

## Public School Board Sector Planning Review

### *Public Involvement Planning for the City of Edmonton*

*At a time of declining enrollment, surplus school space and insufficient student-based funding, the Edmonton Public School board retained Dialogue Partners to engage the community and stakeholders in a comprehensive process that would explore how to make the best possible use of available resources so that all students have access to vibrant schools and a range of quality programs. Dialogue Partners set to work, bringing together the community for a values-based dialogue that weighted community priorities with financial and infrastructure realities in order to chart a path forward.*

70%

participant  
satisfaction with  
openness,  
transparency &  
meaningful process

### What happened?

We worked with the public, stakeholders, and staff in a multi-phase, values-based approach. Part 1 of the project focused on two City Centre areas with 11 schools under review. Part 2 took place in 3 larger sectors with 70 schools under review. For both parts of the project, we conducted a detailed conflict assessment and used the input to develop public engagement plans.

In the first phase, Dialogue Partners conducted outreach to over 6,000 community members using 16 distinct communication tools. We hosted 21 engagement events, gathering input from over 600 participants. Activities included workshops, deliberative workbooks, open space processes, and online consultation. For every event, we produced a “What was Said” report. In most cases, we also included an evaluation report that included actionable insights gathered during the session that could inform decision-making.

During the second phase, Dialogue Partners conducted open space forums, deliberative workbooks, online discussions, and YOUTH Talk sessions in schools.

### Things we learned along the way.

High emotion, conflict, and a wide diversity of viewpoints made this

a challenging project. We implemented a step-by-step methodology, capacity-building with the organization and stakeholders, and a values-based process to address these issues in the engagement process.

A lack of trust and a need to demonstrate commitments and transparency were fundamental to meaningful outcomes. Supporting participant understanding of the complexity and challenges of the issues and viewpoints was important to developing opinions that were sustainable. We worked hard to help all participants understand that a simple “don’t close schools” is not a sustainable solution that would address the complexity of values or challenges present in the discussion.

