



October 16, 2008

TO: Board Chairs

Dear Board Chair:

For sometime now, public interest in school boards and public involvement in the schools we govern has been in decline. It has reached a point where - in most cases - only the parents with children in our schools, staff who work in our systems or businesses tied to work experience/vocational school programs are informed and involved. In some cases, not even that is true.

The lack of public involvement in publicly funded education is a threat to the health and welfare of an education system governed by locally elected school boards who represent their communities. Collectively, we have done a poor job reaching out to, informing and involving the 70% of parents and taxpayers who do not have children in school. This group represents a powerful voice that we need to listen to. We must have the public's support to maintain excellence in public education.

At the 2008 Spring General Meeting, I announced that ASBA would take the first step in correcting this major deficit by helping school boards connect with their communities. In addition, we will host a *Summit on Public Involvement in Public Schools*. The Summit is set for March 13 and 14, 2009 at the Shaw Convention Centre in Edmonton. Its purpose is to reach consensus on more effective ways of engaging, listening to and involving the forgotten education stakeholder – individuals who do not have children in school. Our theme for this initiative is:

*Putting the Public Back into Public Education*

Essential to the success of this Summit is your Board's commitment during the next few months to go out into your local communities and gather input on how the public views their involvement in our schools. Are they happy with the level of involvement they have? What do they know of your school board and the school system that you govern? What would they like to know? What barriers exist that prevents them from providing input or being better informed?

I know some school boards have public consultation mechanisms that they can roll out to gather this input. For those who don't, this handbook provides approaches you may wish to employ.

This initiative is an exciting opportunity for us to show leadership on an issue of importance. I thank you in advance for your energy and commitment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Welwood". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "H" and a long, sweeping underline.

Heather Welwood  
President

HW:mj

SUMMIT LTR