

**SCHOOL ACT REVIEW**  
**Discussion Paper for Legislative Review**  
**Response from**  
**HIGH PRAIRIE SCHOOL DIVISION #48**

**High Prairie School Division #48 recognizes the importance of and agrees with the values of the foundational themes developed to help structure a new education act. There is one additional value High Prairie School Division believes is necessary.**

These values are:

Opportunity –the availability of opportunity for all students to achieve their highest potential

Fairness – equity of opportunity recognizing that advantages and disadvantages vary widely amongst Alberta’s students

Citizenship – preparing students for full active participation in the economy, society and democracy at the level of their local communities, the province, the country, and the world

Diversity – recognizes the diversity in learning styles and needs within the student population, the breadth of cultural diversity in the province, and the strengths that diversity provides to our society

Choice – recognizes that citizens expect more than a “one-size fits all” approach to the delivery of public services.

**Transitions – recognizes that education and employment beyond secondary school could benefit from transition planning with post-secondary partners and industry early in the students’ learning path.**

The foundational themes identified in the discussion paper centre on five main themes– access for students, educational opportunities, student success, governance, and financial responsibility. The themes, as set out below, are agreeable to High Prairie School Division’s philosophy of education with the addition of key recommendations for your consideration in forming the structure and outline of a new education act:

## **II FOUNDATIONAL THEMES**

1. All Alberta children have a superseding right of access to the ECS -12 public education system which is not dependent on where they reside.
2. Students should be able to access instruction at any time, any place, and at their own pace.
3. Student success is the primary goal of the education system and government has a responsibility to provide the structure and supports to maximize it.
4. The connection of locally elected school authorities to their communities is an important element of our public education system. Government has a responsibility to support maximizing trustee and board competence, and to set provincial standards for the roles and responsibilities of boards.
5. There must be balance between local autonomy and fiscal responsibility.

Key Considerations from High Prairie School Division:

1. Inclusive Self-Government

- a. "Legislation should define "public (school) education" as being inclusive – both for children/students and for all adults in the (electoral) process of government. And definition of public (school) education should refer to such education as governed locally by elected representatives of the local population."<sup>1</sup>
- b. "There should be an assurance that, within each public school jurisdiction, residents are entitled to elect trustees from the jurisdiction, whose role is to provide government and oversight, and that these trustees are accountable to the local electorate and may only be removed from office by action of the Board, or the local electorate and/or courts, for reasons set out in the law. The assurance should be equally strong for both public and separate school jurisdiction."<sup>2</sup>
- c. "Public school jurisdictions should be given "natural person powers"<sup>3</sup>
- d. "Public school boards should be enabled to achieve the educational and (related corresponding) community goals and objectives of their local electorate. Public schools are the hub of the general population's community and the local school board provides a common link for the public to achieve public policy objectives locally, as they relate to education, broadly defined. Public school boards should have the authority of a local general-purpose government to facilitate the accomplishment of communities' important public work related to education."<sup>4</sup>
- e. **One local education board that was inclusive of public, separate, francophone, charter, home schooling, and private schools could respond much more effectively to the community in which they serve. Programs, and services requested by the public would be met with one system that is inclusive of all students representing all people. This would eliminate the need for those school boards that are presently exclusive of students based on language, religion, academic or athletic achievement. Within this inclusive educational board a community based denominational, language, athletic or academic school could be created at the community's request, and within the parameters defined by the minister to mandate programs and services. This would reduce administration, bussing, and infrastructure costs. It would also enable a better use of resources to support programming. However, if a segregated system is still desirable in Alberta's new vision and " a separate school system exists, individual members of the minority faith should be allowed to choose to be residents, ratepayers, elected officials, and electors of the public school jurisdiction."**<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Public School boards' Association of Alberta "The School Act Review" (Fall 2009) page 18

<sup>2</sup> Public School boards' Association of Alberta "The School Act Review" (Fall 2009) page 18

<sup>3</sup> Public School boards' Association of Alberta "The School Act Review" (Fall 2009) page 19

<sup>4</sup> Public School boards' Association of Alberta "The School Act Review" (Fall 2009) page 20

<sup>5</sup> Public School boards' Association of Alberta "The School Act Review" (Fall 2009) page 21

## 2. Boundaries

- a. “Decisions regarding the boundaries of public school jurisdictions should be determined at the local level. Local communities (school boards and the electorate) should have the sole authority regarding amalgamation, regionalization, and annexation and/or reconfiguring any or all of the boundaries of the local public school jurisdiction.”<sup>6</sup>

## 3. Capacity

- a. “Regardless of local circumstances or where the jurisdiction is located in the province, school jurisdictions should have reliable access to predictable, stable and adequate funds from the provincial government, in order to do all the things that are mandated by the provincial government.”<sup>7</sup> **In the cases of federal students, there should be no inequity between provincially and federally funded students.**
- b. “Public education is a shared responsibility of local and provincial communities. Each community should have the flexibility and the capacity to contribute to the success of their respective educational goals and objectives. Public school boards need a financial connection to the local community so that their public can respond to locally agreed mandates and province long-term solutions to community needs and requirements. This should not have a negative impact upon equitable access and funding of the provincial programming mandate to all public school boards throughout the province.”<sup>8</sup> **An equitable provincial funding model is necessary if local taxation is implemented. In reference to local taxation High Prairie School Division has developed an equitable provincial funding model. We are agreeable to presenting this funding model upon request.**

## 4. Educational Services

- a. “The Minister should be allowed to contract with an individual school jurisdiction or an association of school jurisdictions to accomplish any of the public education policy objectives of the provincial government.”<sup>9</sup>
- b. **The minister should encourage and enable multi-jurisdictional and cross-ministry initiatives to accomplish educational policies and objectives.**

## 5. Separate School Co-Existence

- a. **High Prairie School Division #48 strongly believes that one governing body should be formed to encompass all schools within the existing public school jurisdiction boundaries by amalgamating all schools within those divisional boundaries inclusive of public schools, separate schools, francophone, charter schools, private schools and home schools. Schools of choice will be continued or developed based on community need within the parameters as set by the minister. Our focus is on education of all students. Rural Albertans, in particular draw from a smaller**

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<sup>6</sup> Public School boards’ Association of Alberta “The School Act Review” (Fall 2009) page 22

<sup>7</sup> Public School boards’ Association of Alberta “The School Act Review” (Fall 2009) page 23

<sup>8</sup> Public School boards’ Association of Alberta “The School Act Review” (Fall 2009) page 23

<sup>9</sup> Public School boards’ Association of Alberta “The School Act Review” (Fall 2009) page 25

**population. A continuance of exclusive systems within our education values splits resources, funds, and community support. It is very important to advocate for the rights of the individual and to support the foundational themes of 1) *all Alberta children have a superseding right of access to the ECS-12 public education system which is not dependent on where they reside; and that 2) allowing students access to instruction at any time, any place, and at their own place.* However, the present system supports six different education systems that exclude students from their choice of education.**

- b. However, if the present system prevails, we believe “Throughout Alberta, the boundary of a non-operating public school district (currently, a 4X4) should be made coterminous with the (rural) boundary of a corresponding public school division.”<sup>10</sup>**
- c. “The boundary of a separate school jurisdiction should be within or coterminous with the boundary of the corresponding public school jurisdiction.”<sup>11</sup>**

#### **Top Priorities:**

- 1. One local education board that is inclusive of public, separate, francophone, charter, home schooling, and private schools.**
- 2. No matter what the source, all funding should be adequate and equitable.**
- 3. Enable cross-ministry initiatives that facilitate student support services, resource sharing, and/or transition to post-secondary.**
4. The governance of public school jurisdictions is an exercise in local self-government. Locally elected school boards are responsible to ensure transparency and access to the decision-making process.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Public School boards' Association of Alberta "The School Act Review" (Fall 2009) page 26

<sup>11</sup> Public School boards' Association of Alberta "The School Act Review" (Fall 2009) page 26

<sup>12</sup> Public School boards' Association of Alberta "The School Act Review" (Fall 2009) page 17