



**The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools
Response to the “Task Force for Teaching Excellence”
June 2014**

TAAPCS is pleased to provide a response to the recent report entitled “Task Force for Teaching Excellence”. In general terms, TAAPCS is supportive of the report’s recommendations, but we would like to offer some questions and express several concerns. Our comments are presented in relation to the four key themes that emerged from the consultations.

THEME 1: Define expectations for teaching excellence

Our Association agrees with **Recommendations 1-4** which identify a need to revise the existing practice standard for teachers in order for there to be alignment with *Inspiring Education*. Further, we affirm the need to adopt practice standards “for school leaders and district leaders”.

THEME 2: Enable teachers to achieve excellence

Charter schools support **Recommendations 5 – 7** to consider broader criteria for admitting students into teacher education programs, as well as to strengthen these programs through alignment with *Inspiring Education*. Alternative pathways to teaching and Letters of Authority are also affirmed by charter schools.

As charter schools, we have consistently been privileged to employ “community-based experts” to enhance our programs. Schools such as the Calgary Arts Academy and Suzuki Charter School regularly employ art and music experts and, in doing so, have succeeded in offering programs that they might not have otherwise been able to.

Recommendation 8 is supported by charter schools, who appreciate the value of longer practica for pre-service teachers.

Implementing a teacher internship program is seen as valuable by charter schools. However, it is thought that the teacher intern should work directly with a master teacher, co-learning through sharing one classroom. They should not be assigned their own classroom, as is suggested in **Recommendation 9**.

TAAPCS recognizes the value of new teachers working with experienced teachers within a growth mindset; however, it is our suggestion that a coaching rather than a mentoring approach be adopted, which is a modification to **Recommendation 10**.

Also supported is **Recommendation 11** in respect of the teacher's annual professional learning plan. Related to this plan has been (some) charter schools' ability to recognize teachers in both monetary and non-monetary ways. We believe that this approach should be available to all Alberta teachers.

Concern has been expressed, however, with **Recommendation 12** where it is indicated that individuals who are invited to contribute their expertise in mentorship, leadership and teacher collaboration, etc. "be allotted time from their teaching duties". We wonder how that release time would be funded. In general, we are supportive of this recommendation.

Recommendation 13 indicates that "system support for teachers and the learning environment must change" and that "supports must respond to more diverse and inclusive classrooms, increased use of technology, the vision of *Inspiring Education*". While we are supportive of these notions, funding is, again, a concern.

THEME 3: Define the role of leaders in teaching excellence

We know that attracting, preparing and inducting school leaders is a challenge in Alberta. The ever-evolving leadership role is challenging and many people are reluctant to assume these leadership roles. Therefore, while charter schools support the concept of standards for leaders and mentorship/professional development programs (**Recommendations 17 and 18**), we are concerned that to expect all potential leaders to undergo a rigorous, formal, mandatory preparation program (**Recommendation 16**) before they take on a school leadership position may only worsen an already challenging situation.

TAAPCS has, over the past two years, developed and implemented a pilot "Leadership Learning Initiative" for leaders in our 13 schools. The concentration is on the "Principal Practice Competencies" identified by Alberta Education. The program has been exceptionally successful for both beginning and seasoned leaders. We believe that rather than have a mandatory preparation program, leaders could access programs such as ours, or CASS's "Start Right", early in their tenures.

THEME 4: Assure teaching excellence

This theme, and its accompanying recommendations, has proven to be quite controversial – except for charter schools. We support **Recommendation 19** which suggests a separation in how issues of conduct and competence are dealt with. The current process for addressing concerns of these types (for both teachers and school leaders) is not only complicated and confusing, but also very expensive and time-consuming. We do not believe that there should be one body "responsible for investigating and adjudicating the practice review process while defending its accused members". This, in our view, is problematic.

Charter schools support **Recommendation 20**, which addresses the proper conduct of teachers and school leaders. The implementation of a process to increase public understanding of what constitutes appropriate conduct, as well as the processes involved when a complaint is registered, will increase transparency. We are also supportive of public communication of the resolution of such complaints.

While the current Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation remains valid, by taking action to align it with the expectations of *Inspiring Education* and providing a requirement for continual professional growth, most competency issues can be addressed. Having teachers undergo re-certification every five years (**Recommendation 21 and 22**) through what appears to be an increased level of evaluation, is perhaps only one way of ensuring professional currency. We have questions and concerns related to the additional burden placed on in-school administrators and central office personnel, and the potential of damaging the collegial nature of the relationship between teachers and administrators. We are worried that the impact could be more negative than positive. Rather, we suggest that it may be prudent to require teachers to earn Continuing Education credits (possibly through university studies or authorized PD activities) over a period of time in order to remain certified.

Charter schools would prefer that processes designed to provide principals with annual written feedback be developed at the local level rather than by the Ministry of Education, as suggested in **Recommendation 23**. Many charter schools already collect and provide such data and feedback to principals.

Recommendation 24 regarding Principal performance is supported by TAAPCS. Our school leaders experience a great deal of empowerment where assuring teaching excellence is concerned.

In respect of **Recommendation 25**, TAAPCS does not support the existence of both professional and union functions within one body. We envision the creation of a Professional College of Teachers and the establishment of a separate body that would attend to those duties ascribed to a union.

In closing, we commend Minister Johnson for creating the Task Force for Teaching Excellence and for the fine work of Dr. Glenn Feltham and his committee. This “arms-length” view solicited significant input from the public and stakeholder groups. Of largest concern to charter schools is how this vision of teaching excellence will be resourced, both financially and with human resources. We sincerely hope that the Government of Alberta is committed to taking the needed steps in order to facilitate the changes envisioned by *Inspiring Education*. For charter schools, the status quo really is not an alternative. ...for charter schools, this is our reality.

Respectfully,



Judy Gray, President
On behalf of Alberta's Public Charter Schools