

## **The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools – 2010-11 Annual Report**

### **Co-Presidents' Message – Jay Pritchard and Judy Gray**

2010-11 was a year of political uncertainty in Canada. Not only were federal politics in the throes of change but so too was Alberta's. With the announcement of Premier Ed Stelmach's retirement, many provincial organizations began to wonder what the future would hold in store. Our Association was one of these. With such ambitious initiatives as the introduction of a new Education Act as well as Action on Inclusion, Teaching, Leadership and Research, our members questioned if there would be a change in direction when a new leader was elected. To this point, Alberta Education appears to be staying the course and work continues. To this end, our Association has been invited and has responded with written feedback and participated in many discussions with Alberta Education and our partners over the past year. We are appreciative of the opportunity to do so. In particular, we were pleased to have been involved with the Minister's Dialogue on the future of charter schools which was held in June, 2011. With over 40 delegates in attendance from a broad spectrum of the educational community, we were able to hear concerns from others about charter schools and to explain and clarify what we understand to be our mandate, now and into the future. It was an important event for our association and one which we anticipate will influence the future direction of charter schools.

On a local level, our Association under the direction of the Education Advisory Committee revised our bylaws to reflect the changing nature of our organization. These were approved by our membership at our January meeting. As well, we explored and provided professional development opportunities for our directors; worked to enhance communication within various committees such as the Administrators' Group and the Committee of Board Chairs; explored expanded Risk Management opportunities; sought clarification on facility issues such as leasing and planned for Conference 2011 and Pre-Conference 2011. Follow up to these undertakings will continue in the upcoming year.

A special thank you is extended to the members of our Association who so willingly and enthusiastically give of their time to make our organization the success that it has come to be.

### **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 association's mission:

“Working together to provide 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 to further the following objectives:

1. To promote and facilitate public charter school education in Alberta.
2. To speak with one voice in support 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, 2010-11**

The Charter Board Chairs met three times during 2010-2011. The mandate of this committee is to provide a vehicle for professional development as well as to offer support for government relations. To this end, PD opportunities offered during the course of the year included workshops of “Change and Governance” as well as “Government Relations”. Discussion at the meetings also included a closer examination of what PD needs existed regarding topics such as: New Board Member Orientation; Board and Superintendent evaluation; Pathway to Effective Board Policy Governance; Strengthening the Board/Superintendent Relationship; Becoming a Better Board Chair; Public Engagement. In addition to providing online PD opportunities, the possibility of providing PD three times a year immediately prior to the TAAPCS’ meetings was discussed. A brief survey with boards was conducted in June to see if there was support for these initiatives and the results were generally positive. In addition to discussing PD activities, the CBC also shared information regarding the government relations activities which their boards had been involved with. It was emphasized that by meeting with local and provincial decision makers, formally and informally, charter boards have an improved opportunity to influence the future direction which our schools will take.

#### **Charter School Administrators’ Group**

There were three administrators’ meetings held during 2010-11. Almadina (Mountain View Elementary) hosted the November meeting while Suzuki was the site of the February meeting and FFCA (North Middle School) accommodated the administrators in May. An average of 16 people attended. At the November meeting it was proposed that a standard format be followed for each meeting. It would consist of at least three components: PD, Association business and Topics of interest. For 2010-11 and for 2011-12 it was determined that the professional component for each of these meetings would be to examine “Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders” and would be led by Dr. Garry McKinnon, Superintendent, Calgary Science School. It appears this format and topics have been well received and therefore will be continued.

#### **Alberta Education Initiatives**

2010-2011 was a year in which Alberta Education continued to clarify the changes which will occur in our province over the next three years. The **Alberta Education Action Agenda 2011-14** indicated that “We need to transform our Early Childhood Services to Grade 12 education system to make sure Alberta’s students are prepared for the opportunities and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. To this end they noted several strategic policy directions: Rethinking student needs; Rethinking what we’re teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Rethinking excellence in teaching students; Rethinking how we engage with communities; Rethinking research. As a result, three goals were stated: Goal one: Success for every student; Goal two: Transformed education through collaboration; Goal three: Success for First Nations, Metis and Inuit students. Flowing from these goals are several “Actions” which are therefore

the focus of Alberta Education's attention. They are: Action on Curriculum; Action on Inclusion; Action on Teaching and Leadership; Action on Legislation and Action on Research. Our organization appreciates the opportunity at having been invited to participate in discussions related to these "Actions"

### **New Education Act**

Perhaps the most highly anticipated "Action" activity (Legislation) taken by Alberta Education 2010-11 was the introduction in the legislature of Bill 18. Subsequent to its spring introduction, members of the province's educational community were invited to attend meetings in Calgary and Nisku on May 3 and 4 respectively, to examine the proposed changes. The discussions were both informative and thought provoking. While many details need yet to be determined, several of the changes which will directly relate to charter schools include: the concept of "permanence"; the responsibility to be inclusive (Sections 11 & 33(1)); and an understanding that existing charter schools are deemed to be "established by the Minister" under this new Act and therefore will not be required to "re-apply".

### **Action on Inclusion, Teaching, Leadership and Research**

Another "Action" activity which is generating much discussion in our schools relates to the concept of "inclusion". As noted above, charter schools will need to "provide a continuum of specialized supports and services to students that is consistent with the principles of inclusive education" (Section 33 (1)). In 2011-12 Alberta Education will be holding meetings and supporting further discussions throughout the province in order to determine how "communities of practice" can be built to accommodate "inclusion".

Our association has also been represented in the discussion of other "Action" activities – Revision of the Teaching Quality Standard (Professional Practice Competencies for Teachers) and the implementation of the provincial School Leadership Framework. It is expected that final reports in both these areas will be released in 2011-12. Related to these activities is Alberta Education's Workforce Planning Committee. Again, we are very ably represented on this committee as well.

While not directly involved with initial discussions on the "Action" related to research, we were invited to provide input to this provincial committee and we did so in June, 2011. We understand that a framework will be developed with its major purpose of "moving us towards a culture of research practitioners wherein research informs practice and vice-versa". This framework will be circulated in the upcoming year.

Again, our association is pleased to have been involved in discussions related to these very important strategic initiatives.

### **Online Survey regarding the Future of Charter Schools**

In January 2011, Alberta Education began conducting an extensive provincial online survey concerning the future of Charter Schools. The results were tabulated in May and draft copies have been circulated. The data indicate that this survey resulted in over 2700 responses (including 500 written submissions). It was estimated that "more than 70% of the respondents were representative of current charter school

community members (parents, students, board members and staff)". Such a large response would indicate that our members are very concerned with where the future may lead. In addition to the numerical/graph data arising from specific questions, the report contains summaries of the following: Barriers that may prevent charter schools from becoming centres of innovation and research; Ideas of how future charter schools in Alberta should be established; Ideas on the qualifications of teachers for future charter schools in Alberta; Ideas on the accountability of future charter schools in Alberta; "Other" key ideas related to the direction for future charter schools in Alberta. The document, entitled "Action on Research and Innovation: the Future of Charter Schools in Alberta: Summary of Online Survey Results, September 2011" should be available on Alberta Education's website in late October/early November.

### **Minister's Dialogue regarding the Future of Charter Schools**

As a supplement to the online survey, Minister Hancock, hosted a "dialogue" in Nisku on June 2. The meeting was attended by more than 40 people representing the educational partners in Alberta. Charter schools were allotted 8 representatives. The purposes of the meeting were: "To engage educational stakeholders in a focused dialogue about the purpose of charter schools in a transformed educational system; To include stakeholders in discussion that is creative, innovative and solution focused; To help inform the Minister about regulatory changes that might be made in the near or longer term to position charter schools to better realize this purpose". After the Minister spoke to begin the day, a third party facilitator provided leadership and the delegates addressed several questions related to the future of charter schools. Our association's representatives indicated that the discussions were rich and diverse in nature. An extensive document prepared by the facilitator entitled Highlights and Key Themes from the Minister's Dialogue, should soon be released on Alberta Education's website. It is hoped that a stakeholder team will then be appointed to work at developing a framework for regulatory review and thus provide the Minister with suggestions for the upcoming writing of the Education Act's Regulations.

### **The Fraser Report**

Our schools continue to do well as evidenced by the Fraser Institute's 2011 annual report on Alberta's elementary schools which was released in March, 2011. The results indicate that Alberta's charter schools obtained the highest average with private schools being second. In regard to charter schools the data were for the elementary level; therefore, because of grade configuration and minimum enrolment requirements, only 7 of 13 charter schools were included. Christl Dabu of Our Kids' Media, says "charter schools had an average of 8.6 out of 10 and private schools scored 7.7 out of 10 for the 2009-10 school year. The average for all 654 schools in Alberta was 6.0". Dabu says "Fraser Institute's ... rankings only deliver info on the schools' performance rather than the reasons behind it". While there are critics of the "oversimplification" of these data, Peter Cowley, Fraser Institute's Director of School Performance Studies and Co-author of the report says "it provides useful objective data and is much more than a "snapshot of a school's performance in a single year".

### **Conference 2011 and Pre-Conference 2011**

A conference planning committee with representatives from Calgary Science School, Foundations for the Future Academy, Almadina, Westmount, Calgary Girls' School, Calgary Arts Academy and the Calgary Regional Consortium began meetings in December, 2010 to plan Conference 2011. It was determined that the conference would be held in Calgary on October 20 and 21, 2011 and the theme would relate to innovation ("Celebrating and Sharing Innovative Practices"). The committee invited Mr. Keray Henke, Deputy Minister to open the conference and Mr. Roger Garriock to deliver the keynote address. The following day, at the Calgary Science School, it was decided to hold breakout sessions so schools would have the opportunity to share the research informed, innovative practices in which they are engaged. Suggestions from the schools regarding presentations they would lead and a survey of interest was conducted to determine the offerings. In addition to speaking at the Conference, Mr. Garriock volunteered to lead a one day pre-Conference on the topic of Innovative Problem Solving.

### **Tidbits**

- Suzuki Charter School moved into its new facility in August 2010. It is located at 10720 – 54<sup>th</sup> St. Edmonton, AB T6A 2H9.
- Westmount Charter School learned in June, 2011 that it would face a very busy summer in preparation for the move to two new campuses before the start of the 2011-12 academic year. The campuses are located at: 728-32 St. NW (K-4) and 2215 Uxbridge Dr. NW (5-12), Calgary.
- At the close of the 2010-11 school year we learned of the retirement of Mr. Ches Cowley, superintendent at the CalgaryGirls' School and the resignation of Mr. Steve Simmons, superintendent at Aurora Charter School. We welcome Dr. Susan Ditchburn and Dr. Dale Bischoff as the new superintendents at the Calgary Girls' School and Aurora Charter School respectively.
- Other retirements include principals Caroline Parker at the Calgary Girls' School, Sharon Goulet of Suzuki Charter School and Martha Faulkner, Westmount Charter School. We welcome Judi Hadden, Karen Spencer and Dr. Shelley Robinson as our newest principals at CGS, Suzuki and Westmount respectively. Further, at the time of our previous annual report, the appointment of Mr. Ray Battachio, superintendent at Valhalla Community Charter School had not been officially announced and we wish to acknowledge his appointment at this time. As well, we overlooked the announcement that Mr. Steve Mumert, a long-time staff member, was appointed principal at Valhalla. Please accept our late congratulations gentlemen.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Garry Andrews, Executive Director

The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools

October, 2011.