

## City's top-ranked school system has a thing or two to teach the rest

### International praise for Edmonton public schools

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EDMONTON - An American researcher and author has singled out Edmonton Public Schools as the best managed school district in North America.

"The fact that you've got 87 per cent of first graders and 92 per cent of 12th graders at or above grade level in the provincial achievement tests is really incredible," says William Ouchi, a professor at the Anderson Graduate School of Management at the University of California, Los Angeles.



**CREDIT: Journal Stock**

"I hope the rest of North America will copy Edmonton public, because they will help themselves if they do," Ouchi said Friday from Toronto, where he is promoting his new book called *Making Schools Work, A Revolutionary Plan to Get Your Children The Education They Need*.

**(William) Ouchi**

Ouchi studied 223 schools in six cities and contends that management and accountability are at the heart of a successful school district, not class size, teacher training or funding.

He identified seven keys to successful schools and in his book shows how they work in schools of all sizes and types.

He concludes that Edmonton public is the most successful example of how those basic fundamentals work.

He lauds the district's decentralized system -- brought in 30 years ago by then-superintendent Mike Strembitsky -- where every principal is an entrepreneur who takes control of every aspect of the school, a revolutionary leap from the old "top-down," centralized management system.

Ouchi is currently working with the governor of Hawaii, who hopes to implement the "Edmonton system" in all schools in the state. In New York City, the Edmonton model is being introduced in 1,200 schools.

It has been used in Seattle since 1995, in Houston since 2000 and is in its second year in Cincinnati.

All the praise pleases Edmonton public's superintendent Angus McBeath. It's a welcome change from last spring, when the district was criticized for poor financial planning and told to monitor its school-based budgets more closely in an audit by Alberta Learning.

"Over the last 30 years, Edmonton Public Schools has established an international reputation for innovation in educational practice, site-based decision making and program choice," said McBeath. "That reputation is the result of our willingness to continue improving and making decisions that ensure superb results from all students."

In his book, Ouchi cites Jasper Place high school as "the Swiss watch" of high schools.

"It really is a jewel," he says. "Bruce Coggles is a perfect example of an entrepreneurial principal."

Jasper Place has a mix of special needs children, honours students bound for university, industrial-vocational students and a special program for those in danger of dropping out.

"If Coggles were in a traditional, bureaucratic system where he had to ask permission from the superintendent to make any changes in his budget, there is no chance on Earth he would get there," says Ouchi.

Coggles said he is thrilled by the book's recognition of his staff and is particularly honoured "because there are so many excellent schools in Edmonton."

He and his staff are committed to looking at the needs of individual students rather than just general programs.

He also appreciates the latitude he is given within the district to accomplish his many tasks.

"If that kind of climate didn't exist in your district, it wouldn't be possible to do some of these things."

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#### 7 KEYS TO SUCCESS

In his new book, *Making Schools Work*, American author and education consultant William Ouchi outlines seven factors that identify a top-flight school district.

- Every principal is an entrepreneur.
- Every school controls its own budget.
- Everyone is accountable for student performance and for budgets.
- Everyone delegates authority to those below.
- There is a burning focus on student achievement.
- Every school is a community of learners.
- Families have real choices among a variety of unique schools.

Ran with fact box "7 Keys to Success", which has been appended to this story.

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