

Respecting the Past, Preparing for the Future

TAAPCS Annual Report
2011-2012

October 19, 2012

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www.taapcs.ca



TAAPCS CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

Jay Pritchard and Judy Gray

2011-2012 IN REVIEW

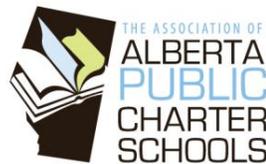
As seems to be the case each year, changes on the political landscape continue to take place. During the course of 2011-12 for example, we had three different individuals serving in the role of Minister of Education. The year began with the Hon. Dave Hancock in that role. In October the Hon. Thomas Lukaszuk became Minister only to be followed in May, 2012 by the Hon. Jeff Johnson. While there is a case to be made for new people bringing new ideas to the position, there are also obvious challenges to organizations such as ours. With such changes, for instance, there is an ongoing need to provide our elected representatives with sufficient background information to allow them to fully understand the uniqueness of our situation. We have attempted to do that and were pleased with Minister Lukaszuk's positive response to one of our ongoing concerns regarding "permanence" for charter schools. While not fully meeting our request for permanence, the possibility of extended terms for our schools is clearly a step in the right direction. We have also had the opportunity for a group of our representatives to meet informally with Minister Johnson in order to offer him basic information regarding charter schools. We are hopeful that this meeting will be followed with other opportunities in the near future to speak with Mr. Johnson and our new Deputy Minister, Mr. Tim Wiles, about specific challenges we face. While extending terms for charter schools is positive, there are several challenges which remain for our association. These challenges include: equitable treatment for charter schools regarding funding, access to vacant school buildings, and improving the application process to establish charter schools.

To date, for instance, a new model concerning inclusive education funding does not recognize the uniqueness of our schools, and we are required to spend money from other operational areas to address the special needs of all our students. Transportation costs continue to be a concern and, with the delay in passing the new Education Act in April, the completion of the provincial study on transportation will be further postponed before cost concerns are addressed. Timely access to vacant school buildings continues to be a challenge. Since most of our schools rely on lease arrangements with our public school system counterparts, we are continually faced with delays in preparing our facilities until the school closure process in the public system is complete. There have recently been instances when some of our member schools have not been able to finalize moves into vacant public school buildings until well into June or July, and yet are expected to open their doors in late August. Our reliance upon the public school system is concerning in another way as well. Currently, the School Act requires any application to

establish a charter school to first be presented to the resident public school system. If that system indicates it is not prepared to proceed with offering the type of school being requested, only then can applicants go to the Minister for approval. We see this “first right of refusal” as being an unnecessary step in the process and have asked the Minister that this be reconsidered when the new Act is proclaimed.

Having noted the challenges we continue to face, it is also important to recognize the many positive developments which have occurred in our member schools over the past year. We are encouraged by the commitment of our students, staff and parents as our association continues to grow stronger. For example, the very positive response in 2011 to the Minister’s online survey regarding the future of charter schools was outstanding. We have been told there were more responses to this survey than there were to a similar survey on Inspiring Education in 2009-10. Our “community” was extremely positive in its support for charter schools. As well, during 2011-12 our association held a conference entitled “Celebrating and Sharing Innovative Practices: Alberta Charter Schools” and the response to this initiative was overwhelmingly successful. Other successes from this past year include the acquisition of a grant to further enhance the leadership development of our administrators, the support of all our schools in providing funding to allow us to conduct university research on “The Impact and Capacity of the Alberta Charter School System”, the continuing effort by the association to provide professional development for directors (both in person and now online), and the successful presentations our representatives have made at meetings with Alberta Education, CASS and the ATA.

We are encouraged by the past year and look forward to an even better year to come.



WHAT IS TAAPCS?

The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools is currently comprised of 13 member schools, which are located throughout the province and are united in support of the following mission:

“Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.”

The Association has been in existence since 1998 and over the last several years has held three meetings annually for the purpose of furthering four primary objectives:

1. To promote and facilitate public charter school education in Alberta.
2. To speak with one voice on behalf of public Charter Schools in Alberta.
3. To provide a forum for public Charter Schools to meet in support of common goals.
4. To advocate for continued innovation and choice within public education.

❖ **Charter Board Chairs (CBC) Committee:** Bill McGregor, Chair, 2011-12

The Board Chairs' committee met three times during 2011-12. The mandate of this committee is to help address the professional development needs of directors as well as to provide direction in the area of government relations. During the course of the three meetings it was determined that Board development activities should continue and where possible be expanded to include an online option. Accordingly, during the year, four Board development workshops were held at individual schools and the first online Board development module was created and placed on the association's website. Modifications to the module will be made during the upcoming year. As well, at each meeting, discussions took place regarding what efforts were being taken by individual Boards as they meet with their elected officials. A number of Boards had successful meetings with their MLA's throughout the year. The dialogue was informative.

❖ **Conference 2011**

On October 20/21, over 400 delegates were in attendance at the 2011 Conference entitled "Celebrating and Sharing Innovative Practices". The conference's opening addresses on October 20 were delivered by Keray Henke, Deputy Minister and Roger Garriock, an expert on innovation, who earlier in the day had conducted a pre-conference with more than 30 administrators. On the following day there were 22 break-out sessions on a wide variety of topics offered to participants. The sessions were facilitated mainly by charter school staff members with Alberta Education personnel lending their assistance in areas more related to their expertise. Evaluation results indicate that participants felt the conference was very successful. In particular, having "local" experts facilitating discussions, sharing of information/practical ideas, networking, and reasonable costs were seen as positives. To everyone's delight, the conference concluded with a surprise visit from then Minister Thomas Lukaszuk!



Hon. Thomas Lukaszuk greeting TAAPCS Members
at Conference 2011

Appreciation was expressed to the Calgary Science School for their leadership, not only in helping to plan the event but also for hosting the break-out sessions and providing the necessary support services. As well, appreciation was extended to the Calgary Regional Consortium which was instrumental in providing administrative and clerical assistance for the event. The financial statement prepared by CRC indicates that the conference resulted in revenue of \$74,349. Expenses totaling \$47,964.56 resulted in a profit of \$26,384.44. The CRC will be asked to assist with the 2013 conference, which is now beginning its planning stages.

❖ **Leadership Initiative**

Starting in 2010, TAAPCS administrators have held regularly scheduled meetings which, in addition to business items, also involve professional development activities. Specifically, since May 2011, the group has called upon the expertise of Dr. Garry McKinnon, Superintendent of Calgary Science School, to provide assistance in reviewing and understanding the seven competencies which Alberta Education has determined administrators should possess. The results of these sessions have been very positive and TAAPCS was pleased to learn that when we

formally applied for a grant from Alberta Education to extend these sessions to include more of our administrators, superintendents included, our request was received positively. As a result, in June, 2012 we learned that our association will be able to provide opportunities for almost 40 administrators in the area of leadership development. Our \$50,000 grant is for one year. We have engaged the services of Dr. Jim Brandon, University of Calgary, to assist in this initiative. Alberta Education’s goal is for our association to develop a process, as well as materials, which might be used by other school authorities in the province as they engage in development of their school leaders.

❖ **University of Calgary Research Project**

During 2011-12, as a follow-up to the Minister’s Dialogue on Education, there was extensive discussion throughout the association on the evolving role which Alberta Education might see charter schools playing in the future. Discussions about the role of charter schools to offer choice to students and parents - while at the same time being innovative, creative and research based - were prompted, in large part, by Alberta Education’s online survey entitled “Action on Research and Innovation: The Future of Charter Schools in Alberta”. While the results of this survey were not released until August 2012, the association was convinced there would be strong support from our constituents for our schools to continue as they are. However, the association was equally convinced, notwithstanding some excellent reviews in newspapers and journals, that the general public lacks a clear understanding of what charter schools are, what they do, and why they are successful. Support from the general public, therefore, might be lacking and if Alberta Education is looking at the future of our schools, we felt there was a need for an independent third party to conduct research into certain aspects of our mandate. Therefore, in June 2012, we approached the University of Calgary and during 2012-13, two faculty members will be conducting research which “will identify the Alberta Charter School system’s capacity and impact for future growth and sustainability within the broader education system in Alberta”. Dr. Dianne Gereluk and Dr. Eugene Kowch will be the university researchers conducting the study, which is entitled “The Impact and Capacity of the Alberta Charter School System”. Results will be shared with our association in October 2013.

❖ **Alberta Education On-line Survey: “Action on Research and Innovation: The Future of Charter Schools in Alberta”**

As noted earlier, during January/February 2011 Alberta Education posted an online survey on their website as a follow-up to earlier feedback they had sought through the “Charter School Concept Paper” which had been distributed in 2009. A total of 2712 responses to the survey were received. As well, there were eight written stakeholder submissions and 351 letters and form letters. Alberta Education reported that “of the total response to the online survey, more than 70 per cent of respondents were representative of current charter school community members (parents, students, board members and staff). A majority of survey respondents expressed satisfaction with the status quo for charter schools and many indicated a desire to see the current structure, focus and governance of charter schools maintained. At the same time, however, respondents generally agreed that charter schools of the future should have increased responsibility for research and innovation. While respondents suggest that charter schools must maintain the element of choice as a driving force, they agree that charter schools must also focus on innovation and research informed practices that may provide a lens through which change can

be contemplated in other public schools. Other topics addressed in the survey include governance, membership in the ATA, permanence for charter schools, and accountability. Alberta Education has posted the results for the Minister’s Dialogue as well as the online survey results on its website.

❖ **Political Changes**

In October 2011, Premier Redford made several cabinet changes. The Hon. Thomas Lukaszuk replaced the Hon. Dave Hancock as Minister of Education. In May, 2012, the Hon. Jeff Johnson became Minister of Education while Mr. Lukaszuk was appointed Deputy Premier. During Mr. Lukaszuk’s tenure, one important change impacting charter schools was made. A major goal of the association has been the achieving of “permanence” for charter schools. While not “permanence”, Mr. Lukaszuk determined that “extended terms” for our schools were possible. Accordingly, he instructed Alberta Education officials to develop a process whereby charter schools could apply for fifteen-year terms rather than five. To date, four charter schools have applied and been approved. More are expected to do so in the upcoming year.

The long-awaited **Education Act**, which was expected to pass in the legislature during the spring sitting, has been delayed. The result of this delay has impacted several provincial initiatives which either directly or indirectly affect charter schools. In particular, funding concerns exist. For instance, negotiations regarding the tripartite agreement which were taking place in the spring were halted when the Act was delayed, and only recently have resumed. How a new agreement will impact charter school staffs remains to be seen, but clearly a new agreement will affect us. A new agreement could also have an impact upon Inclusive Education funding for charter schools. With the spring budget it became apparent that charter schools were not acknowledged in the same manner as non-charters where the “new” funding model is concerned. Essentially, our schools are delivering inclusive education services required by Alberta Education but are doing so without related funding, since this portion of the “new” funding model does not address the uniqueness of our schools. Moreover, with the delay in passing the new Act, the transportation review which was being undertaken by Alberta Education has also been postponed. The concern of our schools regarding appropriate funding for transporting our students, which this review was hoped to address, will not be resumed until the Act is passed and Regulations are developed.

❖ **Provincial Committee Representation**

Over the past year, TAAPCS was proud to be ably represented on the following Provincial Government Committees:

- English Language Learning – Ed Wittchen (MECCS)
- Workforce Planning – Garry McKinnon (CSS)
- Dialogue on teaching Quality – Garry McKinnon (CSS)
- School Leadership Preparation – Denise Budgen (FFCA)
- TQS (Professional Practice Standards – Karen Spencer (Suzuki)
- Parent Resource - Cathy McCauley (FFCA)

❖ Comings and Goings

During 2011-12, we bade farewell to several of our Association members and welcomed several newcomers. Mr. Keith Jones, Superintendent at Almadina decided to retire; we are pleased to have Ms. Yvonne DePeel take his place. As well, Mr. Ray Battochio, Superintendent at Valhalla, resigned and we are look forward to Mr. John Picard joining us at the Superintendents' table. Our good friend Mr. Jim Rigby also decided to "get serious" about retirement, and we are fortunate to have Mr. Don Falk join our team in the role of New Horizons Superintendent. And we will certainly miss one of our longest-serving members, Mrs. Megan O'Hara, Westmount Secretary- Treasurer, whose tireless efforts moved our Association forward in so many ways.



Garry Andrews, Jay Pritchard, Megan O'Hara, Jim Rigby, Judy Gray

❖ Appreciation

As an association, we are very appreciative of the strong support we have received from our "community members". We are also appreciative of the part Alberta Education has played in providing advice and, where needed, assistance. Thank you also to our colleagues in CASS (College of Alberta School Superintendents) who so willingly include our members in the deliberation and discussion of items of mutual interest.

Throughout 2011-12 we were called upon numerous times to reflect on our past as we prepare for the future. In doing so, it became clear that many people provided assistance along the way and therefore became "champions" of charter schools. To that end, we felt it was important to recognize and thank those special people who have given their time, energy, influence and expertise to enhancing the charter school promise through the establishment of our newly-created "*Choice and Innovation Award*". The inaugural presentation(s) will take place this year.

The following are the criteria for consideration of the awarding of the Choice and Innovation Award (CIA) by TAAPCS:

- Individuals or groups who are submitting nominations, must be members of TAAPCS.
- Both individuals and groups are eligible for nomination.

- Nominations will be accepted until September 30 each year.
- Winners will be contacted in advance of the October TAAPCS Banquet, at which the awards will be presented.
- Up to three CIA winners will be selected each year. The names of the winners, and a short description of their contributions, will be posted on the TAAPCS website.
- The nomination will contain evidence in regards to the ways in which nominees' contributions have enhanced or highlighted innovations within one or more charter schools, and/or furthered the objectives of TAAPCS {i.e. (1) To promote and facilitate public charter school education in Alberta; (2) To promote a forum for public charter schools to meet in support of common goals; (3) To speak with one voice on behalf of public charter schools in Alberta; and (4) To advocate for continued innovation and choice within public education. }

A special thank you goes to Judy Gray and Justin Kool for their development of the rationale and criteria for this award, as well as to Karen Spencer for looking after the technical work.

Respectfully presented by
Dr. Garry Andrews, Executive Director
The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools
October 19, 2012

