



The Division of Choice

1041 - 10A Street  
Wainwright, AB T9W 2R4

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October 9, 2009

Dear Honorable Minister Hancock:

RE: AMENDMENT TO THE ALBERTA SCHOOL ACT

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This letter is written in response to your request to our members for suggested amendments to the Alberta School Act.

As you may be aware, the School Boards Employer Bargaining Authority (SBEBA), represents a number of school boards in Alberta relative to labour relations and collective bargaining with the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and the teachers it represents. Currently, because of limitations under Alberta legislation, our organization is unable to achieve one of our primary goals as an employers' organization, that being a single collective agreement to cover all of our membership and the teachers employed by our member school boards.

The Alberta Labour Relations Board, in its decision dated December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007 between the SBEBA and the ATA, identified the current limitation in Alberta legislation and encouraged the parties to voluntarily consider a single collective agreement between the SBEBA and the ATA [page 39, para. 71]. Unfortunately, the ATA opposed this direction, thereby necessitating the negotiation of twelve collective agreements with many common and/or similar terms and conditions.

Our membership has directed that I communicate to you the initiative of our organization to have the Alberta School Act amended as follows:

*Amendment to Section 119 of the Alberta School Act*

Where one or more school boards, as employers, voluntarily come together as an 'employers' organization' under the Alberta Labour Relations Code, that section 119 of the Alberta School Act be amended to specify that there will be a single collective agreement between the employers' organization representing those school boards and the union or unions affected.

Mr. Minister, this amendment would enable school boards who come together as members of an employers' organization to accomplish a primary purpose of formation, that being to standardize or have common terms and conditions of employment relative to the employees they employ.

The SBEBA would ask for your support and the support of your colleagues in the legislature for this important amendment.

If you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me at (780) 214-1054.

Sincerely,

Brent Romanchuk  
President, SBEBA

Cc: All Members of the Legislative Assembly



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October 29, 2009

Mr. Keray Henke  
Deputy Minister  
Office of the Deputy Minister  
Alberta Education  
7th fl Commerce Place  
10155 - 102 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5J 4L5

Dear Mr. Henke,

**Subject: BTPS Feedback on Charter School Concept Paper**

At their October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009 Board meeting, the Board of Trustees of Buffalo Trail Public Schools reviewed the Charter School Concept Paper provided by you on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The Board discussed this concept paper at length. They have requested that I provide a response on their behalf outlining a number of significant concerns that they have with this concept paper.

It is the belief of our Board that Charter Schools have and will continue to fragment the public school system in the Province of Alberta. Establishing public schools that have the ability to exempt students who require special education programs endangers one of the most important tenants of public education. In an education environment where inclusion is strongly emphasized, it seems ironic that there is support for a program that segregates a sector of the population. The potential that these types of schools could mirror the characteristics of private schools through selective enrolment is of grave concern to our Board of Trustees. Building a program that caters to a select population is bound to be attractive. It is not surprising that the concept paper acknowledges that charter schools have developed momentum and waiting lists currently exist for these schools. Allowing this to occur has the potential to impact on the student population and composition in many regular public schools.

The concept paper speaks to the potential for charter schools to explore innovative practices in a controlled setting. Our Board of Trustees would argue that Alberta Education's current AISI program is built upon this very premise. As a part of the AISI program, innovations are supported and learning is shared across districts and the province. School jurisdictions and schools are accessing the lessons learned through this very valuable program and adapting these innovative solutions to fit the unique needs of students in their respective jurisdictions. The suggestion that charter schools could somehow accomplish this goal may serve to undermine the excellent work being accomplished in many regular Alberta schools.

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The concept paper identifies the need to provide charter schools with funding beyond what is provided to regular schools. These funds would recognize the increased demands on charter schools for professional development and research. With the limited funding currently available in education it concerns our Board that further charter school investment will result in decreased funding to regular schools. Our Board would also be concerned if the increased funding to charter schools would limit the potential for regular schools to be involved in funded special projects currently available from time to time by Alberta Education.

The suggested criteria for charter school renewals are also of concern to our Board. The suggestion that charter schools would be deemed successful if they achieved good or better provincial results and a higher level of parental satisfaction is unacceptable. If the charter school student population is composed of a select student demographic where all energies are focused only on the needs of regular students it is safe to assume that these results would be above the average.

Finally, the Board of Trustees notes an absence of research to support establishing charter schools in the Province of Alberta. In particular we struggle to understand how charter schools might be established in rural communities where student populations are limited. Often student populations do not allow us to establish multiple schools in a community and distances between communities limit our ability to do so regionally. Does the research on charter schools support the creation of charter schools only in large urban centers? If so, how does the research apply to more rural settings?

In closing, we would like to express our appreciation for the opportunity to provide feedback on this concept paper. We look forward to seeing the impact that our input will have on the future of charter schools in the Province of Alberta. If you would like to discuss the information in our response further, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Bob Allen  
Superintendent of Schools  
On behalf of the BTPS Board of Trustees