

As this is my last official DEC meeting, I wanted to take a few minutes to reflect on my 16 years at this table and thank a few people.

I first joined the DEC in 2005 and luckily for me, Gail Dickson and Linda Thorne took pity on me and helped me to understand the role. They were very patient, and I was a slow learner. The DEC was a mix of retired educators and industry types, and I learned a lot. Susan Tipper was the Superintendent and when I became Chair, I saw first hand how she put people at ease and dealt with difficult issues. One of the first school closures we undertook was at Lorne School and Susan led the community meeting. It was tense and emotions were high. She took control of that meeting and showed empathy for the community that led to a much healthier discussion about the school.

I have had the great fortune of working with a number of DEC Chairs over the years and NB is fortunate these people gave of their time to Education. People like Bob Parkinson, Jeannine St. Amand, Patricia Lee, Joni Donahue, Marty Forsythe, Tamara Nicol, Mike Mortlock, Roger Nesbitt, Mark Noel, Harry Doyle and Kim Douglass will all be remembered as strong, effective advocates for Education in NB. Hopefully, I didn't forget anyone.

I can honestly say that I enjoyed working with each and every Minister since I became a Chair. I may not always agree with their policies or focus, but I never once doubted their commitment to try and improve student outcomes in NB. Each Minister brought their own stamp to the department and we always worked well together.

A lot of a DEC Chair's time is spent working with the Deputy and Assistant Deputy Minister and there is no question in my mind of the dedication and compassion they all brought to the job. They are incredibly talented folks - John Kershaw, Dave Roberts, Wendy McLeod McKnight, our own Zoe Watson, John McLaughlin, Nancy Boucher, Chris Treadwell and now George Daley and Craig Caldwell. Theirs is a 7x24 role and they deserve a huge thank you. In addition to the DM and ADM, the CDC also has always had a great working relationship with senior staff at the department. The average citizen has no idea of the hours these folks put in on behalf of our students

It goes without saying that without Stacey Brown, our DEC Manager, we would have lost a lot of our focus and she is an invaluable resource to the Chairs and indeed, all DEC Members. She is always available to take your questions about policy and policy governance. The Council of DEC Chairs relies heavily on Stacey and we owe her a lot. For you new members, reach out to her as often as you need to.

Some of the highlights for me on a personal level include the Advisory Committee Minister Carr asked me to co chair on anti-bullying. The people who participated were an incredibly dedicated and compassionate group – we had teachers, DEC members, Principals, community partners like the Red Cross and PIE, students, MLAs, NBACL, Roots of empathy, UNB and many more who contributed to the work. We were able to convince the Alward government and Minister Carr to hire a full-time inclusion coordinator in each sector – and given how frugal the conservative government was, that was a significant achievement. This was also the beginnings of our push for a Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity policy on a provincial level that was finally realized in September of 2020. This is a significant policy that would not have been realized without DEC's.

Did we eliminate bullying in NB Schools? Absolutely not, but I firmly believe that the heightened awareness and the massive efforts put forth by Superintendents and educators has mitigated it to a large

extent. There is still a long way to go, and it will never be eliminated. It is a constant work in progress, but I know the care and effort from staff is there.

#### Highlights:

Focus on Mental Health – St Andrews - Alan Jones of Anglophone East worked diligently to develop a mental health policy and program and that has spread to all four Anglophone Districts.

Sistema – Cynthia Freeman King – public consultation. A chance conversation after a meeting brought Sistema to our attention and after having a presentation from NBYO, District 8 set up Sistema here and it still operates today.

Public engagement – new school South Central peninsula. There is no question the work done by the DEC in the inner city schools through two years of consultation saw an incredible level of support from the community – created a task force with funding from Living SJ and the City. BCAPI, YMCA, PSSCs, city councillors, city MLAs, PALS – just a few of the people who signed on and continue to lobby the government for the school. A special thank you to Jeff Cyr and Steve Carson from the City of Saint John and to Gary Lawson who chairs the task force.

I would like to thank each and every DEC member over the course of 16 years for your hard work. You all brought a lot to the table.

There are a few members – all much older than me, who I viewed as mentors and confidants...people like the late Gerry Mabey, Bob McDevitt, Mike Hunter, the late Gail Dickison, Fred Horgan, Wayne Spires and of course, Roger Nesbitt.

Last but certainly not least – Anglophone South has the best staff of any district in NB. They have always been willing to come to the DEC table and present on the wonderful work they do. Thank you to Clare for keeping things together for us through some pretty tumultuous times.

Last but not least – Zoë Watson... I have to admit when Minister Carr called me to say that Zoë would be the Superintendent of the new amalgamated District, I was a little concerned. I only knew Zoë as the ADM. She came on board in the spring, handled the merger of three large corporations into one very smooth operation running and fully staffed by September – she is dedicated. I recall getting a text from her during an incident at Saint John High – she was sitting in her golf cart underneath a tree on the course – in Scotland!

The District would not be where it is without her extremely capable leadership. I am honoured to have worked with her!

Rob Fowler  
DEC Chair