

## **Minister Hancock's Address to the 91<sup>st</sup> ATA ARA**

### **Frank Bruseker:**

Ladies and gentlemen, it's a real pleasure for me today to introduce to you our Minister of Education, Dave Hancock. I know that some of you had the opportunity to meet with the Minister last night. He had a bit of a reception for teachers who arrived early yesterday evening, and many of you took the opportunity to have a chat with him. And I think that's a real tribute to the Minister – that he would come and join us, and we're very pleased and honoured, Minister, that you could join us.

The Minister is in his fourth term as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. He was sworn in as Minister of Education just after this most recent election that was held on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. He's had previous ministerial experience in a number of portfolios, including Minister of Health and Wellness, Advanced Education, Justice and Attorney General, and Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. In addition to being the Minister for Education, he's also the Government House Leader, which I know keeps him very busy when the session is on, as it is at the moment.

Minister Hancock is a lawyer by profession, but don't hold that against him: he's married to a teacher, so he continues to get educated on a regular basis and that's a good thing. [Laughter] But the Minister has been very eager to meet with teachers – you had one meeting with Provincial Executive Council and I'm sure we're going to hear more about that. And so, Mr. Minister, I would invite you to come forward and share some thoughts with the members here today.

[Applause]

### **Minister Hancock:**

Well thank you very much for the honour and privilege of having the opportunity to join with you today – and to say thank you, to start by saying thank you. Because I know you represent teachers across the province who are passionate about what they do, and you do such important work in terms of the future. In fact, I saw the banner up there – “The Future: It's Why Teachers Teach” – and I think that's so important.

I want to just thank my colleagues Janice Sarich, the Parliamentary Assistant and MLA for Edmonton-Decore and Teresa Woo-Paw, the member for Calgary-Mackay, for joining us this morning. If you have any really tough questions or messages that you want to pass on, the two of them would be more than happy to hear from you while they're here. [Laughter]

And Keray Henke and our staff from Alberta Education – I've had the privilege of working with them directly now for a little over a month. Or is it two months? It seems like time goes by so fast. And I can tell you that we've got very dedicated people. I'm absolutely privileged to be able to work with the people in the Department of Education who are committed to learning as well.

We're off to a great start in this term, for me. I've had the opportunity now, as Frank mentioned, to meet with PEC Council fairly early on to get some... instruction? as to where we needed to go. Guidance – guidance.

## Minister Hancock's Address to the 91<sup>st</sup> ATA ARA

But it was a good meeting. A good opportunity to really talk about what's important as we go forward and to share – as I like to say – to share our biases about what we think needs to be done. I also had an opportunity to meet with Frank and Gordon [Thomas, ATA Executive Secretary] and Keray as we start the process outlined under the [unfunded liability agreement](#) to really work together collaboratively on the future of education in our province.

And it is wonderful to be here with so many teachers. As Frank mentioned, I come from a family of teachers. My mom was a teacher all of her life but passed away a year or two ago – actually, just spring of 2006 as we were launching the leadership process. She did say to me that she thought I'd make a good Premier. [Laughter]

But I know in her heart of hearts, as a long time legislator, what she really wanted me to do was to be Minister of Education. And so I'm very pleased to have that portfolio, because I think education is foundational. Education is really about the foundation of where we're going and what we're doing. And so there could be no more important place for me to put my shoulder to the wheel as far as I'm concerned, being right here with you making sure our children have the opportunity to maximize their potential and to succeed. [Applause]

I mentioned my mother right off the top, because I've been very fortunate in my life to be taught by some of the best educators in our province. My mother, of course, is foundational. As we lived in small communities – and I wasn't in all of these – but through northern Canada, places like Osdenberg House, Peckanjikum, right through to Hazelton, Fort Vermilion, La Crete. I'm the youngest of seven children and all of us have a post-secondary education. That doesn't happen unless you've got a real commitment to education from family and community. And I had the benefit of that real commitment to education. And so I've made that commitment part of my passion for life. My sister is a teacher as well, just retired. My wife is a junior high school principal. My son teaches Grade 3, has for the last nine years. Education is really part of my family, my passion and my philosophy.

So this is really like coming home, and I hope that you will work with me, as I know you will, as we think about what kind of a future we can have for our children, what kind of future we can have for our province. And what we need to do to get there.

With the unfunded liability agreement in place and the contracts in place over the next five years, I look at the time that I have as Minister of Education – and I don't know how long that will be. I haven't been able to keep a job so far. [Laughter] But that shows you have to be adaptive in education because you can change careers from time to time.

But I think that over the next five years we have a real opportunity, a real opportunity to shape the future of education, and develop the [policy frameworks](#). And then to understand what is needed to implement those policy frameworks to make sure that Alberta's students, their children and their grandchildren, can live in Alberta and work in Alberta out into the world in a knowledge-based economy and to be global citizens. And there could be nothing more important than that.

## **Minister Hancock's Address to the 91<sup>st</sup> ATA ARA**

We can have that wonderful opportunity and we can seize that wonderful opportunity if we agree to work collaboratively on the big picture and then on how we implement it. It's only through those collaborative efforts that we can help our students experience success in learning and success in life.

It doesn't require that we agree on everything. But it does mean that we have to be able to share our thoughts frankly and openly and work together to put new ideas into practice.

And I want to work with you to help students find their passions and discover their enthusiasm for learning.

I want to work with you to grow our students into caring and contributing citizens.

I want to work with you to ensure that our students develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that they need to be successful in a global knowledge economy.

I want to work with you so that we can help each child overcome their barriers to success and achieve his or her potential.

We need to focus on students' needs for the next five years, ten years, twenty years. And we have the opportunity. We have the opportunity to step back from the issues of the day to look at the bigger picture and the longer term and to set in place that policy framework that will help us achieve that success.

I'm a big fan of policy frameworks. I believe that any decision you make without a policy framework in place is ad hoc. It doesn't mean that they're not good decisions, but there's been lots of ad hoc decisions that have been made from which good didn't result. But if we don't know where it is that we want to go, we're not going to achieve our best potential.

A school system that prepares students for the decades ahead is one that in my view prepares them for a learning society, one where citizens are engaged, inquisitive, self-starting problem solvers. What we need to do is ask how we can best provide the supports students need to overcome their own barriers, rather than to make them jump over our barriers.

I'm also a firm believer in a consultative approach to developing public policy. We need to engage the stakeholders, which means we have to first understand who the stakeholders are. We need to engage our communities. And of course, we need to involve teachers who are all the ones who spend more time with our children than many times even their parents do. This is the best possible way in my view of ensuring that our education system meets the real needs of our students.

## Minister Hancock's Address to the 91<sup>st</sup> ATA ARA

I believe, and I know many of you do, that our education system is already world-leading. But we can and we should make it better. We do have to remain current and we do have to be looking to the horizon. It's not about being number one so that we can beat our chests and say "we're world leaders" or "we're number one." It's about making sure that our children have the opportunity to succeed in a global economy that's knowledge-based and the opportunity to be citizens of the world.

Having talked about policy frameworks, that's not to suggest there aren't any issues we'll have to deal with along the way. Obviously, there are.

In my [mandate letter](#), it clearly identifies access to early learning, particularly for at-risk students, as being a priority. And if I could pick one priority at which to succeed, I think it would be this one. So much of the groundwork of success or failure of many of our students is laid before they even approach a classroom.

I'm open to considering how we work with our children ages zero to six. And we've started that discussion with Janice Tarchuk in Children and Youth Services and Ron Liepert in Health – actually, we started it when I was in Health and Ron was in Education, but now we're continuing it the other way around – to talk about how we deal with early learning opportunities and how we deal with those barriers to success that children may have.

This is not new to me – I've been a sponsor of a golf tournament for Success by 6 for the last eight years to raise both funds and friends for the concept that our children need to be ready by age six to go to school.

When I talk about children at risk, I mean that in the broadest sense. They're not simply identified by the children from an inner-city area or socioeconomic status, but it's also defined by medical barriers, physical barriers, whatever challenges a student might have. Those are the issues that we need to deal with so that we can overcome those barriers, so that they can find their passion. We can help them access the tools they need to help them be as successful as they can be.

That concept of success for all students is not just a catchphrase. It's what you as educators entered the profession to do, and it's what I as Minister am committed to trying to achieve and attain.

As those of you who are here who are working in the classroom well know, the diversity of our student population makes this easier said than done. We must ensure that our educational system can acknowledge the different needs and backgrounds of our students and is flexible enough to respond effectively. That's particularly true for our children at risk.

## Minister Hancock's Address to the 91<sup>st</sup> ATA ARA

I had the opportunity and privilege of being the Minister for Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs early on in my career. I know that our Aboriginal population is growing at a rapid pace, and I know that when I was Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs we brought in a cross-ministry goal that Aboriginal people should have the same socioeconomic status as all other Albertans. We're nowhere near that. We are with individuals, certainly, but not as a collective group.

I know what will make that happen fundamentally is the right approach to education that ensures that every Aboriginal child has the opportunity to get an education in the manner and of the type that they need to be successful.

We're doing a lot of good work, but a lot more needs to be done. The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing segment of our student population. It's absolutely important that we help them be able to maximize their own personal potentials and succeed.

The whole special needs area is a topic I know that we're going to be dealing with over the next two years. It's a very, very important area. We had the review last fall, the information has been gathered, and what it has clearly exhibited is that we've got a lot of work to do on developing an appropriate [policy framework](#) with respect to special needs and an appropriate funding framework to follow it. [Applause]

Some of you last night were talking to me about this and I had to say it's not as simple as just adjusting the funding framework. If we adjust the funding framework on the current model, it won't work any better than the current model does. We need to take the time, we need to work with you as the people in the classroom who are dealing with special needs students and stakeholders across the province to get the policy framework right and then to get the funding model for that policy framework right.

We've started that process. I was at a conference with CASS a week ago Thursday, I believe it was, where we started the discussion about what a new policy framework would look like and outlined a work plan that will get us there, involving you, involving stakeholders in the community in that discussion about creating the new policy framework.

We need to continue to improve our participation rates and our [completion rates](#). We're making progress but again, there's more to be done. Eighty percent of the new jobs in a knowledge-based economy that will be created will require some form of post-secondary education. And we need to ensure that our students are inspired to complete high school and transition to that post-secondary education. We need to be able to have the robust nature of a school and passionate teachers who inspire children to succeed to get there. We're doing it in a time frame where there are many challenges, but it is something that's possible and it is something that's necessary.

## Minister Hancock's Address to the 91<sup>st</sup> ATA ARA

We know from the research that's been done some of the factors that go into that – not just the robust programming, although that's important, or paying attention to the transitions that students have in their lives, that's very important. But one thing that jumps out time and again when you talk about students who succeed: they had a role model and a mentor who made a difference to them. And more often than not, that's been a teacher. Any person that I've talked to who has gone through to a successful conclusion to their lives – well, I don't talk to people who have had a conclusion to their lives [Laughter] – Mackenzie King!

But when I talk to people who do what they're passionate about and who believe themselves to be successful, virtually every one of them can talk about a teacher who inspired them at some time in their life. That's the important role that you and the people who you represent play in this process. You know that – you don't need me to tell you that. But I hope you'll work with me to make sure that our community and our society knows that.

Because the other thing that is very important to me during my time as Minister of Education is about making sure that as a society we value our teaching professionals. I've mentioned a few times in the past our Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal communities put a high regard on their elders. And if you examine the Aboriginal community, they don't have that high regard for their elders just because they're old. They have that high regard for their elders because historically and traditionally elders had the knowledge which was absolutely essential to be passed on so the society could continue to exist and live. It was the educator they were valuing, not the old (not to say we shouldn't revere our old).

In our modern society, that's the reverence we should have for our teaching professionals and our educators. And that's why one of the goals that I have in my role as Minister of Education is to raise that view in our community, in our government and across our province. [Applause]

No education system is better than its teachers. We need to ensure that we have student-centred and child-centred professionals with the right skills in the right places. One of the reasons we have one of the best educational systems in the world is because we have some of the best teachers in the world. And any successful person can point to those teachers, as I mentioned. That's what good teachers do – they make a difference in children's lives.

I've been in elected office now for eleven years. I can go through the community in south Edmonton that I represent. When my wife goes with me – which my wife and family often do not because it takes far too long to do anything because I have to stop and talk to everybody – but when they do, I can tell you this: more people stop to talk to my wife than stop to talk to me.

The reason is because she taught them in Grade 6. And that was a long time ago! (I'm not telling any secrets about my wife's age!) But that's the impact that a strong, committed, caring, passionate teacher can have on a child and a child's success. My dentist is one of my wife's Grade 6 students. That's the impact that teachers have in our community.

## Minister Hancock's Address to the 91<sup>st</sup> ATA ARA

We need to continue to attract the best and the brightest to a teaching profession, because it's a noble profession, because it matters, because it's more than just the pocketbook (although people do have to pay their bills). But it's more than the pocketbook. It's about how we have a teaching profession that is respected and acknowledged, because it is about how we create the future, how we create a province where our children and our grandchildren continue to be Albertans because they are able to trade out into the world in a knowledge-based economy, they have the knowledge, skills and attributes to be able to do that, they can be citizens of the world and live in a province that has the best quality of life.

Quality of life comes from a good environment, it comes from a great health system, it comes from the indicators of culture and value, but it comes from a place where parents want to live because it's where their children can get that best education.

We can do that. [The Excellence in Teaching Awards](#) which I've had the privilege of participating in over the past few weeks are one way. But we need to find more ways over the course of the next few years to really raise the bar in terms of how we view our teaching professionals in our community. [Applause]

And we need to raise the bar inside our profession and inside our education system so that teachers can remain passionate about what they do and remain passionate about their classrooms. That means removing the burrs under the saddle. It means providing the support services that are necessary – I call them wrap-around services – so that when a child brings their home life, their community life to school, that we're not expecting the teacher in the classroom to bear that whole burden themselves – that we're providing the services necessary to help children through their issues, whether it's family breakdown or loss, whether it's the bullying issues, whether it's having a safe and caring community, whether it's the drug issues.

Whatever issues they're bringing to school, we need to focus on the school as the portal for that child to their family and community. We need to make sure those supports services are there so that teachers can be passionate and caring in their classroom and committed educators, so that we can avoid the burnout that happens when it's too difficult to come to work every day. [Applause]

I know that many of you are looking at the concept of age 55 – the thirty years – saying “that's my retirement goal.” I aim for an opportunity to have teachers who do not want to leave teaching because they're making a huge difference, they're passionate about what they're doing. They're not looking for a change in career because the career that they have is so compelling.

I think we can do that, and I'm here today to work with you, to ask you to work with me, on that journey to make sure that we focus on our children, that we make sure that our children are first, to make sure that in our schools, in our classrooms, in our education system, that making sure that our focus is that every child can find what they're good at.

Every child has some talent. Every child can be successful. Every child can achieve to their own potential. I know it's a big challenge and a big task, but as passionate professionals and as people who care, you can do it and we can help.

## **Minister Hancock's Address to the 91<sup>st</sup> ATA ARA**

I look forward to working with you together for as long as I have the opportunity here. I trust it will be at least one more year, so I hope you'll invite me back next year.

Thank you so much.

[Applause]