

Frank Dunham
Superintendent
Mission Public Schools

Roy Daykin
Secretary-Treasurer
Mission Public Schools

VISION 2020: ADAPTIVE SCHOOLS ENABLING STUDENT SUCCESS

*A Discussion Paper Presented to the Board of Education for Mission Public
Schools*

September 22, 2009

“Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. Making progress requires going beyond any authoritative expertise to mobilize discovery, shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses, and generating the capacity to thrive anew” (Heifitz, Grashow, Linsky, 2009).

SECTION 1 PURPOSE

It would appear that we find ourselves at a crossroads. The combination of changing need, declining student enrolment and the uncertainty of future government funding makes it imperative for Mission Public Schools to explore new ways to deliver education services to our community; those that look to the future, not the past, and those that will enable staff and, in turn, our students to continue to succeed.

The purpose of this paper is to initiate discussion within the Board of Education and the community to consider a significant shift to the manner in which education services are delivered to students of Mission Public Schools. It is suggested that consideration be given to transforming the current educational model in a manner that includes structural changes to where, how and when these services will be delivered.

Mission Public Schools has made great strides to improve student success during the past several years, increasing our graduate completion rates by over 16% during the past ten years. Despite comparative results for which there is much to celebrate, the fact remains that there is more that needs to be done. While student achievement data indicates that the majority of Mission students meet the performance expectations developed for our provincial curriculum; some do so minimally. Providing the resources to enable continued system improvement throughout our school district should ensure that more of our students will fully meet or exceed these expectations.

During the same ten year period, the world and the challenges that confront teachers, principals and school districts have changed dramatically. Many children enter kindergarten not having had the exposure to language and cultural experiences that enable them to enjoy early success, secondary students attend schools that, at least in terms of space and time, look eerily similar to those attended by their teachers and parents, and recent studies in neuroscience indicate that the way we learn doesn’t always match up with the way we teach.

SECTION 2 THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

“Boards of Education are elected to improve student achievement. They do it by engaging their communities in building and maintaining a school system that reflects local priorities, values and expectations. School trustees listen to their communities, guide the work of their school district, setting a plan, policy and the annual budget - and report back to the public on how our students are doing” (www.bcsta.org/whoWeAre. 2009).

The locally elected Board of Education provides leadership for shaping and supporting the work of Mission Public Schools. Our Strategic Directions recognizes the vital role that can be played by individual employees, formal education partners and the broader community.

SECTION 2.1 BOARD OF EDUCATION GOALS 2009-2011

The Board of Education will:

- Demonstrate ethically-based, transparent and inclusive decision making that supports innovation, creates opportunity and ensures success for all students.
- Promote two-way communication with individuals and groups in the community that builds trust and reflects the values of diversity, integrity and respect

SECTION 2.2 OUR VISION – THE GRADUATE PROFILE

Adopted by the Board of Education in February 2007, our Graduate Profile is the vision for Mission Public Schools. The student who graduates from Mission Public Schools will be able to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Seeks Knowledge and Understanding
- Thinks Critically and Solves Problems
- Listens and Communicates Effectively
- Uses Technology as a Tool
- Interacts Effectively with Others
- Exhibits Strong Personal Qualities

SECTION 2.3 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2009-2011

Our Strategic Directions reflect the core purpose of ensuring success for every child, acknowledge the scope and breadth of a sustainability framework, and recognize the importance of building community capacity to make this happen.

These Strategic Directions support the type of public school system we envision for the future; best illustrated by our Graduate Profile. They are an expression of outcomes that will be grounded by research yet encourage innovation and create opportunities to ensure student success.

Strategic Directions are broad strategies that support the achievement of more than one of our anticipated outcomes. They are about setting priorities – priorities to guide choices. Strategic Directions provide a context for considering priorities around programs and services and around resource allocations. The considerations outlined within our Strategic Directions reflect a set of choices and strategies that the Board of Education deems important but are not ranked in any particular order.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: ENSURING SUCCESS FOR EVERY CHILD

We believe that public education is the key to enabling students to become leaders and socially responsible global citizens. Student learning is the central focus of our collective efforts.

Goals and Objectives

- Broaden access to quality programs that encourage career exploration and prepare students for post-secondary success.
- Support the effective application of technology to student learning.
- Focus greater support for our most vulnerable learners.
- Embrace opportunities for students that embody the values of equity and social justice and develop the necessary skills for global citizenry.
- Enhance the development of literacy throughout the curriculum.
- Develop partnerships that increase opportunities for early learning.
- Promote a greater appreciation for the importance of healthy living.
- Encourage a deeper understanding of the need for environmental stewardship.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: SUSTAINING QUALITY EDUCATION

Success in Mission Public Schools, both for our students and our employees alike, is contagious and should to be regularly celebrated. Our ability to sustain this success will be based upon the decisions we make now to assure that financial, human, and physical resources are available into the future.

Goals and Objectives

- Optimize the use of government funding by examining the efficacy of our programs and operations.
- Celebrate the success of all employees and ensure their connection to our core organizational purpose.
- Continue our inclusive and transparent approach to objectives-based decision making, project planning and implementation.
- Regularly communicate plans to solidify our facilities, transportation, and technology infrastructure.
- Solidify our reputation as an outstanding employer by maintaining a comprehensive workforce plan that celebrates the success of all employees, ensures their connection to our core organizational purpose, and builds succession for all aspects of leadership.
- Examine ways in which school and district business can encourage and reflect sustainable environmental practices.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Mission Public Schools values the relationships it has developed with its formal education partners and the community. We respect our partnership with parents in supporting learning and the contribution of our students and staff to the greater community. Mission is a diverse and inclusive community that works hard together to support the development of our children and our neighborhoods.

Goals and Objectives

- Ensure the long-term viability of existing community partnerships that support literacy, early learning and vulnerable students.
- Explore opportunities for the further integration of services that support child and family development in schools and neighborhoods.
- Build on our commitment to collaborate with key stakeholders to improve literacy within our community.
- Involve more students in the decision making process.
- Create connections with service clubs and community organizations that deepen appreciation for the critical importance of public education to a just and democratic society.
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SECTION 3 SCHOOL DISTRICT CONTEXT

SECTION 3.1 ENROLMENT PROJECTIONS

The District's overall student population will continue declining until the 2015/16 school year. This is a decade plus trend from an enrolment peak of 7,652 students in 2003/04.

Mission Public Schools uses Baragar Systems to assist us in our demographic projections. The projections provided by Baragar are based upon information from Federal, Provincial and local levels of government that includes current birth rate and population data.

Table A on the following page provides our current enrolment projections. These projections are updated annually.

SECTION 3.2 SCHOOL CAPACITY

The School District has two types of schools – elementary and secondary. The total capacity of our elementary schools is 4,400 students and the total secondary school capacity is 2,925 students. We do not anticipate that any new schools will be built in the near future, however, it is important to position the district well to anticipate future community growth.

Mission Public Schools existing school facilities do not easily accommodate moving to a middle school structure. Our largest secondary school can accommodate 1,100 students. Middle schools often span grades 7 - 9; grades 10 - 12 comprise the graduation program. Current enrolment data does not indicate that either group will drop below 1,200 students or exceed 1,400 students through 2023.

Changes can be made to school buildings with significant capital investment. However, it may be difficult to secure these funds from government and have the new or retrofitted buildings operational in a timely fashion.

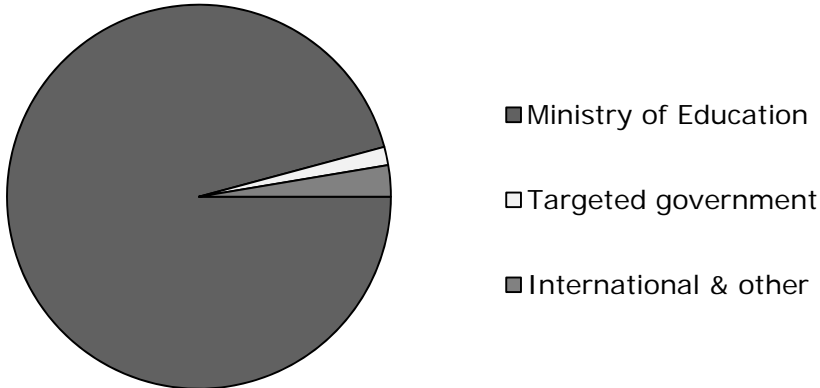
TABLE A

| | Projected Enrolment 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2023 | District Capacity |
|------------------|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------------|
| Grades K – 6 | 2,993 | 3,018 | 3,000 | 3,108 | 3,157 | 3,244 | 3,278 | 3,338 | 3,716 | 4,400 |
| Grades K – 7 | 3,474 | 3,436 | 3,447 | 3,491 | 3,564 | 3,621 | 3,717 | 3,763 | 4,200 | 4,400 |
| Grades 7 – 12 | 2,982 | 2,819 | 2,768 | 2,663 | 2,600 | 2,514 | 2,475 | 2,479 | 2,783 | 2,925 |
| Grades 8 - 12 | 2,501 | 2,401 | 2,321 | 2,280 | 2,193 | 2,137 | 2,036 | 2,054 | 2,299 | 2,925 |
| Grades K - 12 | 5,975 | 5,837 | 5,768 | 5,771 | 5,757 | 5,758 | 5,753 | 5,817 | 6,499 | 7,325 |

SECTION 3.3 FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Mission Public Schools, like other public school districts in British Columbia, is almost entirely dependent upon the Provincial Government for funding. In Mission's case 98% percent of funding is from government sources with the balance coming from our international student program. Government funding is directly related to student enrolment; as enrolments change so does revenue from government. The average government grant per student for Mission Public Schools is just under \$9,000.

Funding by Source

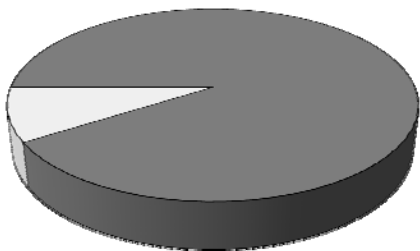


The delivery of education is a labour intensive service with over 90% of all costs being employee salaries and benefits. The remainder is spent on utilities, the materials and supplies needed to maintain schools, and transportation. In Mission Public Schools, expenditures are heavily focused on supporting student learning; approximately 96% of all revenue provides direct service and support to schools. Four percent is spent on school district administration.

Because revenue is directly linked to enrolment, there is no opportunity to replace revenue that is lost due to lower enrolment. In addition to a decrease of 400 students over the past four years, a future loss of 250 to 300 students is projected over the next five years. This decline in enrolment represents more than \$6,000,000 in reduced revenue over a nine year period.

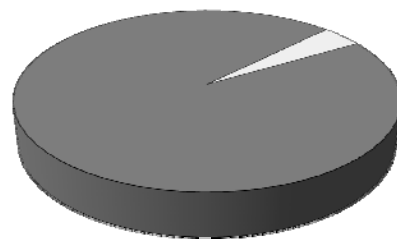
The school district has managed its funding challenges over the past few years by making adjustments to its operations through increasing class sizes, reducing or eliminating non-essential programs, closing schools, eliminating employee positions, and increasing revenues where possible. Over time, these peripheral changes become increasingly more difficult to achieve; no longer permitting schools to maximize support for student learning.

Expenditures by Type



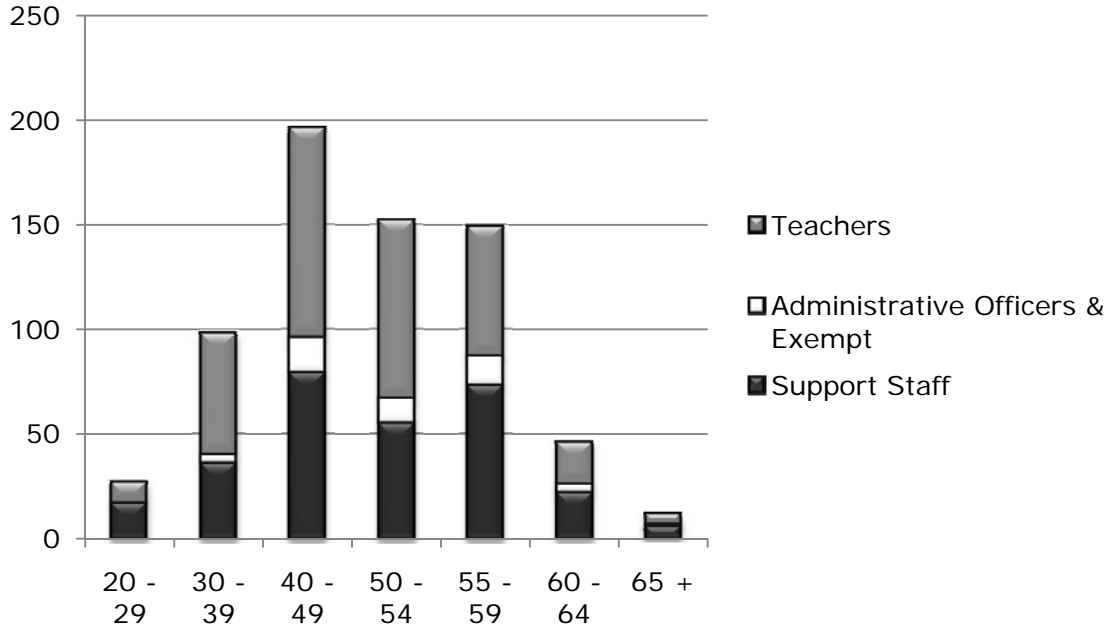
■ Salaries & benefits □ Non - salary

Expenditures by Function



□ Central Administration ■ School Focused

Another challenge being faced by the school district is an aging workforce. More than 50 percent of district employees are over the age of 50. It is expected that the majority of these employees will retire within the next 10-15 years.



Mission Public Schools has worked successfully to recruit and retain exceptional staff in all roles within the organization. However, as revenues are reduced it becomes progressively more difficult to maintain the kind of support and mentorship required to support instructional improvement and building leadership capacity for the future.

SECTION 4 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

“No matter how prepared you are for the future, there are bound to be some uncertainties that you will not be able to control” (Rosenzweig, 2007).

Too often the uncontrollable uncertainties that confront us steer people and organizations toward short term, technical solutions to problems rather than adapt to the new realities of a constantly changing world.

In February 15, 2005 at its regular meeting the Board of Education accepted the Mission School District Secondary Program Review report. The report and its recommendations were founded upon four pillars or guiding principles. These were:

1. Comprehensive Schools
2. Course Access
3. Program Choice
4. Student Engagement for Success

In the 2005 school year Mission enrolled just over 6900 full time equivalent students in its schools. We now begin September 2009 with an enrolment of approximately 6100 students.

While recognizing that a number of the report’s recommendations have been successfully implemented, the continued declining enrolment in Mission make it necessary to question the degree to which our secondary schools can, individually, remain comprehensive. Given that we have three relatively small secondary schools within a relatively small school district, it may be more prudent to re-conceptualize ourselves as a comprehensive district for the purpose of delivering secondary programs. While the 2005 Secondary Program Review recommended that students should be encouraged to access programs at sites other than their neighborhood schools, the transportation services necessary to support this recommendation were never provided.

SECTION 4.1 CONFIGURING SCHOOLS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research regarding school configuration indicates that different models for configuring the grades within schools are used for a variety of reasons. These include increasing student achievement, meeting the social and psychological development needs of students, the efficient use of available funding, ensuring the effectiveness of the transportation system, or the use of available facility space (Seller, 2004).

It might further be suggested that the key to decision making rests in clearly identifying the objectives to be met and how the alternatives being considered may impact students and other aspects of the schools and school district operations (Richetti and Tregoe, 2001).

The literature on school configuration informs us that there is no single model that will meet each one of the objectives that are deemed to be important. Therefore, it becomes necessary to remember that we are looking for the best match between the model and what we hope to achieve for our students.

Our goals need to be balanced. Social development and our graduate rates are each influenced by grade span configuration. Focusing on one of these must take into consideration how the other will be affected.

In order to make the best decision about which configuration to use it is imperative to know what goals are being sought and where they fit into the school district’s list of priorities.

Any chosen grade span configuration will have strengths as well as weaknesses.

A list of considerations related to configuration should include but not be restricted to:

1. The extent to which the configuration will increase or decrease costs.
2. Will the configuration likely increase or decrease parent involvement?
3. How many students will be enrolled at each grade level and what implications will this change have for course offerings and instructional grouping?
4. Is there any data available that suggests whether this configuration will improve success rates for a significant portion of our students or depress the performance of others?
5. Will the configuration lead to the loss of a neighbourhood school or the closing of other schools in the system?
6. How many points of transition and articulation will now occur in the K-12 system?
How will these be addressed?
7. What mechanisms or channels of communication will be used to ensure that students move smoothly through the system, in terms of both academics and social and emotional adjustment?
8. Does the configuration allow for interaction between a range of age levels and a variety of grouping options?
9. How will the presence or absence of older students affect younger students in a particular school?
10. Is the design of the school building(s) suited to managing students in the selected grade span? For instance, does it have several wings, useful for dividing a large school into smaller "houses" (middle years and graduate program)?

The literature also illustrates the need to understand how a particular organizational model will impact on the schools involved and the system as a whole. Changes to the configuration used may change what and how teachers are expected to teach.

It is not feasible to expect that the grade span configuration can be changed without the need for further changes in the school district including logistical changes, such as busing or a new administrative structure. Likewise, there are likely to be changes in the school communities such as how parents interact with the school.

More importantly we are reminded that ". . . sound educational practices are more important than grade span (Paglin and Fager 1997).

SECTION 4.2 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (K- GRADE 6)

As a result of the provincial government's commitment to full day kindergarten for 2010/2011, the need to design a comprehensive local strategy for early learning has become more immediate than previously anticipated. While there is some urgency to our planning for five year olds to attend full day next year, our considerations should not be limited to simply accommodating this singular initiative. Implementing a full day program for kindergarten will require additional space, yet we should not assume that our commitment to early learning will begin at age five.

Mission Public Schools is currently working alongside Coquitlam School District and others to develop an Early Learning Framework that would serve to guide additional local initiatives.

It is suggested that consideration should be given to the feasibility of configuring our elementary schools for 2010/2011 as K-6 schools. Doing so would not only ensure adequate space to implement full day

kindergarten programs but also allow the school district to pursue the creation of lasting partnerships for the provision of before and after school child care. This consideration should include determining community interest for elementary schools of choice (for example performing arts) and centers of specialization to better serve families of children with special needs.

Some discussions by previous Boards in Mission regarding elementary schools of choice have cited the collective agreement with local teachers as a significant deterrent to exploring these models further. More specifically, it has been suggested that the challenges inherent in staffing a performing arts school, for example, could outweigh the benefits.

Another point of view that might be offered is that no barriers to implementation are insurmountable. It has been our recent experience in Mission Public Schools that potential problems regarding the implementation of planned change can be identified early and solutions developed by including those most affected in the process. It is anticipated that the implementation of any changes to the current configuration of our schools will require inclusive, transparent decision making processes and clear and open communication.

SECTION 4.3 SECONDARY SCHOOLS (GRADES 7-12)

From time to time parents have asked about the potential for a middle school to exist in Mission. These discussions have generally focused upon reorganizing middle years students (possibly grades 6-9 or grades 7-9) from all schools in the district into one or two existing buildings and retaining the remaining secondary buildings for graduation program students (grades 10-12).

Enrolment projections and the capacity of our existing schools appear to make creating a traditional middle school a challenging and possibly shortsighted consideration, especially during the current climate of limited government funding for capital projects. It might also be argued that to do so would create the need to reconfigure again prior to 2020 in response to geographic population shifts within the community and projected growth for southwest Mission.

To date it has been the decision of the Board of Education not to implement a traditional middle school model, largely out of concern that moving to a traditional middle school model would add another unwanted grade-to-grade transition for students. The Achievement Contract for Mission Public Schools identifies grade-to-grade transitions as a continued area for improvement. Any configuration decisions made by the Board of Education should bear this in mind.

Moving grade seven students from elementary schools into our existing secondary school buildings creates the potential to develop a "middle school within a school" model for grades seven to nine. Many of the middle school practices identified by research as having a positive effect on student achievement could be implemented within a new grades 7-12 setting.

Doing so should allow the school district to minimize the capital costs associated with retrofitting an existing building or buildings to meet new needs.

The cost pressures associated with declining enrolment have also made it challenging for principals to retain staff at our secondary schools. Having fewer students each year has meant keeping fewer teachers. Improving student achievement is a continuous, collaborative exercise; one to which our staff are extremely dedicated. School improvement efforts could be enhanced by putting more students into our existing

secondary schools, permitting principals to maintain staff, and allowing important conversations about improving learning to take place that involve the same staff over an extended period of time.

SECTION 4.4 THE CAMPUS MODEL: SPECIALTY PROGRAMS AND ACADEMIES

Adopting a district school, multi-campus model for secondary students in grades 10-12 would support a number of the recommendations found in the 2005 Secondary Program Review. To do so would require maintaining a common timetable for our district school and developing a transportation infrastructure that would make it easy for students to move between campuses.

This model could provide the potential for better utilization of our teaching force. Students would be scheduled for courses at their neighborhood campus for part of the day and be bused for part of the day to unique specialty or academy programs that would exist on other campuses in the district. The scheduling model that is currently used at Hatzic Secondary School provides an example of how this could be accomplished.

Examples of specialized academies or centers of excellence could include: 1) a Centre for Liberal Arts, Culture and Modern Languages; 2) a Centre for Sciences, Environmental Studies and Technology; 3) a Centre for High Performance Athletics and, 4) a Centre for Culinary, Media and Performing Arts. The Riverside facility would provide the venue for a variety of other trades and service industry related programs.

Student athletes wishing to perform at the highest level of competition could do so. Mission's best athletes could practice and play together on the same teams and could compete against the very best throughout our province. Similarly, students with high aspirations in any curricular area could benefit from more frequent interaction with peers of similar interests.

Potentially, administrative and equipment costs would be reduced. A campus model could negate the need to purchase and replace specialized and somewhat expensive equipment at three school sites. A new administrative structure for secondary schools could also be considered. It seems likely that administrative leadership could be provided for our district school, multi-campus model in a manner that does not represent the separate and distinct administrative units that currently exist.

SECTION 4.5 ANNUAL SCHOOL CALENDAR

The statement of purpose herein highlighted the need to review the elements of space and time as we consider how best to position ourselves as a district for the years ahead. To this end it would be worth our time to consider a more balanced school calendar other than what currently exists. It is difficult to see the wisdom of maintaining a calendar that does nothing to minimize learning loss. For example, the most recent (2009) summer break was ten weeks long.

Rather than attempting to mitigate the effects of summer learning loss for vulnerable children by providing summer camps funded by grant money, it seems prudent to at least discuss the feasibility of a more balanced calendar for all Mission students. The pros and cons of implementing a balanced school calendar are well documented (Shields and Obert, 2000)

Mission's earlier flirtation with Year Round Schooling or a Balanced Calendar (Sept. 2003 - July 2005) attempted to run dual track calendars within one building. This model was problematic for several reasons and was proven to be an inefficient use of resources relative to the number of students enrolled.

Revisiting this concept would require, in the opinion of the Superintendent, moving one or more schools to a single track Balanced Calendar model or moving the entire school district in this direction.

SECTION 4.6 EXTENDED SCHOOL DAYS

It may also be possible to better utilize our existing human and financial resources by extending the school day in a manner that would allow students easier access to specialty programs and academies. An example of one way to do this would be to open our schools from 7:00 am - 10:00 pm and to have classes scheduled in a manner that supports the interests and maturity of students. Younger students might be subject to a schedule that is more traditional whereas older students might access a more flexible schedule similar to what could be found in post secondary settings.

SECTION 5 HOW GOOD PEOPLE MAKE TOUGH CHOICES

As the Board of Education examines the feasibility of changes to current structures within our school district, it will do so by first establishing a decision statement. An example of such a statement might be:

Decision Statement: Select the school district configuration that best positions Mission Public Schools to adapt to changing demographics and maximizes the use of government funding to ensure student success.

Further, the Board will agree upon a clear set of objectives or criteria aligned specifically to the decision statement and from which the alternatives or options before them can be evaluated.

The objectives developed for this purpose may include but not necessarily be restricted to:

Objectives:

- Broaden access to quality programs that allow students to meet their desired learning outcomes.
- Maximize support for student transitions into our schools, within our schools and between our schools.
- Enhance the viability of existing and future community partnerships that support early learning and family development in schools and neighbourhoods.
- Maximize the use of government funding by better aligning enrolment with school capacity.
- Maximize the use of government funding by utilizing the full potential of our human resources.
- Maximize the effective application of technology to student learning.
- Maximize support for our most vulnerable learners.

The Board's evaluation of the match between each alternative presented and the stated objectives will guide their decision and provide a clear and transparent public process.

SECTION 6 PLANNING FOR IMPLEMENTATION: THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE

Adaptive change requires thoughtful consideration and careful planning that is focused on what really matters and an unwavering commitment to continuous improvement. Change should be respectful of the outstanding work currently taking place within our schools.

Change will not happen overnight. It will require the ability to work with our teachers and support staff, school based administrators, parents, and other district partners to identify for the Board of Education all potential problems associated with any proposed change prior to implementation and from there developing proactive plans to address these issues.

Once a direction has been set by the Board of Education it will be important to implement the plan over a multi-year period ensuring the school district's ability to provide the necessary support to make these changes successful for our students.

The adaptive challenge before us will demand three very tough human tasks: figuring out what to conserve from past practices, figuring out what to discard from past practices, and creating new ways that build from the best.

"It's not really true that people resist change. People love change when they know it is a good thing. No one is likely to give back a winning lottery ticket. What people resist is not change per se, but loss Adaptive change is hard work it challenges our relationships, competence and identity....it requires individuals and organizations to modify the stories they've been telling themselves and the rest of the world about what they believe in, stand for, and represent "(Heifitz et al, 2009).

SECTION 7 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION: NEXT STEPS

Opportunities to participate in the consultation process for Vision 2020 have been scheduled as follows:

| | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Thursday, October 8 | 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm | School Focus Group | Heritage Park Sec. Cafetorium |
| | 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm | Public Community Forum | Heritage Park Sec. Cafetorium |
| Friday, October 9 | 9:00 am - 12:00 pm | Student Focus Group | Heritage Park Sec. Staff Lounge |
| Tuesday, November 10 | 9:00 am - 12:00 pm | Student Focus Group | Heritage Park Sec. Cafetorium |
| | 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm | School Focus Group | Heritage Park Sec. Cafetorium |
| | 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm | Public Community Forum | Heritage Park Sec. Cafetorium |

It is anticipated that a summary report resulting from this process will be provided to the Board of Education at its December 15, 2009 regular meeting.

Written responses to this discussion paper may be forwarded to the Superintendent Frank Dunham and the Board of Education via:

Jane Boutilier, Executive Assistant
Board of Education Office
Mission Public Schools
33046 4th Avenue
Mission, B.C. V2V1S5

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