

Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

June 2016 Issue

“Farewells”

With the end of another school year we say goodbye to a number of our friends and colleagues who are leaving the charter school community. Whether it be for purposes of retirement, relocation or refocusing, we want to wish all the best to folks like Judy Gray (FFCA), Josh Van Beers (CAA), Darrell Lonsberry (Connect), Scott Meunier (Boyle Street), and John Picard (FFCA), although John will retain his duties as Superintendent for Valhalla. Our apologies if we overlooked anyone. It is a real pleasure to have worked with individuals like these who have provided great leadership and commitment to the association. Thank you.

The message we are conveying is that “we are public schools”, not private or independent, as some in the media have portrayed us. As well, we represent educational “choice” – something in which Alberta has taken pride for decades. In offering choice based upon our mandates, we do not limit enrollment to only the “best” students as some critics would claim, but rather our students come with a variety of needs and talents which we do our best to accommodate. By attempting early on to dispel misconceptions and myths which can arise at a time of significant

political change, we are hopeful that we can establish a positive relationship with our new government and its officials. Again, we encourage our members to take the initiative to speak with your MLA’s in this regard.

“What has happened since December?”

Since the December newsletter our association has focused on activities which arose from the strategic plan discussions that began in October. What follows is a brief summary of those activities and their relationship to our association’s three main goals:

- To improve communication
- To strengthen governance of our organization
- To address our research mandate

Improving communication

1. General Meeting January 14/15, 2016. We met in Red Deer and as a follow up to the strategic planning workshop which was held in October, we reviewed the plan’s three main goals (noted above). The result was a motion from the floor which was connected to the first two goals – improved



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communication and a stronger organization. The motion, which passed, called for the association to retain the services of a communication strategist who would assist us in securing and planning for meetings with those individuals and/or groups who have an impact on charter schools. In particular, we were directed to meet with the Minister, MLA's and senior officials so that we could share the story of charter schools and therefore address the myths which exist about our schools. Accordingly, we invited proposals from several communication firms/individuals who were recommended to us. Three companies were interviewed and a three month contract was awarded to Hill and Knowlton who have offices in Calgary and Edmonton.

2. Meetings were arranged by Hill and Knowlton and in March the Executive met with the Premier's communication and public liaison advisor in Calgary, an MLA in Sherwood Park, and the Deputy Minister and Assistant Deputy Ministers in Edmonton. On April 1, we met with the Minister of Education, and then at our May General Meeting in Edmonton we were pleased to have three MLA's join us for breakfast and engage in informal discussions. As a result of these gatherings/meetings, we have heard the

Minister, despite some public pressure reported in the media, indicate his support for charter schools by saying he has no intention of changing current arrangements. To the credit of a number of our boards, meetings with the Minister and MLA's have taken place at the local school levels and the response received for their continuing support has been positive. These meetings continue and will remain a priority.

Strengthening governance of our organization

1. Strategic plan follow up. As noted, the May meeting featured an element of re-visiting the goals outlined in the strategic plan. In addition, Becky Kallal, former Board Chair for Edmonton Catholic and now an educational consultant specializing in the area of organizational effectiveness, led a discussion. Specifically, Becky referenced the organizational structure for TAAPCS and the need for possible bylaw changes and/or clarification. The examples she noted were the need to clarify roles of the Executive Director, the EAC and the CBD. In addition to role clarification, she suggested that the purpose for the meetings also requires examination. While these clarifications might be considered, she also recognized



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that TAAPCS should honor its cultural history of “nimbleness” by avoiding the tendency to become overly consumed by rules and regulations. Following the discussion and suggestions which came from the members, it was recommended that we have Becky examine the feedback and bring her suggestions for possible changes to our October AGM.

Addressing our research mandate

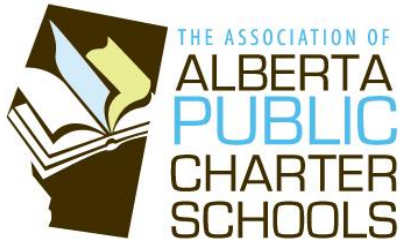
1. Aurora Charter School’s approach to developing teacher capacity for research was featured with our membership on two occasions this year. The suggestion has been made that a “southern” cohort of teachers be established and perhaps modelled after the “northern/Aurora” approach. Dr. Dale Bischoff, Aurora’s Superintendent, has volunteered to advise any group regarding the factors to be considered when setting plans in place.
2. Further work is needed to define the unique mandate for Charter Schools to participate in research that informs the broader educational system. Defining the mandate is a necessary step to support advocacy for funding and to facilitate shared responsibility with Alberta Education for ensuring Charter Schools are supported in

achieving the research mandate. The general consensus seems to be that schools want maximum flexibility to pursue their own directions while also recognizing the value of a defined “Charter Schools Research Model.”

School Leadership Learning

1. School Leadership Learning Initiative. The fourth year of this professional development activity for administrators/leaders concluded on May 25. As in the past, nearly 30 individuals participated in the three formal sessions. The focus for 2015-16 was on supervision and evaluation. Unlike previous years however, financial restrictions prohibited us from utilizing the services of an outside facilitator so that responsibility fell to a committee of our own in school administrators. In this regard special appreciation is extended to Karen Spencer, Jeney Gordon, Darrell Lonsberry and Scott Meunier for their leadership.
2. If funds are available for a fifth year of this initiative, a decision will be made in the fall as to if and how we might proceed.





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“Slow but sure”

Clearly, more work is required, however it is encouraging that in a few short months we are able to identify the efforts we made towards improving communication, strengthening the organization and addressing our research mandate. While perhaps not as fast as many would like, we are making progress as an association and to accomplish this, we depend upon the help of many.

Thank you to our Executive Officers, Dianne McBeth, Yvonne DePeel, Don Falk, Judy Gray and Meredith Poole. Appreciation also to our Education Advisory Committee who along with our Executive Officers, consists of Joe Frank, John Liu, Lynne Paradis, Heather Christison, Susan Chomistek, Phil Butterfield, Vicky Qualie, Dale Erickson, Lorie Skaper-Burtch, Jolene Kochendorfer (who also serves as the chair of our Charter Board Directors’ group) and Marlene Lambe, our Alberta Education representative.

Best wishes for a peaceful, relaxing summer.

Dr. Garry Andrews, Executive Director
TAAPCS
June 28, 2016

