



The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools

Input to Proposed Changes

Alberta School Act

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#240, 688 Heritage Drive S.E.
Calgary, Alberta T2H 1M6

Presented by: Jay Pritchard and Judy Gray
Co-Chairs, TAAPCs
403-520-3206

Introduction

Members of The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools (TAAPCS) participated in several initiatives to prepare themselves for involvement in a review of the current School Act; charter school superintendents who are members of CASS, and charter school secretary-treasurers who are members of ASBOA have had their voices heard within the context of those Associations' joint initiative in sponsoring a forum to review the School Act. The conclusions identified in the "CASS-ASBOA Membership Input Alberta School Act" document (See Attached) are largely supported by TAAPCS with the additional comments outlined below.

TAAPCS members and schools have contributed individually to the "Inspiring Education" dialogue, and one of the Association's Co-chairs served on the "governance" subcommittee of "Dialogue's" Working Committee. Individual members and schools also contributed to the work of "Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta" through participation in focus groups and submission of briefs.

TAAPCS Executive has engaged in on-going discussion about the potential impacts of these initiatives on the operation of charter schools. Within this context, and at the direction of the membership, the Executive undertook a review of the current school act with the intent of providing leadership and support to schools as they prepared their individual submissions regarding changes to the School Act.

Recommendations

TAAPCS suggests that:

- The concepts of choice continue to be embedded in the Act.
- The ideas associated with charter schools as centres of research and innovation is included.
- The new Act provides for the inclusion of wrap-around services for students and families (i.e. cooperation and coordination among various departments of Government, as well as NGO's).
- The new Act is re-written to include delegation of authority to charter school superintendents (current Section 61).
- The processes for implementing compulsory school attendance for students are made more effective.
- The section of the Act dealing with the appointment of the Charter superintendent is changed to reflect that the superintendent's accountability to the Board.
- The Act clarifies the distinction between a "school authority" and a "school jurisdiction".
- There is clarity in terminology regarding "public" schools vs. "charter public schools".

- Section 37 is amended by adding a subsection empowering the Minister to make regulations respecting the appointment of charter board members; further, that the regulation include provision for the Minister to appoint all members of charter boards.
- “Inclusive education” is interpreted within the context of the specific mandate approved by the Minister of Education for each charter school.
- The sections of the Act regarding charter schools are re-written to reflect that “the experiment is over”. (Specifically, the notions associated with choice, enrolment caps, five year terms, the accountability processes currently employed, limits on the number of charter schools, accessing capital funding, the value of autonomous governance, etc.) While it is recognized that much of this is regulatory, it is important that it be included on a go-forward basis.

Conclusions

The Association of Alberta Public Schools appreciates the opportunity to provide input to Alberta Education as change to the School Act is contemplated. As a public school organization, TAAPCS is united with CASS and ASBOA in the majority of the conclusions reached at their forum; however, it is also recognized that it is vital to have legislation “catch up” with the unique set of legislative and regulatory circumstances that attend charter schools. This is an opportunity not to be missed, and we thank you for your consideration of our thoughts.

Conclusions

The review of the responses from the *Review of the School Act* Forum and the results of the survey would indicate the following key ideas should be incorporated into the CASS and/or ASBOA positions relative to the new Act.

1. The new Act must be based on clearly defined, unambiguous principles; however, it must also include specifics on the services and resources school systems are to provide to students and on the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders in the education system.
2. The new Act should be more enabling and less restrictive than the current act. It must be broad enough to enable public education to meet the increasingly diverse needs of its citizens. This could be done through a commitment to “inclusive education”, through a commitment to the provision of alternate forms of the delivery of educational services or both.

There should be opportunities for school boards to engage in broad range activities, such as borrowing funds for capital project or initiating services and supports for students, which are not specifically mentioned in the Act.

The commitment to “inclusive education” should not place public education at a “competitive disadvantage” with those groups that wish to have an “exclusive” education within the public education system. The Act must require those institutions that access full public funding be obligated to allow all students to participate in all programs or schools.

3. There must be a commitment to local autonomy clearly stated in the Act. This may be in the form of a principle that states that persons in local jurisdictions are in the best position to determine the unique needs of their students. One outcome of this principle would be the provision that local jurisdictions are able to hire their superintendents without Ministerial approval.
4. The new Act must state the appropriate role for school boards is a governance role, based on the belief that the school board formulates local policies and the administration enacts those policies.