

PEACE WAPITI PUBLIC SCHOOL DIVISION No. 76

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CENTRAL OFFICE

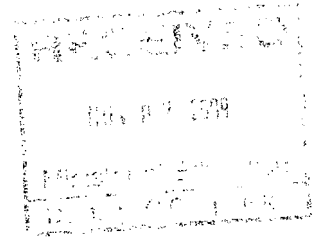
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October 29, 2009

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



Dear Minister:

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in dialogue relating to the proposed changes to the School Act. Peace Wapiti School Division (PWSD) has taken extensive advantage of this opportunity and has supported its trustees' involvement in discussions hosted by PSBA, ASBA and the Minister's "Inspiring Education". In addition to the submissions that you will receive from our provincial association, PWSD would like to provide input relating to the following areas:

1) **Values**

As the Minister has indicated that the new legislation is intended to be an enabling, overarching framework for the broad governance of the education system, it is vital that the legislation provide clear understanding and direction in terms of the values the legislation is based on, and the role that public schools are expected to fulfill within the education system of Alberta. Currently, the "Inspiring Education" documentation identifies the following values as key values upon which a new school act will be based: opportunity, fairness, citizenship, choice, diversity, and excellence. From PWSD's perspective, it is understood that any definition of these values should include the following concepts:

- a. **Opportunity** - every learner has the opportunity to achieve their potential and our education system works to reduce, and where possible eliminate, the barriers that occur to a student achieving his or her potential. These barriers include, but are not limited, to learning styles, socio-economic background, geography, and race.
- b. **Fairness**- every student has access to the programming that they require in order to meet the entrance requirements of Alberta's post secondary institutions and meet the accountability standards set by Alberta Education. It needs to be recognized that this opportunity to a basic equitable level of programming may impact choice. Providing too much choice in an area with a small population will

divide the already limited resources and ultimately reduce the quality of the educational program that rural divisions are able to offer.

- c. **Citizenship** - every child needs to develop an understanding of the role citizens play in a democratic society and be prepared to contribute to their community on a political, social, and economic level.
- d. **Choice** - students learn in different ways, have different needs, and families have differing definitions of a successful educational experience; however, a focus on choice can also result in undermining other key values such as fairness, diversity, and excellence. Thus, the new legislation must enable and support a public education which is all inclusive to provide a variety of programs, which meets the needs of all students and families and does not result in the segregation of students based on socio-economic background, race or learning abilities. In addition, any choice which is offered must be accessible to all students and have accountability systems that assure Albertans the choice offered provides an opportunity for excellence and reflects Alberta Education standards.
- e. **Diversity** - every child should be welcome into an inclusive, safe, learning environment, which demonstrates respect for the differences within Alberta's cultural fabric, socio-economic groupings, gender or sexual orientation. The value of diversity needs to speak to the diversity which should exist in the classroom and not to "exclusive" schools where parents send students so they can be with others just like themselves.
- f. **Excellence** - every child has the right to the supports and resources to pursue excellence. These supports include not only highly trained people such as teachers and principals, but also the infrastructure and equipment necessary to support instruction.

2) The Mission Statements

The legislation should include a mission statement for the role of public school jurisdictions which makes it clear that public school jurisdictions are fully funded, fully inclusive and governed locally by elected representatives. A second mission statement should be included for education systems that receive public funds, but are exclusive to students. Developing two mission statements would make it clear that the role of providing an education which is equitable and open to all, is fulfilled by the public jurisdictions, while the role of providing programs which are based on some form of exclusion, is a role filled by non-public jurisdictions.

3) The Governance Framework

- a. Over the last 20 years PWSD communities have seen significant changes in the educational needs of their children and we expect to see significant changes in the future. Thus, school boards will need to be given the power and the flexibility to address the new educational issues as they arise. The new legislation needs to empower those local school boards with the ability to engage in agreements with other institutions which provide services to our students so that the evolving needs of children can be met. While the new legislation should be written to enable the

school boards to address the education needs of the local community they serve, it should be respectful of the partnership that exists between the province and the school board in the provision of these education services. To achieve this, the new legislation needs to include a clear mandate for each level of government and an assurance to access the resources necessary to support the mandate.

- b. **Coterminous Boundaries** - The new legislation should support public schools to allow non operating 4X4s to be made coterminous with operating public school divisions so that each public school division would only be comprised of one public school district. The concept of 4X4 was a construct of the late 1800's and no longer has relevance given the improved transportation systems. Eliminating these old 4X4s would improve public schools flexibility in adapting to the needs of rural communities. In addition, separate school jurisdictions should align with public school jurisdictions to support clear collaboration. Currently, some separate school systems span multiple public systems and consequently when seeking collaboration with public systems, develop multiple individual partnerships with varying responsibilities and expectations.
- c. **Superintendent** - PWSB believes that the authority to hire the superintendent should be returned to the locally elected board. The current requirement of seeking the approval of the Minister is unique to the K-12 education sector and is not a requirement of post secondary institutions, or municipalities. If a board is to take on the responsibilities associated with local governance, then it also needs the authority to select its CEO.
- d. **Local Programming** - While the new legislation should make the province responsible for the creation of a provincial wide curriculum available to all students, it should also support local school boards in their work to create locally developed courses which meet the needs of their communities and students. The legislation relating to locally developed courses should be enabling and not support further regulations which are either prescriptive in the development of local options or require significant amounts of monitoring and red tape.
- e. **First Nations Agreements** - The new legislation should support the development of one tri-party agreement between INAC, Representatives from Treaties 6, 7, 8, and Alberta Education. The agreement would be constructed so that school boards receive the same per student funding from Alberta Education for federal students as they do for provincial students. This agreement would also allow local boards and bands to enter into agreements for enhanced educational services. Approaching this partnership on a provincial level would stabilize the funding which is currently being provided to boards which are serving federal students. In addition, it would remove a potential area of conflict from the local level and allow boards to focus on the educational needs of all students living within their communities.
- f. **Local Bargaining** -The business of running school jurisdictions is best managed at the local level and local bargaining is part of that package. Local bargaining provides locally elected school boards the necessary flexibility in decision making to address the needs and priorities of its staff and the community the board serves. While the opportunity for conflict is real, approached as a business tool, the bargaining process provides opportunity for valuable communication and

understanding. PWSD's success in fiscal management is a bi-product of a good working relationship between the board and all staff fostered through constructive local bargaining. Moving this responsibility to a provincial level will restrict the board's ability to address local issues and will increase our staff members' perception that the province and not the local board is their employer.

4) Safe and Caring

The new legislation needs to support school boards in the provision of a safe and caring environment for all students. The legislation will need to enable school boards to require risk assessments for some students who have a history of violence and to enforce requirements such as anger management courses and counselling for students whose behaviour has indicated they are a danger to others. In addition, when dealing with students whose behaviour represents a threat to others, boards need to have the flexibility to extend an expulsion past the end of the school year and into the following school year.

5) Defining Roles

New legislation needs to clearly define the roles of administrators, teachers, students and parents.

- a. Legislation relating to administrators should reflect the Principal Practice Guidelines and should also recognize the role of the vice principal in a school.
- b. Legislation relating to teachers should clearly define the role of teachers and should reflect the Teaching Quality Standards.

The Board of Reference is no longer an equitable process for teachers. The standard of carefully considered court decisions has established a monetary formula to compensate employees when the relationship between employee and employer has failed. Where the Board of Reference has the authority to put teachers back into a very uncomfortable and stressful employment situation, it does nothing to serve the teacher or their students. The alternative of a monetary settlement award (as employees in all other fields would have) allows the individual options and choices without financial hardship.

- c. Legislation relating to the students' role needs to be expanded to more effectively address the issue of non-attendance.
- d. Legislation relating to the role of parents should recognize the critical role that parents play as the students' primary educator and as a partner to the school in providing a positive learning experience for children.

Sincerely,

Stacey Pelland
Board Chair



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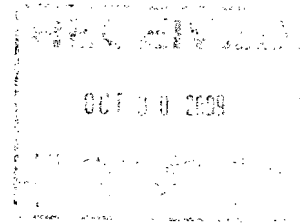
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October 29, 2009

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



Dear Minister:

Re: Charter School Concept

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input relating to the *Charter School Concept Paper*. Any plans to expand the role of charter schools in Alberta must also address the issues currently associated with the charter school movement.

Charter schools are eroding the concept of equitable public education in Alberta. Clause *b*) in the *Concept Paper* states that, "Overall, charter schools appear to have provided enhanced student learning outcomes as compared to other similar schools and as compared to similar students enrolled in other jurisdiction types." While it is unclear how this conclusion was reached, it may not be surprising given the funding advantages that charter schools have received.

Some of the funding concerns relating to charter schools include:

- 1) *Administrative Funding*: Public school boards generally administer many schools, while most charter school boards operate a single school. Charter schools are being treated like small boards by necessity and get additional administrative grants, while their administrative load is far less than many public school boards. In our area the Small Board Administration funding for a charter school of less than 50 students provided an additional \$3800 per student funding.
- 2) *Transportation Funding*: PWSD supports ASBA's position that students who attend 'programs of choice' within the public system receive the same transportation funding support as students who attend charter schools. Currently charter schools get transportation funding for what is essentially a school of choice while public boards that wish to offer transportation to students attending a school of choice cannot access this funding. Given that

public schools of choice welcome *all* children, fair and equitable access to transportation funding is particularly important

- 3) *Per Student Funding:* In 2008, one charter school had a September enrolment of fewer than 50 students and received provincial funding in excess of a million dollars, according to its financial statement on its website. This places the per student cost to the tax payer at a rate that is twice that of the nearby schools. Given that a proposed purpose of a charter school is to test innovations and then encourage the spread of the innovation, then the innovation has to be sustainable in other schools. To be sustainable it would have to be affordable. Funding a charter school at a per student rate that is more than double the per student rate of the local public school creates a situation which is unfair to children attending the public school district. If a charter is established, the funding should be at a rate which reflects the average funding per student at other divisions in the same area/region.
- 4) *Growth and Decline Funding:* Charter schools should not be eligible for growth or decline funding as their growth is a decline in another jurisdiction. This effectively doubles the taxpayers cost.
- 5) *Lease Funding for Charter School:* PWSD is concerned about an anomaly that exists in the current regulation that allows charter schools to have Alberta Education fund the lease of a facility, even though the facility was funded originally by Alberta Education. For example based on the information provided by the charter school web page in our area, the province is funding the lease of a charter school with an area of approximately 1150 square meters, at approximately \$140 per square meter or close to \$1500 per square foot (or over \$3200 per student) in the first year of operation. In addition to this, the province is also providing plant operation funding equivalent to \$60 per square meter (or over \$1300 per student). By comparison, our District received less than half this level of funding for plant operation and maintenance for this same facility less than two year ago.
- 6) *Research Funding:* In addition to the funding advantages noted above, the discussion paper indicates that charter schools would have access to additional funding for research purposes. Any additional funding for research should not be funnelled through the charter school but be transferred directly to the Post Secondary Institution. Funneling it through the charter opens up an opportunity for misdirection of funds. The charter schools only 'gain' from this should be the availability of the 'experts' in their building. If charter schools receive supplies and equipment and staffing to engage in or support the research then they will have an unfair advantage in resources over local public schools – not an equitable distribution of funds. One also wonders if testing that cannot survive a public school environment is worth doing?

I am also concerned about the suggestion in the *Concept Paper* that charter schools serve as provincial innovative education research centres. While the *Paper* acknowledged that the role of charter schools as centres of innovation and distributors of promising practice has "largely not been realized", the *Paper* is predicated on the benefits to be achieved through the expansion of this role. To my knowledge, public school districts in our area have not received any measurable benefit from innovation developed by charter schools. On the other hand, PWSD students have benefited from several innovated projects which have involved other school jurisdictions, post-secondary partners, regional authorities, non-profit societies, public institutions, business organizations, community partners and regional learning consortia. Projects such as the French Language Resource Centre, the Collaborative Course Development Projects, the Online French

10 Course Development Project, the Moodle Collaboration Initiative, Inter-jurisdiction Technology Collaboration Initiative, the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project, the Distance Learning Initiative and the Technology Mediated Learning Project have been highly collaborative and innovative projects that have been effectively shared across the region and the province. In addition to all of these, our AISI projects have allowed us to develop and support the spread of best practice through out our division. All schools should be seen as partners for innovative educational research centres, not only charter schools.

Also within the *Concept Paper* a significant disconnect exists between its major findings and what is suggested in terms of a vision for the future. The *Concept Paper* indicates in clause f) that there is a “need to develop a revised charter school governance model that addresses the legitimate concerns of both the charter schools and other stakeholders in the system”, yet there is no identification of these concerns and the only apparent changes in the governance recommendations relate to extending the term for the schools and broadening the scope of who can create a charter school (non-profit societies, companies, school boards, private schools, post-secondary institutions, public institutions, business organizations, organizational coalitions and/or regional authorities). Basic concerns, such as taking steps to ensure that the charter school regulations are not used to address school closure issues or used for political purposes other than would be reflected in the stated vision for charter schools, need to be addressed.

Finally, the current right of charter schools to be exempt from providing service to special need students is discriminatory, as it allows publically funded charters schools the ability to deny special needs students access to the same educational experiences that non special needs students have. 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. Institutions that access full public funding should to be obligated to allow all students to participate in all programs or schools.

Peace Wapiti is concerned that a growth in charter schools particularly with the continued inequities in funding, governance, location and inclusion, will further erode Alberta’s education system, undermining the goal of equitable education for all students.

We appreciate the opportunity to have our opinions heard. Like you, we believe Alberta students deserve an equitable quality education – our future depends on it.

Sincerely,

Sheldon Rowe
Superintendent of Schools