

## **Minister Hancock's Remarks – *Putting the Public Back in Public Education* Check Against Delivery**

Good evening – and thank you, Heather.

It's great to be here tonight with so many people who share a common and important cause: *Putting the Public Back in Public Education*.

We're incredibly fortunate to have an excellent education system in Alberta – our students' performance and the international interest in how we do teaching and learning are a testament to that.

This world-class system is the result of the hard work and talent of many people, including many who are here tonight.

Education in Alberta is something we rightfully can take pride in.

However, public education in Alberta is perhaps a victim of its own success – we do it so well that people see no need to get involved.

One of the most troubling trends of recent years has been declining interest in school board trustee elections.

This is deeply worrisome to me, because I believe that every Albertan has a stake in what happens in our schools today.

Within most of our lifetimes, today's students will be graduating as full members of our communities, and living and working next to us.

Even from a purely selfish point of view, the education of others matters – just ask the machinist whose co-worker can't read a safety manual.

But we must remember that education exists not just for our students, but for our communities as well.

The bonds of community are founded on a much higher principle than self-interest.

Communities, and therefore education, are about what we can accomplish together, for the benefit of everyone.

That's why we want our students to grow up to be confident, caring, contributing citizens.

We want them to be self-governing –in the dual senses of caring for themselves, and contributing to the governing of our democratic society.

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Barack Obama put it very well when he said, “dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It’s not just quitting on yourself, it’s quitting on your country – and this country needs and values the talents of everyone.”

That’s true everywhere that is democratically governed, and it points to the need for the public engagement with education.

But there’s another compelling reason to put the public back in public education.

I’m convinced that it is only with greater public involvement in education that we will overcome the challenges we face.

As I noted when I began, we have a very good education system.

But there are places where we need to improve – like:

- providing better supports to students with special needs;
- improving First Nations and Metis outcomes; and
- boosting our high school completion rate.

These problems are not acceptable to me or to you.

If we are to succeed in overcoming these problems and offering an even better education to our students, we must welcome into our schools the very communities into which our students will graduate as citizens.

We cannot forget that learning happens everywhere, not just in a classroom, at a school, on a playground or sports field.

We also know that one of the best ways to improve high school completion is for each student to have at least one person in their life – a teacher, a mentor – who cares about them and helps them find their passion.

A great many members of the public can bring their passions, their insights, their skills, and their worldly experience to the task of education.

That’s why *Putting the Public Back in Public Education* is so important and so timely.

The nature of education is changing – students are no longer learning the same things in the same ways.

One thing that will not change is the crucial role of the public in education.

But like education is changing, so is the role of the public.

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We have to ask ourselves if the way we govern our school system needs to change with the times.

I think we all want school boards that do more than just manage the finances and the bus routes.

A school board is that essential piece of self-government, one that puts life into those higher principles that underlie our communities.

I know that invigorating school boards will be a big part of the conversation you'll be having here this weekend.

It's important that Albertans understand the challenges education is facing. I appreciate that all of you are here to help overcome those challenges.

As you are quite aware, it's teachers and parents with children in school who are most engaged in education; we need to increase the level of that engagement.

All of us need to seek input not only from teachers and parents with children in school, but also from the approximately 70 per cent of Albertans who don't have children in the school system.

Their involvement matters, not just because their tax dollars help fund the system, but because all of us have a stake in creating the right foundation for the future.

I'm looking forward to hearing about the outcomes of your discussion.

The feedback and ideas you generate this weekend will help inform the activities of both the Alberta School Boards Association and Alberta Education.

They will also feed into a major initiative that we launched earlier this week – one we call *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans*.

*Inspiring Education* will provoke ongoing public discussion about the value of education as a foundation for the future success of the province.

It will help us to develop a broadly accepted and clear understanding of what it will mean to be an educated Albertan 20 years from now.

We must also look beyond our immediate needs and interests to develop a policy framework which describes the overall direction, principles, and long-term goals for education in Alberta over the next two decades.

With this initiative, we're taking a very different approach from what we've done in the past.

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The dialogue is led by a steering committee, co chaired by MLA Jeff Johnson and teacher Brent McDonough, who is here tonight.

*Inspiring Education* is not a traditional consultation.

It's about listening to a variety of interests and voices to deepen our perspective on education and help develop public understanding and expectations across multiple perspectives.

It assumes we're all learners, not knowers.

This is an important distinction if we're going to engage the broadest possible spectrum of Albertans.

We want to broaden the focus from existing, organized stakeholder points of view to individual perspectives of the community.

We want to engage all Albertans and include new and different perspectives.

*Inspiring Education* is also about putting the public back into public education.

We'll be holding community conversations in eight locations across the province in April, May and June.

We will also have moderated online discussions and conversation toolkits to support an exchange of ideas and hopes for the future of education.

*Inspiring Education* 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.

Just as you're participating here this weekend, I hope you'll actively contribute to Inspiring Education.

Through projects like *Inspiring Education* and *Putting the Public Back in Public Education*, I know we'll be able to make education in Alberta everything we want it to be.

Thank you.