

“Innovation in Action” - Canada West Report Released

At TAAPCS' January 2010 meeting, delegates received Shawna Ritchie's review of a research report she authored for the Canada West Foundation on the topic of Charter schools in Alberta. Entitled “Innovation in Action: An Examination of Charter Schools in Alberta”, the report, which was done independent of requests from any of Alberta's educational institutions or organizations, examines a variety of topics which include: a history of charter schools in Alberta, the situation which exists today, challenges and opportunities, questions raised about charter schools, and conclusions reached from this study. Of particular note are the conclusions which include comments such as “Charter schools were introduced in Alberta in order to provide choice and innovation in public education provision. This goal has been accomplished”. However, the report also says that “They have not been as innovative, or as influential, as possible. Nor will charter schools reach their full potential if the constraints in which they operate are not reassessed”. The report goes on to list the conditions which limit the schools. “Charter schools will only be able to achieve their full potential if their role in education is clarified and the remaining impediments to their operation are lifted. This means changing legislation in two important ways: 1) giving charter schools permanent status; and 2) clarifying charter schools' position in the education system”. Ritchie goes on to note that facilities and funding are issues, as is managing growth, continuing to hold schools to a high level of accountability, and altering “their relationship with other school authorities”. On this latter topic, the report indicates that “For charter schools to succeed, increased opportunities and incentives for collaboration, sharing and professional development between charter school educators and the rest of the education system need to be established”. The report concludes with “Without changes to legislation and increased communication in the education community, asking charter schools to accomplish their full potential is the equivalent of clipping a bird's wings and then asking it to fly”.