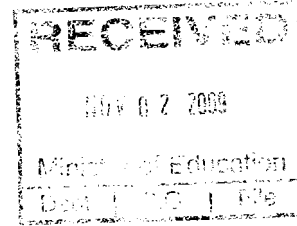




Dr. Bill Stuebing
Chairman, Board of Trustees
Direct Line: 403-347-5319
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October 29, 2009



Honourable Dave Hancock
Minister of Education
224 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Hancock:

In response to your invitation to provide comment on and input into the upcoming revision of the School Act, the Board of Trustees of the Red Deer Public School District No. 104 (the Board) is pleased to offer the following recommendations for your consideration:

1. The Board supports the following guiding principles as being the foundation of public education and, as such, recommends that they be incorporated into a new School Act:
 - a) Inclusion - Our public schools are open and accessible to every student. Public schools welcome and value the diverse qualities that children and their families bring: their faith, their ethnic and cultural background as well as their physical and mental characteristics.
 - b) Democracy - Our public schools belong to our communities. They are the first civil institutions in which children participate outside of the family. Public schools are models of civil democracy, demonstrating the importance of interdependent relationships in developing healthy communities. In our public schools people are respectful, responsible and demanding of justice for everyone.
 - c) Local Autonomy - Our communities empower our governments. Communities elect boards of trustees to be their agents and ensure a balance between the direction provided by government and the needs and aspirations of the community. Our public school trustees are the key community leaders to whom the provincial government looks for assurance that the sensitive balance between the community and the education system remains tilted toward our communities with their unique beliefs values and aspirations.
2. The Board supports a restructuring of the K-12 school system in Alberta, including constitutional change where necessary, so as to establish a single system of governance at the local level, in which all educational choices and programs, including but not necessarily limited to public school education, separate school education, francophone school education, alternative programs, and other programs of choice such as charter schools, would be governed by a single local authority. In the dualistic culture of the 1800s and early 1900s, Alberta's public schools were, for the most part, Protestant schools; hence the need for separate Catholic schools. However, as public schools have become increasingly secular and non-religious, the 19th century justification for our current



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system of governance has disappeared. Accordingly, the Board believes that the present governance model is outdated and anachronistic in the context of the increasingly multicultural society of 21st century Alberta. Further, the Board believes that the current system of governance has created a competitive school system that is fiscally inefficient and, at least in parts of rural Alberta, has diminished the viability of existing schools and inflicted significant damage on local communities. Please also note that the Board sees public funding for private school education as being unnecessary in its proposed new governance model and therefore recommends the removal of such funding.

3. In keeping with the recommendations of both the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA) and the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA), the Board supports the granting of natural person powers to school boards. This would give to school boards the same legal rights and privileges that are enjoyed by individuals (persons, people) in Alberta. The Board notes that, at present, the only class of organization in Alberta without natural person powers is school jurisdictions: they may only do that which the law specifically allows them to do.
4. The Board supports the need for a financial connection to the local community so that the public can respond to locally agreed-upon mandates and provide long-term solutions to community needs and requirements. This should not have a negative impact upon equitable access and funding of the provincial programming mandated to all public school boards throughout the province.
5. In keeping with the recommendation of the ASBA, the Board believes that a school board should have the unfettered authority to hire its own superintendent of schools. The Board contends that the present system, in which a corporate legal entity (ie board of school trustees) does not have the sole authority to hire its own superintendent of schools, is unreasonable in the extreme. Further, the present system diminishes the extent to which a board's superintendent of schools is responsible to his or her employer, in that the superintendent of schools also carries a level of responsibility to the authority that has approved his or her appointment.
6. The Board believes that the minimum school leaving age should be raised to eighteen years of age, or the age at which the student graduates from high school, whichever occurs first. The present minimum school leaving age is outdated in that it fails to reflect the importance of obtaining an education in today's society, it is inconsistent with the body of educational research that supports an increase in the minimum school leaving age, and it is out of step with the growing number of educational authorities that have already raised the minimum school leaving age.

Finally the Red Deer Public Board of Trustees is pleased to advise you that it supports, in its entirety, the submission already presented to you by the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta.

Honourable Dave Hancock
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Thank you for giving consideration to our submission. Please accept our best wishes as you engage in the challenging, but important, task of initiating revisions to the School Act.

Sincerely,

Dr Bill Stuebing
Chair - Board of Trustees

cc: Cal Dallas - MLA Red Deer South
Honourable Mary Anne Jablonski - MLA Red Deer North
Alberta MLAs
ASBA Board of Directors
PSBAA Executive Committee
Chairs - Alberta School Boards