour and some other important matters."

So, schools submit their budgets annually, and they have to defend those budgets to the trustees and then the budgets are approved by the board of trustees. Then the schools are responsible for spending that money. People were really worried at first that schools might make bad decisions. They might buy something that people wouldn't think was proper. We had a famous case this year that got into the newspaper.

**Schools decide how many teachers, custodians, support staff, para-professionals, what kind of services, supplies, and equipment to buy. What we said was, "We will monitor you for results, not for processes used."**

A high school took their whole staff to a lodge, and had a two-day retreat in order to galvanize the staff into increasing the results on high school achievement tests (which they did, by the way). The whole thing cost \$22,000. That was made public, and our daily newspaper reported that and said, "See, isn't it wrong when you allow schools to make decisions about resources?"

We said, "A hundred people got two nights of accommodation and five meals, and this school has been galvanized into making their plan work." They had a professional development plan. Their January results were up significantly on the Fraser Institute rankings of the schools. They went from 156th in Alberta to 87th in terms of their results. I think the \$22,000 was well spent. Of course people are going to make some questionable decisions.

Schools decide how many teachers, how many custodians, how many support staff, how many para-professionals, what kind of services, supplies, and equipment to buy. That really gives a sense of empowerment to schools when they have this money and this authority and what we said was, “We will monitor you for results, not for processes used.”

Those who have the money and the authority should be held accountable for results and educational decisions are best made closest to where teaching and learning takes place. So the results of how well students do on achievement tests, how well students behave, the satisfaction of staff, students, and parents in each school community, are all measured and published publicly.

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## **Part 4. Decentralization: Death, dying, and grieving**

Another big decision was as follows: In 1995 I was asked to take charge of removing virtually all of the service money out of Central office with a view to sending it to schools instead. So for example, there were lots of services provided by Central office staff to the schools, as I’m sure you get services in Halifax provided by the Halifax District. We said, “Let’s give that money to the schools and let the schools decide what kind of services they need, how much service, and whether they want to buy it from an internal service provider or from an external service provider. Maybe schools want services we don’t even provide.”

Well, the Central office people were startled. Many of our staff went through what looked like Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’s stages of death, dying, and grieving. First of all, many staff weren’t sure that anyone would buy their services. Some of our staff didn’t provide very much service anyway. But all of a sudden they were going to have to be accountable. If you were making

**Our schools are customers.**

\$65,000 a year and you were getting \$10,000 worth of benefits, then you were going to have to raise a minimum of \$75,000 a year. And, you were going to have to raise another \$10,000 or \$20,000 to help pay for the other costs associated with providing the service. So that was of grave concern to our Central staff. And I understood their apprehensions, as I shared similar ones.



Then we said, “Our schools are customers. And we’re going to have to train you how to be customer service oriented.” We looked at the Nordstrom service model in the United States as the best customer service business that we had ever seen, and this was something I spearheaded.

At the beginning of this process I didn’t know exactly how to proceed. This is one of things that plagues public service organizations in general. People would rather you do the wrong

**Nobody in our service knew accurately what anything cost.**

work well than to do the right work badly. Let me tell you what I mean by that. First of all, nobody in the public sector in our service knew accurately what anything cost. For example, if you wanted to hire one of our plumbers for a day, an hour, a month, nobody had a clear notion how much it really cost to put a plumber on the floor for an hour a week, a day, or a month.

Nobody knew what a psychologist really cost to do a study and a report. So we said, “Well, let’s figure it out. We’ve got to figure it out because we’ve got to allocate all this money by September and we don’t know how to do that well, but we’ll do it badly rather than do it not at all and then we’ll try and set our prices based on what we think services really costs. Then if we don’t get it right, we’ll monitor and adjust it.” Needless to say we’ve been doing that now for seven years.

What happened to those services that people provided in Central that schools absolutely had to have? One service shrank by 85 percent. The request for technology services tripled in the first year. Other services grew, other services disappeared, other services changed. And then to make it more palatable to the staff, I told them that they were allowed to sell their services and products to other public organizations anywhere in the world.

We do about \$5-and-a-half-million in external sales annually. That actually helps to retain our staff. So we sell resources, textbooks, CD-ROMs, software

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as far away as the Middle East. That's been a great positive. In fact, the sale of external services has actually helped keep some services going that there wasn't enough call for in our own system.

The other thing that challenged and worried our staff at first was that our schools could buy their services and products from outside the system. For example, there was great concern from our psychologists when schools started going to psychometricians and getting testing done at far lower prices than they would have been charged by using district staff. We stipulated that provided the schools contracted with a registered vendor recognized by our purchasing office, we were not going to say you must buy in-house services.”

But you know, the vast majority of services are still purchased in-house. Has it changed the behaviour of our in-house staff? Oh, yes. We monitor customer satisfaction very well. We

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really did have to train people. Our schools are customers. Our parents are customers and our school staff are customers. And you know, when somebody in Central provides a school service and it doesn't work or it isn't good, we warranty that service and schools get it re-done at no charge.

That is very powerful in terms of efficacy for schools. So when I say in our system you're either doing the work in rooms teaching students or you're providing support to that work, people

really believe that because all the money is closest to where students are. The money and the decisions are closest to where teaching and learning takes place.

In the 1980s we hired an energy manager to help us save energy because we operate over 210 buildings and all utilities are expensive, including consumption of water. Try as he might, our energy consultant didn't save us as much as we hoped because staff in the schools didn't see a payoff at the school level by practising consistent conservation methods. Then it occurred to us that we needed to organize consistent with how we know human beings behave. We offered the schools the opportunity to access all of the utilities monies if they wanted to participate in this type of scheme. At least 85 percent of schools signed up right away. Any money that schools did not need to spend on utilities would be retained by the schools and could be put into programs. We also let schools know that we would factor in degree-days so that if you have a colder-than-normal winter, we'd add money to their allocation, and if we had a warmer-than-normal winter, we'd reduce their allocation. The allocation would be based on historical consumption trends. We also told the schools we would adjust their allocations at year end in order to make adjustments for price changes by the utilities. In the first year, schools saved close to \$2 million. And they've been doing that every year since 1986, and they have put the savings into programs at the schools. So that money went into students and into classrooms instead of being sent to the utility companies.

**When you give people the authority and the money, they make different decisions than when everything looks as if it is free.**

People behave naturally. When you give people the authority and the money, they make different decisions than when everything looks as if it is free. If you ever lived in an apartment or, pray tell, you have a child that lives at home, does your

child turn off the lights faithfully, does your child respect the true cost of utilities? When that child moves out and buys their own home and suddenly pays for utilities, they're transformed. All that nagging you did is not worth nearly as much as having to pay your own bills. So site-based

management is based on the principle that when you have the money, you start to behave differently than when everything is free.

## Part 5. Putting private schools out of business

When the Alberta government decided to fund private schools, not totally but heavily subsidize them, we knew that a lot of parents would like to go to private schools because there's this perception that private schools must be better than public schools. Most of the educational establishment in Alberta said, "Let's fight the government, let's kill this move to put money into private education." Now, because there's little elected opposition in Alberta, the government had very little opposition to this notion of funding private education. So we said, "Let's put the private schools out of business in Edmonton. How will we do that? By offering parents alternative programs." Let me give you an example.

**Most of the educational establishment said, "Let's fight the government, let's kill this move to put money into private education."  
We said, "Let's put the private schools out of business in Edmonton by offering parents alternative programs."**

In Edmonton we have Christian education programs in some of our schools. We have a school that operates a cadet-like academy. We have a performing arts high school. We have a sports high school and junior high. We have all-girls junior high schools. We have 31 alternative programs that students can access. Parents suggested these alternative programs to us. Once we offered these alternative programs, two private schools asked us if we would consider taking them under our wing, and if they could join us. The Edmonton Christian School and the Millwood Christian School have been absorbed into the Edmonton system and they've brought lots of new students with them. Many years ago we brought a school that teaches Hebrew into the

system as well.

Initially, our unions were very worried that we were going to offer alternative programs and we were going to compete with the private schools. I met with a number of union staff and I said to them that there are hundreds of teachers and other staff in Alberta who belong to the private school system who are not members of the Alberta Teachers' Association or other unions

and who do not pay any dues. What would happen if we brought in another three or four thousand students out of the private schools into Edmonton Public Schools? What would happen if we brought in several hundred new teachers into the public system, and all those staff started paying union dues?

What if we really competed with the private school operators? So let me tell you, in metropolitan Calgary, they have about 57 private and charter schools. In metropolitan Edmonton, there are six and the only reason there are six is we can't figure out how to get the last six into our system because they don't always use qualified teachers. We're targeting those schools because we want to have zero students in the private system. The best way to deal with the private schools is to convince parents to enrol their children in the public schools. And our parents, because they have so much choice in our system, really believe in public education.

**In metropolitan Calgary, they have 57 private and charter schools. In metropolitan Edmonton, there are six.**

**Our parents, because they have so much choice in our system, really believe in public education.**

## **Part 6. Improving student achievement: Targets, tests, and tracking**

The most important work in the school district and in schools takes place in classrooms, and I want to spend a minute, if I could, on the work we're doing to improve student achievement and

high school completion in our system. One of the things that we've discovered, because we relentlessly measure everything we do, is we don't perform as well as a system as we need to.

**There are no good jobs anymore  
for people who have not  
completed high school.**

There are no good jobs in Alberta anymore for people who have not completed high school. The last great bastion was the oil rigs, and increasingly the oil rigs, because they're becoming computerized, are requiring,

as a minimum, high school graduates.

If you do not complete high school, according to Statistics Canada, you will make on average about \$18,000 a year based on 1996 figures. My son thinks \$18,000 a year is a lot of money. He lives at home. You cannot raise a family on \$18,000 a year in our city and I doubt if you can do it in Halifax. That's the average wage of someone who doesn't complete high school.

Secondly, frequent bouts of unemployment will last through your whole life if you have not completed high school. Thirdly, the economy of Canada is increasingly becoming high skill and high wage. Many kinds of jobs we did in the past are disappearing to the rest of the world. We need every child in high school to complete high school. We, in Alberta, only have around 74 percent of our students completing high school. That is not good enough.

Fully a quarter of our students may not survive well in a modern economy. We have jobs going begging, especially in the trades, and we need to bring in offshore workers to do many of those jobs while Albertans are unemployed and on welfare. What do we know about people on welfare? Welfare is characterized by people with low literacy skills. People on welfare frequently suffer worse health than people who are not on welfare. And welfare is cyclical, so we sometimes have more than one generation depending on the welfare system.

There was some dismay when we established a mandatory district reading and writing test for all students. Some critics indicated that this would damage students. We persevered and introduced the tests and decided that we would make sure the results are public for each of the schools in the district. And there would be achievement targets for improving those results

annually for each of our schools. Years later the system hasn't gone out of business. Damaged children? I hope not. I think that if any children are harmed, it is those who don't learn to read, not those who are subjected to an annual reading and writing test.

**I think that if any children are harmed, it is those who don't learn to read, not those who are subjected to an annual reading and writing test.**

Our results are public. Parents sometimes make decisions on which schools their children attend based on the achievement results. Our schools are ranked by a foundation on the basis of achieved results. This kind of ranking brings a host of criticism from the Edmonton

education establishment. And, to be fair, the ranking of the schools is not always done in a way that gives a complete picture of each school or the students that are served.

The argument when we first released our school-by-school results publicly was that parents were not smart enough to be allowed to have the information about the school's achievement test results. We said, "They're smarter than you think they are and we're going to release them." "Oh, but they'll misuse them. They might change schools based on how well the school is performing."

**The argument when we first released our school-by-school results publicly was that parents were not smart enough to be allowed to have the information about the school's achievement test results. We said, "They're smarter than you think and we're going to release them."**

Yes, they might. They might actually put a school out of business. Our customers can put our schools out of business and quite rightly so, if we didn't have the courage to do it in the first place.

Our students do very well internationally. In fact, Albertan students perform at the top of the world. Now is that because Alberta kids are smarter? No. Our students are no more talented than students from other provinces. Our parents are no more talented than parents who live elsewhere.

We measure what students are obliged to learn and our parents know what it is their

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children are supposed to be learning and they know the standards. They expect to see the test results every year. We also have a requirement that we tell the truth in education, which goes like this: if your child is in Grade 9 and reading at a Grade 5 level of achievement, we must certify that on the report card. We must certify what the actual level of achievement is, based on our standardized achievement test coupled with the

assessments teachers use.

That was another bone of contention. We couldn't possibly tell the truth about where students were really performing. Parents would never stand for it. Not true. We did it and people survived. In fact, parents said to us, "Thank you for telling us the truth. Everybody always said our child was doing really well in school for his ability."

So when people got the actual grade level of achievement that their children were performing at, that was quite illuminating for people who had different notions of how their kids were performing.

**We have a requirement that we tell the truth in education. If your child is in Grade 9 and reading at a Grade 5 level, we must certify that on the report card. Parents said to us, "Thank you for telling us the truth."**

## **Part 7. Learning to how to read is important**

Unless things have changed dramatically recently, most universities do not fully prepare teachers on how to teach reading. New teachers get into their classrooms and they discover that they don't necessarily know how to teach reading to those students who didn't learn how to read on their own.

So we're making a huge effort to ensure that every student learns how to read by Grade 3. We measure reading in every grade through 1 to 9, and we measure writing in every grade

through 1 to 9. The names of all students below grade level are provided to the schools where they are enrolled.

We've tracked high school completion and realized that we know as early as Grade 3 which students may well not complete high school because they have literacy problems. We've

**We've tracked high school completion and realized that we know as early as Grade 3 which students may well not complete high school because they have literacy problems.**

asked each of our schools to address literacy. Even high schools. And to make sure that their teachers are solidly trained in ensuring that students and teachers have the skills necessary to ensure reading competency.

Now let me tell you how we work with our principals. I've asked each of our principals to spend 50 percent of their day, the instructional day, in classrooms

supporting, coaching, and working with teachers on improving instruction. There was some dismay in some quarters when I first asked our principals to do that. "How can we do that? We have too many other jobs we have to do."

I said that when I started teaching in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, I had three non-readers in my Grade 6 classroom. I did not know much about reading. My principal didn't know that I didn't know much about how to teach reading. I never told her and she never asked. My principal was an excellent person but it appeared to me that her time was taken up by non-classroom matters in the school. She was doing the important work in the school. Clearly, the work I was doing as a teacher was not as important because otherwise she would have spent more time with me. And yet, I think the most important work in a school goes on in classrooms, so why shouldn't principals spend their time being in rooms?

Our principals, at a minimum, are in classrooms 20 percent of the time. This includes high school principals, and it's transforming the work that's going on in rooms. Teachers need that kind of support. I

**Our principals, at a minimum, are in classrooms 20 percent of the time.**

would have thought at first our teachers would have complained about administrators being in their rooms, but instead, in most instances, teachers value having principals in their rooms. But teachers also want time to work collaboratively with their colleagues on everything from how to teach, how to use best practices, on planning lessons and units and on how to use common practices right across the school.

## Part 8. Change: It won't happen on its own

You cannot achieve educational change, in my view (and I've been part of most of what we've done in Edmonton in my 28 years there) without allies from outside the education system.

First of all, in Edmonton to this day parents probably wouldn't have complained had we retained a highly centralized school system. Our own staff would probably not have complained either. We would have just carried on. We still would have received more money every year from government as well. Everybody would have expected to get a raise every year. We would have taken the extra money every year and spent it. Many students would have not been successful.

**You cannot achieve educational change without allies from outside the education system.**

People wouldn't have had choice. And I think we could have carried on beating the system into submission and making it carry on because most people simply don't believe it's possible to change the way public education works.

So what do you need? You need powerful allies outside of the education system in order to be the guardians of the expectations about public education. People like you in this room. People might say, "But I'm not a public educator. I don't have that responsibility or interest." And I'm saying to you, don't leave it up to public educators to reform their own system. Remember the ruling class does not reform itself.

So we need people like you, if you're interested, to bring forth a call for change. So out

of fear, quite often, we don't initiate substantial educational reform. Educational reform requires very clever tactics and you must have champions who believe — who can sell a vision as a good thing.

Our staff actually like being part of a system that is well known for its educational innovation. They like operating in a system of choice and have taken it for granted that parents have choice and are our customers. They eventually come to like it. What you need at first, though, is a small core of people, a guiding coalition whereby staff can get an idea or two started.

You have to be very clever.

If you were to do any of what I just talked about today, your staff would all phone every disgruntled person in Edmonton and come back with some horror stories and say, "Oh, we can't do it here because — well, it's different in Edmonton. They can do it in Edmonton but it would never work in Nova Scotia. Oh, it's different in Edmonton. They have money in Edmonton. They don't have any poor students in Edmonton." No? We have about 26 percent of students falling below the poverty line in our city and we have 6,000 Aboriginal students. You might also hear that in Edmonton they have more oil or something and that's why they can implement and sustain change. There would be some good reason why it couldn't be done in Nova Scotia. Just like there are lots of good reasons why things that can't be done in Edmonton can be achieved in Nova Scotia. Well, we couldn't possibly do it because they're close to the salt water or some other such reason.

In closing, I also think we take a very privileged standard of living for granted in this country. I've travelled in Asia, because we have international student programs that recruit from this part of the world. These students bring in about \$10,000 each to the system and our schools get most of that. So our schools like having international students. But we've been opening up the

**Our staff actually like being part of a system that is well known for its educational innovation. They like operating in a system of choice and have taken it for granted that parents have choice and are our customers.**

Chinese and the Indian markets because we have a lot of empty school spaces.

One of the things I've discovered is that India and China are going to give us a very big run for our money. And you know, employers increasingly don't care where people are from. They just want good work. They don't care where you're born. And there are wonderful graduates in China and India. Silicone Valley snaps up the best IT students in India. Can you imagine how much talent resides in a society as big as India's?

So let's say there are only 10,000 students in the best IT schools in India. That 10,000 probably had to compete with hundreds of thousands of candidates for places in those schools. So there's a real talent pool. And so our young people believe that our prosperity is something they can take for granted. And we will not prevail if we do not make our education systems work.

**If we can't get every student to complete high school, and if all of them don't know how to read by the age of nine, then I think we may be doomed to be a second- or a 20th- or a 45th-rate nation because our wealth and prosperity has to be earned.**

If we can't get every student to complete high school, and if all of them don't know how to read by the age of nine, then I think we may be doomed to be a second- or a 20th- or a 45th-rate nation because our wealth and prosperity has to be earned.

In the past we've been lucky. But we may just have to earn it from now on. And education is the generator of wealth, civility and prosperity in society.

## Questions and Answers

MR. CROWLEY

### [Acquiring information](#)

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'm sure that there are many questions. I'm going to sort of kick it off, if I may. Angus, I'd like it if you could tell people here a little bit about the information, the way that you know what's going on in the schools.

**MR. McBEATH**

All 207 principals in Edmonton report directly to me. As a result of the 207 reporting directly to me, I have to have a great deal of information about each school. And I also walk the classrooms in each of the schools I'm evaluating every year.

I get information provided to me on the grade level of achievement of every student in the school. I get information on each student's achievement in reading for each of the schools as well as the grade level of each child's writing at each school. I also get the achievement results by school for each of the provincial and diploma achievement examinations. I get the satisfaction levels of staff, parents, and students for each school.

I get the financial results for each school because the district monitors school budgets. So if a high school has a budget of \$12 million, the principal is responsible for managing that budget. And we have carry-forward surpluses and deficits. We don't make everybody spend all their money by the end of the year.



I get information on high school graduation rates for each of our schools which is absolutely crucial, including how many students start courses, how many students are still in the course at the end of the semester, how many students write the tests, and how many students pass the tests, et cetera, et cetera. Also what level of courses in which students are enrolled. I receive information on special needs students and programming, the performance of ESL students, and the performance of special-needs students. I receive information about the professional development needs of the school because we spend a lot of effort on targeted professional development. We've learned that professional development is really crucial, so we want to have knowledge about the professional development expenditures in each of our schools making sure that it's long-term professional development, which consist of opportunities for both practicing and coaching.

**Virtually all information that we collect about our schools is public. In most instances, schools publish the information. The district also publishes school-by-school information. It's on the Internet, it's in the libraries, and the parents must have a copy of all information.**

I haven't explained the whole dossier, but I have a whole dossier of information on the schools.

**QUESTION**

And how much of that information is public?

**MR. McBEATH**

Virtually all information that we collect about our schools is public. In most instances the schools publish the information. The district also publishes school by school information as well. It's on the Internet, it's in the libraries, and the parents must have a copy of all information. So the

parents should know, for example, what percentage of students are below grade level in reading at each grade level in their school.

**Parents have been receiving regular updates on school performance for a number of years now and that hasn't seemed to create a problem. Teachers, while initially fearful that information on school performance would be made public, are used to it now as well.**

At first, people said our parents are not smart enough to receive information about school performance. Our parents have been receiving regular updates on school performance for a number of years now and that hasn't seemed to create a problem for parents. I think our teachers, while initially fearful that information on school performance would be made public, are used to it now as well. Some parents do use school

performance results as one criterion in deciding whether they want their children to go to that school.

## **QUESTION**

### [Tough schools and poverty](#)

How do you deal with the schools in tough neighbourhoods and areas where there is a great deal of poverty?

### **MR. McBEATH**

If you go to one of our very poorest Edmonton schools, you would find it ringed by pawnshops. Would you accept that as evidence of poverty? And if you went in there you would not believe that it is a poor school. All of the hallmarks of its being a poor school have disappeared because we put an excellent principal in that school and we've given the school additional dollars based on its incidence of poverty and because it is an inner-city school. And, as well, our city centre schools have been adopted by agencies and private interests. We've hired a staff member to focus

on fundraising and making connections with government to help with extra resources in the city centre schools.

So, for example, every city centre student gets a donor to pay for student lunches and breakfasts. Every city centre student receives free school supplies purchased by donors. Every city centre student has lots of ancillary services provided, but not at the school's expense and not provided by the school system. So we address some of the social/emotional issues that way.

## QUESTION

### [Inclusive education](#)

I love the way you've taken some very positive steps in terms of opportunities in inclusive education. How have you done this?

## MR. MCBEATH

Inclusive education is a challenge. It's mandatory in Alberta. It is mandatory at the Board level. We have mandatory inclusive education if parents want it. Our staff sometimes find it challenging to



provide for each student with severe special needs, however. We haven't finished our work on this one yet. But if a parent comes and says that they want inclusive education in their neighbourhood for their child, we must provide it.

Do our teachers know how to do it? Not always. Do universities address it? Well, not nearly enough. Is it expensive? Yes. Is it complex? Yes. Do other parents like it when a noisy severe special needs student is put into a regular classroom? No. Parents often don't like it at all.

## QUESTION

But the difference expressed in the system clearly is they have choice?

## MR. McBEATH

They can move. But special needs students have choices, too. We also have a lot of congregated situations. We still have lots of district sites where we have segregated settings. We run the Alberta School for the Deaf, which is a segregated setting. We have a special junior-senior high school for mild and moderate disabilities and some other severe special needs.

## QUESTION

### [Continuous improvement](#)

I'm very happy to hear you say that one of your objectives is a continuous improvement program as well. Could you speak a little bit to that, please?

**We've asked each of our schools to identify their chief academic weakness, based on the data they have about their students' performance on achievement tests, both district and provincial, as well as data generated by teacher assessments.**

## MR. McBEATH

One of the things that happens in education that worries me is flavour-of-the-month stuff. So one of the things we've asked each of our schools in Edmonton to do, using their data, is to identify their chief academic weakness, based on the data that they have about their students' performance on achievement tests, both district and provincial, as well

as data generated by teacher assessments.

Most of our schools have chosen reading or writing as their school's chief area of academic weakness. Then we worked with the schools in helping them to develop targeted

professional development around reading and/or writing so that every student in the school has a teacher who is either going to be a teacher of reading and/or writing.

That doesn't mean, for example, that a high school teacher won't teach chemistry or biology or physics. But these same teachers are mindful of the fact that they also have to adopt best practices in reading to make sure they embed those in their chemistry teaching and that's multi-year training.

As well, there is coaching that goes along with that. In Edmonton we do teacher coaching; teachers coach each other, their principals coach them, and every principal has a colleague coach. Why should just professional sports team have coaches? We believe that in education you need to have a corporate coach. So we train people how to coach. It creates not only a level of accountability, but also a level of support. We know most professional development is not very effective because it's piecemeal, one-of-a-kind. It needs to be sustained. As well, teachers need to have time to learn, to practise and be coached. You need to practise, practise, coach, coach, practise, in order to acquire a new skill set.

#### QUESTION

##### [Resource allocation](#)

I think we all agree on that in part, but what about resource allocation to support that?

**Many people believe that you improve classroom performance by making your classrooms small. Most of the literature says you improve classrooms by making sure there's high-quality pedagogy in that room.**

#### MR. McBEATH

Okay. That's in the school's budget. Very little money is left in Central by the schools because they really like what we're doing in terms of our professional development at a system level. We pay for some things at a system level, but most of the money spent on professional development

is school-generated. Even when times are tough, as they are right now, schools will not give up their professional development in order to make classrooms smaller.

Many people believe that you improve classroom performance by making your classrooms small. Most of the literature says you improve classrooms by making sure there's high-quality pedagogy in that room.

## QUESTION



### [Comparing performance in Edmonton](#)

You've described a very different model from ours in Nova Scotia. And I'd like to hear comments on what data you have or what data you referred to that objectively says this is a really good model, this model really works in comparing performance in Edmonton and

with performance elsewhere.

## MR. McBEATH

Sure. Alternative schools don't improve student achievement. Having school choice does not improve student achievement, at least not by itself. The data we have is in a time of declining enrolment in school districts in Alberta — our school district enrolment has gone up, so we've got data around that.

We've got improved staff-parent-student satisfaction with our schools. That's gone up over the years. We do have improved achievement in our system, substantially improved achievement over the last several years.

But that has occurred because of the training work we've done with schools and principals in classrooms and that kind of thing. So we do have data, I think, that can back up everything we do.

In terms of international tests we don't know how we do as a city. We only know how we do as a province. And as a province, we're at the top of the world and at the top of the country.

That's not because Alberta students are smarter than Nova Scotia students. I think it's because we have an excellent curriculum in Alberta that's quite specific about

what teachers are supposed to teach, a good assessment program, and high-quality and dedicated teachers.

And I think our achievement tests are very powerful. While people initially don't like achievement tests, they provide a great deal of validation to teachers and parents and students about what students can do.

So I think it's largely our achievement-testing program — we've had it for years, you know. And because we made virtually every student write. I think those are two very powerful things — and because we publish the results by school. I think that people, being human, want to improve results, and because we ask schools to set targets for improvement around the achievement tests, I think it makes a huge difference. We monitor that really well.

**MR. CROWLEY**

Just on the performance question — and I know that we've got several other questions so I won't take much time on this. But on this question of what data you've got to support the model that you're putting forward here, you said those national tests that we've referred to, they don't break

**While people initially don't like achievement tests, they provide a great deal of validation to teachers and parents and students about what students can do. People, being human, want to improve results, and because we ask schools to set targets for improvement around the achievement tests, I think it makes a huge difference.**

out cities or schools, they only do it province by province. But within Alberta there is a province-wide test?

**MR. McBEATH**

Yes. Oh, yes.

**We're the only district in Alberta  
where students perform better in  
Grade 6 than they did in Grade 3.**

**MR. CROWLEY**

And so how is the performance in Edmonton?

**MR. McBEATH**

Our school district outperforms itself based on the level of poverty we have in our system. The Alberta government, through its Department of Learning, has a variety of ways to measure performance.

They take the achievement results and then they factor in poverty, for example, and they can tell you whether your district is moving, and which way your district is moving. We have another thing that we do in Edmonton. We're the only district in Alberta where students perform better in Grade 6 than they did in Grade 3.

Take a school of 500 students. There are 60 Grade 3 students, 40 are still in the same school in grade 6. So what the province does is they look at how well those students performed in Grade 3, then they track those same students for the next three years, and they see how well they perform on Grade 6 tests, and that's called prior level of achievement.

In our system, our students actually performed better at 6 and 9 for the last several years than they did at 3 and 6. So over time we can track the progress of those children — and we're the only urban district in Alberta where that, indeed, is true.

Mobility is such an issue where students change schools during the year. But these actually track the same number of students in the school for three years.

## QUESTION

### [Dividing up the money](#)

Who decides which schools get what money every year? How is it divided up?

## MR. McBEATH

Every year we bring in a group of representative principals who volunteer to be part of what we call the basis of allocation committee and we put them in a room, and they work together with the budget director until there is consensus around what the district's allocation system should be like for the next school year. There's no such thing as a perfect allocation system. But what we hope is that we'll get an allocation system that everybody believes is fair. So the principals and the director of our budget operation sit down together and look at how to allocate the money to schools. Then I approve what they forward to me for consideration.

Most of the dollars we receive from the province are not targeted. We take the provincial dollars and develop an allocation system to send it out to schools. First of all, it is pupil-driven. It's also weighted for incidence of special needs in each school and there is some weighting for low socio-economic factors. Ultimately the allocation system is based on the real students who attend each school.

There are other factors as well. If it's a very small school, it gets an inefficiency grant. It's all based on the per-pupil regular amount plus additional monies based on the severity of the special needs of the actual students who go to that school.

## QUESTION

### [School size](#)

I have a couple of questions about elementary school size. Are there any Edmonton elementary schools that are very large, more than 400 students?

**MR. McBEATH**

Very few.

**SPEAKER**

And for the larger schools, did they perform better than the smaller ones?

**MR. McBEATH**

No. I don't see school size as a factor. Poverty does play a role in the results of schools.

Generally, however, the results that the school gets are very much related to the quality of the principal and the teaching that goes on in the school.

**QUESTION**

[Student behaviour](#)

We started the day on the premise that the work in the classroom is the most important work in society. And my daughter is a teacher and has been in the classroom for about three years and I'm sure there'd be no problem in her buying into that way of thinking.



Yesterday I bumped into a friend of mine who is a teacher. She retired on April 1st this

year. And I said, "I can't understand why a teacher would retire in April and walk away from her classroom and leave those kids, you know, with somebody else in there until end of the year." And she said, "Well, if you spent two days with those kids, you would understand."

**I don't see school size as a factor. Poverty does play a role in the results of schools. Generally, however, the results that the school gets are very much related to the quality of the principal and the teaching that goes on in the school.**

Now I guess what my question is, how are you dealing with that? How have you transformed those behavioural problems?

**MR. McBEATH**

Quite often people leave teaching because they haven't received, I think, the support they deserve. In teaching, we want to develop a system where everybody has to be forced to retire because they love it so much. And yet we know many teachers who leave the system and they haven't loved it at all.

**Quite often people leave teaching because they haven't received the support they deserve. We want to develop a system where everybody has to be forced to retire because they love it so much.**

So I think that part of that problem is the kind of training and support we give teachers. First of all, you have to have superb behaviour in every classroom in every school in the system.

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We must ensure that our teachers have the very best training in how to manage student behaviour. We must make sure there's a school-wide focus on discipline. We have to get stricter in terms of our expectations about the involvement of parents and their support for their children's learning.

We have to be stricter when it comes to children's dress, children's appearance. Children have to know there are standards. They have to come to school, they have to show up on time, they have to do their homework, they have to complete assignments. We have to make sure every student surrenders at the door. We're quite strict in Edmonton and we get some real criticism sometimes because of

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our expectations for student behaviour. We had incident once about a student who had a strange colour of hair. And the rule in the school was you could not have a hair colour God couldn't have possibly given you and the student was denied the opportunity to attend a year-end function. The media thought this was the most important education story. And we backed that principal, and that student didn't attend the function and, guess what? Virtually all the parents in that school said, "Thank you, the schools have some standards and values and beliefs."

School is not about feeling good and doing what you want. We spend billions on education in this country. It is something that is life and happiness threatening if you don't get the benefit of it. So we really support our teachers by putting a lot of emphasis on student behaviour.

We train our teachers on best behaviour management. Those principals that are in classrooms every day can detect things about where the teachers need training, because they're in rooms everyday.

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And they can say, "Who organized this school? Look at this combination of students in this room. I mean we need to do a better job of how we organize these classrooms." They can tell who's floundering and who needs support. I think it's absolutely crucial.

It breaks my heart to hear of teachers leaving because it has been a dissatisfying career. But we also have to make sure that we do the supervision properly because there are some people who don't belong in teaching. I don't think it's good for their health or anyone else's if they stick with that profession.

And, you know, I'm just thinking of a young teacher right now who is in her third or fourth year and is just having a very difficult time. And my hope is that her principal counsels her out because she could spend the next 26 years in misery. And so I don't know that we should, as an employer, enable people to be unsuccessful in their careers.

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#### **QUESTION**

##### [Principal and teacher salary](#)

If the principal operates like a CEO, I'd assume that they get to choose the salary levels if that's within their budget what they pay for teachers. It's not some strange rating system.

#### **MR. MCBEATH**

Thank you. You've touched on something important. Schools pay actual costs except for teacher and other staff salaries. Teacher salaries are determined on a grid just like they are here. And we do a blended salary. So you can't hire just young teachers and save money. There's a blended salary — our current blended teachers' salary in Edmonton is around \$71,000. And so that's what a school pays if you have a first-year teacher or a 30-year teacher.

#### **QUESTION**

Well, I'm just wondering about the notion of hiring the best teachers out there and paying them more.

#### **MR. MCBEATH**

Principals get to select off the district shelf. So, for example...

## QUESTION

But at the standard rate?

## MR. MCBEATH

**People believe that you cannot measure teacher performance. I don't believe that. But it has to be done objectively based on the achievement results of their students.**

They have to pay the standard rate. There is no performance pay for teachers. There was a suggestion of performance pay for teachers three years ago. There was such an uproar from across the province that the idea was dropped. That was modeled on the work they did in Kentucky, which was quite interesting. And we went down to Kentucky and studied the system. Actually, I don't think paying for performance in Kentucky had a happy ending either.

People believe in Alberta that you cannot measure teacher performance. I don't believe that. But I think there are very clear ways to measure teacher performance. I think it has to be done objectively based on the achievement results of their students.

## QUESTION

### [French immersion](#)

How do you maintain high academic standards in your French immersion program?

## MR. McBEATH

By measuring the achievement of students, by training the teachers, by having students write the same tests their English counterparts do. Some of the French immersion people don't like it, but we do it anyway. And we also have tests in French.

And we're going through a major French renewal project right now, working cooperatively with the federal government as well as the provincial government.

But we have a very large French immersion program. It's very popular and students do very well in it. They write the same tests, the reading and writing and math, science, social studies. I think the achievement test program is a really powerful way to keep the standards up.

**MR. CROWLEY**

Thanks, Angus. We're going to have to end it there. Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that you'll agree with me that Angus has given us not only an interesting message, a different message from a different experience from what we've seen in the Maritimes in recent years, but he's also given us some inspiration and some hope, about how things might be different.

I'd like to ask you to join me in thanking Angus for coming all the way from Edmonton and helping us.

