

## **SPEECH**

**HONOURABLE DAVE HANCOCK**

**MINISTER**

**ALBERTA EDUCATION**

**CASS/ALBERTA EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM 2008**

### **OPENING CEREMONIES**

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RED DEER, AB**

**May 8  
11:50 am**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- Good morning. It's great to be here at the Special Education Symposium.
- I believe most of you were at the CASS Annual Meeting a couple of weeks ago, so you're familiar with my biases and passions around education.
- My position is no different today. I want to reassure you that I understand the challenges you face and appreciate the work you and your staff do each and every day.
- I'm sorry I couldn't be here this morning for Keray's presentation and your comments on the severe disabilities report.
- However, I welcome the opportunity to share time with you and hear your feedback

### **Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta**

- The information we gathered over the past several months has led us to re-evaluate our policy, accountability measures and funding models for special education in Alberta.
- You have a copy of our findings, and now it's time to move on to the next phase.
- Alberta Education has developed a project plan "Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta".
- The project will be led by a Steering Committee that will be announced in the coming weeks.

- This committee will look at the information we've gathered, review best practices and research, and collaborate with you and other stakeholders to set a new direction.
- Your involvement is key to the success of this project. The next two days are the first—but not the only—time we ask you for your input.
- After this symposium, we will be engaging communities across the province to gather additional information.
- We are committed to seeking advice from a wide range of groups, including jurisdiction staff, principals, teachers, advocates, medical professionals and support workers.
- We will also engage in discussions with parents and potentially with students themselves.
- This consultation will help identify specific issues and form a vision and principles to guide rest of our efforts.
- Every opinion counts; every piece of feedback helps shape our future direction.
- From that input, we will prepare a discussion paper which will outline what has been heard so far and propose options for special education in Alberta.
- This paper will be taken to Albertans for their input in 2009.
- Following that second round of consultation, we will develop recommendations for a new special education policy with supporting accountability measures and a funding model.
- We are aiming for this new framework to be implemented in September 2010.
- As you can see, the road ahead is long.
- However, with your input and guidance from our Steering Committee, I'm confident that we'll set a more effective direction for special education in Alberta that ensures continuous, systemic improvement.
- There will be more information forthcoming over the next two days and in the coming months.
- The conference discussion is about doing the right things to serve the students with special needs.
- You heard this morning from Wayne Mackay about how systemic change can invigorate our education system.
- That sets a wonderful context for the rest of your work during this symposium.

- Positive and constructive policy changes are essential to advancing the education of all students, not just students with disabilities
- Sometimes, it is not the amount of dollars that are invested but rather the actions taken to demonstrate ‘doing the right thing.’

### **School Completion Certificate**

- As a department, our commitment to providing students with special needs appropriate supports and recognition is unwavering.
- Every Alberta student must have an equal opportunity for educational success.
- And so, I’d like to conclude my remarks this morning with an announcement.
- I am pleased to finalize a commitment made by my colleague, Ron Liepert, the former Minister of Education, to create a school completion certificate by the end of the 2007-2008 school year.
- Thanks to the good work of many people, we’ve achieved that goal.
- This new certificate of school completion provides meaningful recognition of the achievements of students with significant cognitive disabilities.
- It acknowledges those students with special education needs who work on individualized program plans that may not be able to accumulate enough credits to achieve a high school diploma.
- Many of your schools already include these students in commencement ceremonies.
- This year, those students will be able to participate fully in the ceremony and enjoy the same recognition as their peers — and receive their own certificate.
- Awarding of the school completion certificate follows a simple and straightforward process through our Special Programs branch.
- Beginning May 15, schools will be able to nominate eligible students to receive this certificate.
- In addition, a pilot process has been developed for creation of a Transcript of Student Competencies for implementation over the next two years.
- This will provide further acknowledgement of the students’ skills as they move out of the education system.

- Check out the Alberta Education website on Monday for further details.
- Also, stay tuned next Thursday for the announcement of new funding to enhance supports for students who are blind or visually impaired.
- This new funding reflects our commitment to work with and listen to our stakeholders from across the province.
- As I wrap up here, I just want to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to you for your work to date and your patience on this important issue.
- Your work last year is an important part of our efforts to improve how we educate special needs students.
- It is our passion and caring commitment to help students that drives all of us.
- You've had a packed morning and I'm sure it's time to take a break and share in less formal conversations.
- I look forward to the presentations after lunch and meeting more of you throughout the afternoon.