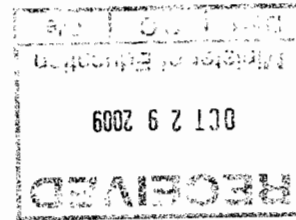




October 26, 2009

Honourable David Hancock
Minister of Education
#224 Legislature Building
10800 97 Ave
Edmonton, AB
Canada T5K 2B6



Dear Minister Hancock:

On behalf of Elk Island Catholic Schools, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the review of the School Act. Our Division is very proud of the accomplishments of our students and our ability to provide high quality Catholic education.

I am most proud to inform you that our Board of Trustees and Senior Administration have dedicated significant time, energy and effort to provide thoughtful, reflective feedback on our vision for the underlying beliefs that we believe should form the basis for education in the province of Alberta.

These beliefs have been summarized into the following seven support statements:

1. We support the vital importance of continuing to provide Catholic education within the province of Alberta, as outlined in the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association "Submission to the Minister of Education's School Act Review Process 2009 (attached).
2. We support the following two additions to the School Act Preamble:
 - Whereas the Government of Alberta affirms its commitment to the preservation and continuation of its one publicly funded system of education through its three dimensions: the public schools, the separate schools and the francophone schools.
 - Whereas a strong public education system is a fundamental element of a democratic society.
3. We support local autonomy in the provision of public education and recognize the benefits of local representation for key stakeholders in our school community – student, parents, staff and members of the community at large, through locally elected school boards.

6. We support a responsive, multidisciplinary integrated services model that addresses the needs of both preschool children and students.
7. We support the role and responsibilities of teachers as professionals that includes continually improving teacher practice through ongoing professional development activities.

Thank you, once again, Minister Hancock, for your invitation to participate in this important process of reviewing the School Act.

Our Board is very open to engaging in future, focused discussion with you on these seven belief statements and practical implications towards a new Education Act.

Very sincerely,

Mr. Tony Sykora
Board Chair
Elk Island Catholic Schools

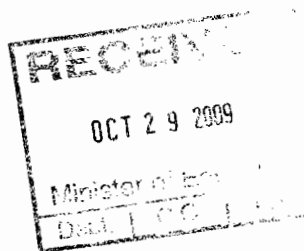
cc: Premier Ed Stelmach
Honourable Iris Evans (Minister of Finance and Enterprise)
Mr. Dave Quest (MLA – Strathcona)
Mr. Verlyn Olson (MLA – Wetaskiwin-Camrose)



**ELK ISLAND
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
Seeing Christ in Everyone

October 26, 2009

Honourable David Hancock
Minister of Education
#224 Legislature Building
10800 97 Ave
Edmonton, AB
Canada T5K 2B6



Dear Minister Hancock:

I am writing to you on behalf of Elk Island Catholic Schools, in response to Mr. Keray Henke's invitation (dated 2009 10 09), to provide feedback on the Charter School Concept Paper (attached). This feedback reflects the position of our Division on four key points.

First, although charter schools have provided some element of choice for parents, it is our belief that the province of Alberta should maintain and strengthen its commitment to the preservation and continuation of its one strong, publicly funded system of education through its three dimensions: the public schools, the separate schools and the francophone schools.

Second, we firmly believe that there is strong evidence of significant innovation in many Alberta school jurisdictions, including our own, directly related to Alberta Education's ongoing commitment to fund Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS) projects.

In our own Division, this funding support has enabled our teachers to receive leading edge professional development opportunities under the direction of our senior administrative team. This proactive, ongoing learning has strongly contributed to our ability to transform classroom learning environments to meet and address the diverse, changing needs of our 21st Century Learners.

These dynamic changes to the learning environment are strongly supported by research and have led to our Division's provincial reputation as an innovative centre of teaching and learning.

From this perspective, there does not appear to be a clear need to enhance funding to charter schools that have largely been unsuccessful in developing innovative teaching and learning practices.

Third, as evidenced by our ongoing partnerships with a number of post-secondary research institutions, our Division has been very successful in identifying key factors that lead to student success.

The fact that our Division has one of the highest high school completion rates in the province, as well as one of the lowest dropout rates and the highest post-secondary transition rates in Alberta affirms this success.

Every year, school jurisdictions from across Alberta have requested our assistance in identifying key factors that lead to these enhanced student learning outcomes. It is our position that providing more funding to charter schools in an effort to achieve this same level of success would be both contrary to strengthening the three dimensions of our existing strong, publicly funded education system and counterproductive.

Finally, our Division is firmly committed, in both policy and in current best practice, to serving the needs of all students within an inclusive education environment.

To enable charter schools to remain exempt from the requirement of all publicly funded schools to provide special education programs and services is contrary, in our view, to both our beliefs and to the fundamental principles of social justice.

Thank you, once again, Minister Hancock, for providing our Division with an opportunity to express our views on salient features of the future of charter schools within the province of Alberta.

Should you wish to engage in further dialogue with our Board and Administration on this issue, please do not hesitate to me, at your earliest convenience.

Very sincerely,

Mr. Tony Sykora
Board Chair
Elk Island Catholic Schools

cc: Premier Ed Stelmach
Honourable Iris Evans (Minister of Finance and Enterprise)
Mr. Dave Quest (MLA – Strathcona)
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