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## December 2011 Issue

### CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN ALBERTA

Since our last newsletter in June, the political landscape in Alberta has clearly changed. We have a new Premier and Minister of Education and an increasing number of MLA's who have indicated they will not be seeking re-election in the upcoming spring election. Leadership in Alberta is clearly undergoing a change.

With new leadership, there have come some immediate changes. Premier Allison Redford honoured her leadership campaign promise to return funds to education and, upon her successful election, provided in October an infusion of \$107,000,000 to Alberta's school systems. While not totally covering the reductions which were made necessary in May/June, the funds were well appreciated. With the appointment of the Hon. Thomas Lukaszuk as the new Minister of Education, there was a delay in proceeding with taking the proposed new Education Act to the legislative assembly. Mr. Lukaszuk indicated his desire to engage in further consultation with the province's stakeholders, particularly with students and parents, and therefore undertook an ambitious campaign to do

so. That process has resulted in a "Ten-Point Plan for Education." The plan includes:

- Reducing travel time for students who spend more than one hour on a bus and enabling students to better use technology when they travel.
- Creating more opportunities for students to earn credits in high school and post-secondary at the same time.
- Updating school design specifications to better support communities
- Co-ordinating building playgrounds and new schools
- Reducing the administrative burden for charter schools
- Supporting First Nations students by working more closely with the federal government
- Creating a stronger voice for parents in the education system
- Providing better information to increase the transparency, clarity and accountability of the education system
- Reviewing provincial achievement tests
- Examining the operation requirements of full-day kindergarten

Full explanation regarding this plan has yet to be received, and therefore how it may impact charter



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schools is unknown at this time. Specifically, we are looking forward to the details regarding “reducing the administrative burden for charter schools.”

### CONFERENCE 2011

On October 20 and 21, almost 500 people participated in our conference - “Celebrating and Sharing Innovative Practices: Alberta Charter Schools.” The conference was opened the evening of October 20 at the Calgary Coast Plaza Hotel with presentations by Deputy Minister Keray Henke and Mr. Roger Garriock.



*Deputy Minister of Education Keray Henke*

Mr. Henke expressed the importance of not only pursuing innovative practices in our schools, but also in teaching students to be innovative. Mr. Garriock, a retired IBM executive, reinforced Mr. Henke’s presentation as he spoke on the need for

organizations to be more committed to enhancing the innovativeness of our citizens as we proceed through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Earlier in the day, Roger delivered a similar message to 36 administrators/directors in a pre-conference workshop as he demonstrated how a program entitled “Destination Imagination” can be used in classrooms to enhance students’ critical and creative thinking, as well as their communication and collaboration skills. Several of our charter schools will now be involved in a pilot project which will focus upon the Destination Imagination curriculum and its materials.

Evaluations from both the pre-conference and conference were very positive. It was particularly appreciated that the conference breakout sessions held on October 21 at the Calgary Science School were facilitated by charter school personnel and included a major element of sharing. Thanks in large part to the utilization of our own personnel as facilitators/presenters as well as to the hosting of Friday’s breakout sessions at the Calgary Science School, expenses for the conference were kept to a reasonable level. While final calculations of revenues/expenses have not yet been completed, it is anticipated that there will be a modest surplus derived from the conference. Appreciation is extended to our facilitators and the administration and staff at Calgary Science



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School for their excellent efforts in making the conference the success it was.

The next conference is planned for October 2013.

### TAAPCS OCTOBER REGULAR MEETING AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On October 19, 2011, TAAPCS held a Regular Meeting, as well as its Annual General Meeting.

At the Regular Meeting, the delegates engaged in a review of the Association's Action Planning document. Suggestions were received concerning the Vision, Mission and Goals of the association. As well, an evaluation took place of the activities in which TAAPCS is involved. Suggested changes will be presented to the January Regular Meeting.

Also at the October Meeting, delegates were updated regarding professional development activities which were, and can become, available to the directors. As a result, numerous governance workshops have been requested by individual boards and, to date, two have been provided. At the Council of Board Chairs' meeting which precedes the January Regular Meeting, an online demonstration will be provided to directors concerning a series of modules which can be adapted for Board development.

"The Future of Charter Schools in Alberta" was a topic which was originally scheduled to be discussed at the October Regular Meeting but this was delayed due to the appointment of a new Minister. As might be recalled, the previous Minister of Education, Hon. Dave Hancock, initiated a provincial online survey related to the future of charter schools and followed this with a meeting in May, 2011 of different organizations throughout the province. This "Dialogue with the Minister" resulted in 39 representatives providing feedback on a series of questions concerning charter schools. The survey results and Key Themes from the Minister's dialogue have not been released yet.

At the AGM, the delegates expressed their support for the following executive for 2011-12:

Jay Pritchard (FFCA) and Judy Gray (FFCA): Co-Presidents

Jim Rigby (New Horizons) and Joe Frank (Westmount): Co-Vice-Presidents

Meredith Poole (FFCA): Secretary-Treasurer

Appreciation was extended by the delegates for the willingness of these individuals to serve in leadership roles.



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## EMERGING ISSUES

TAAPCS continues to be concerned with the need for clarity regarding leasing and facility issues. Several discussions/meetings have taken place with Alberta Education personnel but some confusion remains.

Although not directly involved, charter schools are closely watching the tripartite negotiations which are taking place between the ATA, ASBA and the Government of Alberta. While a salary settlement is of interest, so too are “other” items being discussed. These include assigned time of

teachers and professional development requirements.

The implications of the proposed new Education Act continue to be discussed in charter schools. One topic of considerable interest is the lack of direct reference to Alberta Education’s support for “choice” in the new Act. Another question being raised relates to public school divisions having the option of creating “charter schools” within their own jurisdiction. More clarification will be sought over the next few weeks.

## FEATURED SCHOOL ARTICLE

*Thank you to Almadina Charter School for providing the “featured school” article which follows. As in the past, we are attempting to highlight the work of members in order to raise the level of awareness regarding the great things happening in our schools.*

How Social Studies teachers plan and deliver instruction to English Language Learners at Almadina Language Charter Academy  
by Ashley Rowe, ELL & AISI Coordinator  
Almadina Language Charter Academy

All teachers at Almadina Language Charter Academy, despite their content specialization, use the same unit planner to design their units and lessons. All plans have a vocabulary (academic and content) component, a checklist of core ELL teaching strategies, and account for the English language proficiency levels of students. Although we aim for consistency in teaching practice as much as possible, there are differences in how subject specialists teach ELL students that work specifically in that content area. What follows is an exploration of how our Social Studies teachers do things differently for ELLs.



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Almadina’s Social Studies teachers cannot take for granted that our students understand a word or concept or the cultural contexts in which it operates. All curricular concepts must be taught within the context of culture. This cultural context is important to creating a network of conceptual understanding because it is the lens through which concepts are first explored. Imagine that you are a grade 8 student with limited English who has recently immigrated with her family from Libya and you are being taught about democracy. If you are to progress beyond the knowledge and understanding stage in Bloom’s taxonomy around this concept, your perspective will need to be engaged. Is your cultural context a pre-revolution or post-revolution one? Your understanding of democracy will be anchored in that cultural context.

The High School Social Studies themes are organized around perspectives, but the importance of perspective in teaching a culturally diverse group of K-9 students Social Studies cannot be understated- especially in addressing concepts such as immigration, assimilation, *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, different forms of government or economic structures, and global citizenship, to name a few. To take students’ understanding of concepts to the levels of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, cultural perspectives and contexts must be understood and explored.



Students reading *Heart of a Samurai* by Margi Preus to support and enhance their understanding of the grade 8 Social Studies Unit 8.1: From Isolation to Adaptation: Japan. They are reading this novel in Ms. Grant-Suttie’s English Language Option Class.

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The first questions that a Social Studies teacher asks him/herself when planning a lesson is: What is the key vocabulary around a specific concept? What academic vocabulary might students find difficult? How do I best teach this vocabulary before getting to the heart of the lesson? Like with reading, teaching concept vocabulary in Social Studies should be conceptualized as a process that moves from pre-teaching, to teaching, to review and reflection. ELL students struggle to independently ‘read to learn.’ The process of explicitly pre-teaching, teaching and reviewing is foundational to the practice of a Social Studies teacher, as foundational as student knowledge of academic vocabulary such as “analogy”, “commodity”, “context”, “enlighten”, “foster”, “innovate,” and “scenario”- all eighth grade academic words which must be explicitly pre-taught in context.

As we teach a culturally diverse population at Almadina, it is important to connect the curriculum to the lived experience of our students. We use relia, guests and field trips to do so - as well as literature. The *Dear Canada* series is one example of a supplemental text that serves to connect curriculum to lived experience- personal or vicarious. We use newspapers and magazines to further supplement the curriculum and to provide resources for students who read at different grade levels. Video clips from television and film, such as “The Rick Mercer Report,” also support and enhance instruction. Students’ reactions while watching “The Rick Mercer Report” is a good indicator of their understanding of both concept and language, as the ability to perceive through written or spoken language is an advanced language skill. Our technological resources are well used by the Almadina Social Studies teachers - and each has a SMART Board that is great for sharing notes and video clips, using mapping tools, and reviewing material through interactive exercises.

If we had to choose one, scaffolding is the key strategy in teaching Social Studies at Almadina. Everything from direct instruction, questioning, task building, note-taking, discussions and shared activities are scaffolded by our teachers because in terms of class structure, time and repetition is what our students need most. The focus on vocabulary, lived-experience, culture, and scaffolding curriculum is what makes our Social Studies program unique; it is what responds to the needs of our students; and it is what has made our teachers, in their view and ours, better than ever at their chosen profession.



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## IMPORTANT MEETING DATES IN 2012

### January 19

9:30 a.m. -3:00 p.m. TAAPCS Superintendents' meetings at Red Deer, Sheraton (formerly Capri) Hotel

3:30-4:30 p.m. TAAPCS Council of Board Chairs (open to all directors) at Red Deer, Sheraton

6:00 – 8:00 p.m. TAAPCS Banquet at Red Deer, Sheraton. NOTE: Minister Lukaszuk will be present.

**January 20** – TAAPCS Regular Meeting 8:30-3:00, Red Deer, Sheraton

**January 24** – Administrators' Meeting, 10:00 – 2:00, Calgary Arts Academy



**February 24** – EAC (Education Advisory Committee) Meeting, 9:30-1:30, Red Deer

**April 13** – EAC Meeting, 9:30-1:30, Red Deer

**May 3** – TAAPCS Superintendents' meeting & TAAPCS Banquet, Edmonton (details & location TBA)

**May 4** – TAAPCS Regular Meeting, Edmonton

**May 18** – Administrators' Meeting, 10:00-2:00, Edmonton (details & location TBA)

