

**Dave Hancock, Minister of Education**

**Inspiring Education – Fall Forum**

**Closing Remarks – Check against delivery**

**Tuesday October 20, 2009**

I want to start by thanking you for your participation in *Inspiring Education*.

Whether this is your first attendance at one of our conversations – or a continuation of the input you have been providing about the future of education – all of you here today – and those who could not attend, but who provided input online or in community forums – have helped make this initiative a true dialogue with Albertans.

*Inspiring Education* has never been about a traditional government consultation. With this initiative, we have taken a very different approach from what we've done in the past.

The “Dialogue With Albertans” intended to engage Albertans in an authentic process. (and as we heard - it all starts with conversation)

The process challenged participants to share your ideas and experiences, and asked you to listen to and consider the perspectives of others. The process will give us the kind of insight we need to create an education system that will meet the hopes, dreams and aspirations of all Albertans.

An overwhelming number of participants have come away from these sessions with a real sense of hope ... a feeling of being “inspired”, despite the considerable challenges of their personal circumstances.

Of special note were the focused conversations aimed at individuals who have unique perspectives and who may otherwise not have an equal opportunity to provide in the Dialogue process.

We have heard that people were grateful for the opportunity to tell their stories, to have a voice, to be involved and finally to have an impact on the future of education in this province. The results of these conversations have provided powerful evidence of the importance of one of the main goals of the Inspiring Education project – to engage ALL Albertans in a far-reaching, community-based conversation about the importance and the future of education.

In addition to you, there are a number of other people that have helped make *Inspiring Education* a success and I would like to take a few moments to acknowledge their efforts.

The Inspiring Education Steering Committee continues to guide the project and be its ambassadors in our local communities. With the project's Working Committee, they will be the authors of the broad outlines of a policy framework that results from this dialogue.

Our committee has 22 members from across the province – most of who have been circulating amongst you – engaging you and absorbing the proceedings.

Like everyone participating in the Dialogue with Albertans, they shed their traditional roles of being representatives of a group or organization. Instead, they are engaged as individuals who bring a variety of perspectives to the conversation: culture, family, geography, education, community volunteering, work and life-experience.

The Working Committee has worked hard. I know sometimes you have been frustrated with a process that evolved and was new to us all – but I thank you for your patience and your contributions. Your involvement to date has been meaningful and authentic – I wouldn't expect anything else. I know that I can count on your continued engagement towards meaningful change towards a positive future for education.

I also want to acknowledge work to date of the Project Team comprised of Education staff with very able support from Culture and Community Spirit. The project Team has provided the technical and operational support, and have laboured long and hard over the course of the past year.

I want to single out just briefly - one person who was core to our policy development process, providedg critical direction and thinking in designing our policy processes and in educating us in policy development. Russell Carr passed away in August. We have a huge sense of loss, not only of a friend and mentor but as our guru. He leaves a legacy not only in Education but across government in the many areas where he was providing his own inimitable leadership in shaping and inspiring policy development.

Our cultural entertainment has inspired conversation and demonstrated the creativity and depth of our youth.

Inspirational thinking and a discussion of innovative ideas was certainly a great way to wind up this part of the public engagement process, so I would like to thank the keynote speakers we have listened to during the past three days:

**Dr. Jennifer James:** challenges us in so many ways. Moving from fate to choice requires a whole different mind, a different mythology. She indicated that we need story - a set of ideas that fit the current marketplace, that resonate with deeply held values, and the people telling the stories have to be believable have energy commitment and integrity. She said so much more. Many of us will go home confident in our higher order society - we have moved beyond hunter gatherer and at least use tools.

**Dr. Mark Milliron,** left us with Transcendental Learning, involving Creative learning, Critical learning, Courageous learning and Social learning and talked about interesting transformations like North Carolina moving from Tobacco, furniture and mining to biotech and nanotech. He addressed the important issue of ensuring that it does not become about the technology - it is about how we use the technology creatively and ethically but in a human context and ended saying "our students need our spirit more than ever before. They need us to put in our time, our effort, our patience, our kindness, our care, and our love to their learning journeys."

**Daniel H. Pink**, gave us hope, us right brain thinkers, that at last our time has come. (for me also hope that there is life beyond political speeches). He challenged us to prepare our students for their future not our past. (We are all experts in education because we went 30 years ago). He talked of design, story symphony, empathy, play and meaning. He warned us that the Albertan in 2029 would not do work which could be done with formula or computer code - no routine work - because of Asia, Automation and abundance. And he left us to Explore new metrics, Get real about Stem, rethink motivation, have more forests and less terrariums, and infuse Arts education throughout the curriculum move from ornamental to fundamental.

**Dr. Indira Samarasekera**, connected it all to today. She emphasized the need for every Albertan to Opt In, that we cannot afford to lose one, that we must engage. And her story about the grad student asking can anyone answer my questions. leaving us with the real challenge - students asking the questions for which we don't have the answers and then working with them to find those answers.

These last three days have been a year in the making.

What an incredible journey this has been for all of us.

If I had to pick a wrap-up song for this part of *Inspiring Education*, I think it would have to be Johnny Cash's "*I've been everywhere man.*"

Inspiring Education has engaged people from all over Alberta.

During the course of our meetings, we've been to:

- Edmonton
- Grande Prairie
- Fort McMurray
- Lethbridge
- Calgary
- Medicine Hat
- Bonnyville
- Red Deer

If those meetings have convinced me of only one thing, it is this:

Albertans truly value their education system and they clearly realize that education is the key to our future prosperity as well as our social cohesion.

Though this is the windup of this part of Inspiring Education, more work lies ahead.

To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill, this is not the end – this is only the end of the beginning.

We are now going to undertake a long, involved, complex journey toward the vision of the desired future for education you have been instrumental in helping create.

Because of you – we have some very bold and courageous ideas that can be used to fundamentally change education during the next twenty years.

Because of you – because of those that took part in Setting the Direction – and because of the students who took part in Speak Out! – we now know the shape of our desired destination.

But in moving toward our desired future, we must always remember that we are explorers not travelers.

We will be charting the future – not following a well-worn path.

Arriving at our desired destination will require creating a map as we go.

Our movement toward the future is not only going to be challenging – it's likely to be a little frightening – as it always is when moving through unknown territory.

Creating the kind of change we envision will not be easy.

Convincing others to follow us will require concentrated and effective communication.

Moving away from a focus on content to a focus on skills, abilities and competencies will require us to rethink just about everything we do in education.

Deeply integrating education into – and with – the community, the environment and the real world will demand that we reach out far beyond the current boundaries of our education system.

Building an educational system that is truly student– and learning– centered will not be an easy task.

We may stumble upon the way.

We may have to retrace our steps.

We may have to check our direction.

But if we remain committed to our vision, I have no doubt that we will reach our ultimate goal – creating an education system that will enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, attributes and behaviours they will need for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When I was a child growing up in the north, a sure sign that the season was changing were the flocks of geese that called to each other as they passed overhead.

Those geese came to mind as I was preparing my notes for winding up our activities today.

I think we have something to learn from them.

It is not by chance that geese use the V formation when they are flying.

Each bird flies behind another.

The bird in front reduces the resistance for the bird behind and allows that bird to conserve energy on a long and hard flight.

We are going to have to do that for each other – we are going to need energy to get where we want to go.

By working together, we will create and shepherd that kind of energy.

When you look at geese in flight, you can see that there is always a leader at the head of the flock that keeps it headed in the right direction.

To get to where we want to go, we are going to need strong and committed leaders who can remind us of our destination and remind us of the way.

But different challenges call for different kinds of leadership.

As geese fly, the leader often drops back to be replaced by another member of the flock – each bird in its turn becomes the leader for a particular part of their long and arduous journey.

Inspiring Education is not my process. I started it, but I do not own it. Your leadership and your ownership are what will take us to a better place.

Reaching out to the community will require a unique kind of leadership.

Making curricula reflect the real world will require a unique kind of leadership.

Learning to measure the system on the outcomes of education rather than the specific results in school is going to take a unique kind of leadership.

And integrating the education system into all of the other aspects in which society raises its children is going to take a unique kind of leadership.

We are all going to have to be willing to take over the lead as circumstances require.

And we are all going to have to be willing to fall back and let those best able to lead to guide us during our journey.

As we set out on our journey toward the future, we are going to travel over a lot of land we have seen before and resist the temptation to stop and stay where it is familiar and comfortable.

Our collective work on *Inspiring Education, Setting the Direction and Speak Out!* has enabled us to envision the education system of the future, and make valuable contributions as we work on revising the School Act.

I ask you now to continue to work with me and all of those who value the education of our children.

Now is the time to begin changing our vision into our reality.

Now is the time to be innovative and creative.

Now is the time to be bold and courageous

Now is the time to soar.

Thank you.