

“Planning for Change”

TAAPCS Annual Report
2015-2016

October 7, 2016

www.taapcs.ca

TAAPCS EXECUTIVE MESSAGE



President Dianne McBeth

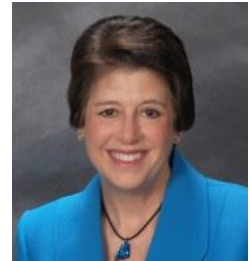


Co-Vice-President Yvonne DePeel



Co-Vice-President Don Falk

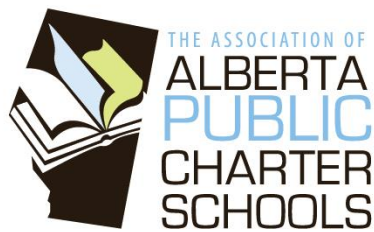
Our message in this year's Annual Report was inspired by one of the Keynote Speeches given at our 2015 Charter School Conference, which was graciously and capably hosted by the Calgary Girls' School on October 30, and attracted 482 participants from our 13 member schools, some Alberta MLA's and American charter school officials. As well as being treated to addresses from our own Dr. Phil Butterfield and Gareth Thompson, we were privileged to have as guest speaker, Ember Reichgott Junge, attorney and former State Senator from Minnesota, national spokesperson on charter public schools, past Board member of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, and current board Vice-Chair of the Washington D.C. based Charter Schools Development Corporation (CSDC), as well as co-publisher of *Zero Chance of Passage*, which describes the struggle for the enactment of the first U.S. charter school legislation.



According to Ember, the myths that exist throughout the public in the U.S. are much the same as here in Alberta: 1. Charter schools receive more money, 2. Charter schools take money from "public" schools, 3. Charter schools are private schools (a misconception held by 2/3 of Americans), 4. Charter schools do not perform as well as public schools, and 5. Management companies "own" charter schools and siphon off taxpayer dollars to run them. Of course this last point is not an issue in Canada, but we have all heard the other statements more often than we can recall, in addition to the claim that we "cherry-pick" the "best" students and reject the rest.

Ember suggested that we focus on developing a 2-minute ("elevator") speech around the following themes, which resonate very well with American (and presumably Canadian) citizens: 1. Freedom to choose, 2. Equality for every child, 3. Efficient, accountable use of tax dollars, and 4. Opportunity.

This advice fits well with one of the goals identified in our Strategic Planning exercise regarding communication with the public; to that end, our message includes the following document that was developed for use as a public relations tool to communicate the reality of public charter schools and dispel the myths. Commit it to memory, cut and paste it, use it in whatever way(s) you can in order that the facts become more prevalent than the myths when it comes to what we do, and why and how we do it!



Innovation in Action: Alberta's Public Charter Schools

Charter schools support Alberta's vision of *Success for All Students*.

- ✓ Alberta is the only province with public charter schools. The first charter school opened in the fall of 1995.
- ✓ Charter schools enrich the landscape of public education by responding to student learning needs and enhancing choice for parents.
- ✓ Over 9000 students, who collectively reflect the diversity found in any similar-sized jurisdiction, participate in Alberta's 13 unique and specialized charter schools.
- ✓ Charter schools operate under time-specific agreements in accordance with provincial legislation, adhere to the provincial curriculum, and account to the Minister of Education through elected Charter Boards.
- ✓ Charter schools undergo regularly scheduled external evaluations linked to charter renewal and Ministerial approval to continue operating.
- ✓ Public charter schools receive the same per student grants as other public schools and do **not** charge tuition.
- ✓ Charter schools include students with special needs.
- ✓ Charter schools emphasize research-informed practice and innovative methods of instruction.
- ✓ Charter schools support meaningful parental involvement and offer safe, caring, welcoming and responsive learning environments.
- ✓ Charter schools employ certificated professional staff who are dedicated to excellence in instructional practice and eligible for Associate Membership in the Alberta Teachers' Association. Five of the charter schools negotiate employment contracts with the ATA.
- ✓ Do not receive capital funding in the same way as other public schools and therefore most often lease surplus space from large public boards.
- ✓ Present a unique education focus related to teaching and/or curriculum as per the individual charters approved by the Minister of Education.

As per By-law requirements, the following report on the activities of The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools for 2015-16 is respectfully submitted.

BACKGROUND

The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools has 13 members from a wide geographic and demographic area which extends from Medicine Hat in the south to Valhalla Centre in the north. As well, there are six schools in Calgary and five schools in Edmonton and area. The mandate of each school is unique and distinctive. The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools was formally created to support all schools regardless of location and mandate. (www.taapcs.ca)



TAAPCS OBJECTIVES

1. To promote and facilitate public charter school education in Alberta.
2. To advocate collectively and effectively on behalf of the membership.
3. To promote a forum for public charter schools to meet in support of common goals.
4. To advocate for continued innovation and choice within public education.

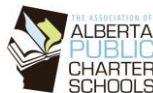
MEETING DATES

The three regular meetings for the Association took place on the following dates:

- October 28/29, 2015 – Calgary
- January 14/15, 2016 – Red Deer
- May 5/6, 2016 – Medicine Hat

Preceding the regular meetings were Superintendent as well as Charter Board Directors' meetings. In addition to the above, the Education Advisory Committee met in Red Deer on the following dates:

- September 25, 2015
- December 9, 2015
- February 26, 2016
- April 8, 2016



TAAPCS STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE

In October 2015, a half day at the fall conference was devoted to strategic planning exercises to assist in determining priorities for focus for The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools. The sessions, led by Dr. Lynne Paradis, were well attended with representation from senior leaders, directors, and school administrators from all charter schools. Input was rich and discussion resulted in the identification of a sub-committee that examined the input and organized it into a draft revised mission statement and several key priorities as follows:

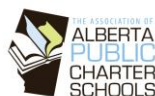
An organization for member charter schools to meet and foster strategic and purposeful opportunities to strengthen Alberta charter schools by:

- a) building on the strengths of successful schools and relationships*
- b) addressing challenges including prevailing myths about Charter schools and the governance model of TAAPCS*

A governance consultant, Ms. Becky Kallal, worked with the sub-committee to review existing governance documents and many recommendations were made to improve the alignment of governance documents with the current practices for public charter schools in Alberta. These ideas were shared with the membership at the May 2016 meeting, and support was expressed to move forward with plans to change existing bylaws and the organizational structure for TAAPCS. In the fall of 2016, the Educational Advisory Committee (EAC) expressed a priority to move forward on proposed changes, and to explore strategies to bring suggested changes to the membership. The opinion of the members working on the draft mission and strategies is that there is strong interest in improving TAAPCS with strategies identified through the collaborative strategic planning process. Presently (fall 2016) a draft of revised by-laws exists, and a draft of strategies to consider as action priorities has been developed. There is as yet no decision on the next steps in the process.

Submitted by:
Dr. Lynne Paradis
Superintendent, Suzuki Charter School

*Support documents available on request



STRATEGIC GOAL: STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE

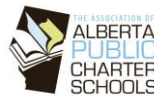
Achieving the vision of *working together to support choice and innovation in public education* is guided by effective governance of the Association. Effective governance guides the organization, protects and enhances its future, and establishes values for expected conduct.

Arising out of a strategic planning exercise led by Dr. Lynne Paradis (Superintendent, Suzuki Charter School) at the October 2015 general meeting, members of the Association engaged in discussion, at both the January 2016 and May 2016 meetings, regarding possible changes to the structure and operation of the Association's existing governance model.

This discussion was facilitated, in substantial measure, by Ms. Becky Kallal, who had previously served as a consultant to several member schools. Ms. Kallal was enlisted by the Association to engage delegates at the May 2016 meeting in an extensive conversation regarding various governance-related topics. These included the Association's bylaws, term limits for Board members, a code of conduct, policy structure, committees, the number and timing of meetings, role descriptions, and the composition of the Board of Directors. Following this discussion, the Association requested that Ms. Kallal review the Association's bylaws, in the context of the tone and content of the conversation, and prepare a set of draft revisions for consideration by the membership.

In August 2016, Ms. Kallal presented the requested draft bylaw revisions to the Executive. These were then conveyed to all member schools with a view toward discussing them at the October 2016 general meeting.

Submitted by:
Don Falk
TAAPCS Co-Vice-President
Superintendent, New Horizons Charter School



STRATEGIC GOAL: IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

Last October Dr. Lynn Paradis, Superintendent (Suzuki Charter School) facilitated a comprehensive strategic planning process using the elegantly simple yet robust Drivers Model. Consequently, the Association identified three goals: improving communication, strengthening governance, and responding to the research mandate.

A solid communications strategy is critical to the Association's work and serves as a framework for thinking about a range of challenges – engaging the membership, building awareness of Charter Schools and their role in public education, announcing results achieved, adopting a more effective governance model, and developing the research framework.

TAAPCS perceived threats to the existence of Charter Schools and the notion of choice in public education following the election of a new provincial government. The sense of urgency grew when the Education Minister rejected two new applications for charter schools. Additionally, the Minister granted a mere five years, rather than fifteen, for several charter renewals.

In response to the uncertainty and increasing levels of concern, both the Association and the Board Chairs representing all thirteen Charter Schools wrote letters requesting a meeting with the Minister to seek clarification about the future of charter schools. Neither of the letters received a response. Similarly, efforts to meet with MLA's, particularly those whose constituencies included charter schools, met with little success. Meanwhile a proliferation of blogs, news stories, and social media campaigns propagated popular myths that undermined the credibility of charter schools.

The Association approved funds to support a communications strategy that would focus immediately on influencing key decision-makers such as the Minister, Deputy Minister, and various MLA's. Communications consultants from the firm Hill+Knowlton Strategies were contracted to

support this endeavour. Jim Rutkowski, currently a Senior Advisor in the Office of the Premier, and Marie Rajic provided expert advice and guidance in setting clear objectives, identifying and prioritizing the audiences, creating strong, clear messages, leveraging opportunities, and implementing the first steps in the defined strategy. They also secured the desired meetings with Minister Eggen, Deputy Minister Rosen and several MLA's.

In preparation for the meetings with these key decision-makers, Jim and Marie gave wise counsel on government relations that supported pleasant, productive and pointed meetings. Minister Eggen's letter (2016/04/26) published in the Calgary Herald, entitled *NDP Supports Choice in Public Education*, attests to the results. The Association appreciates the Minister's assurances of continued support for Charter Schools.

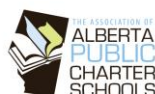
Similarly, invitations for MLA's to attend various functions at Charter Schools, as well as requests for meetings with the Association, met with favourable responses - a noticeable change. MLA's Annie McKittrick (Sherwood Park), David Shepherd (Edmonton Centre), Erin Babcock (Stony Plain) and Shaye Anderson (Leduc-Beaumont) attended the May TAAPCS breakfast in Edmonton.

At the May TAAPCS meeting, Marie Rajic spoke on the importance of sustaining positive government relationships, as well as the need to promote better understanding and appreciation for the significant contributions of Charter Schools in meeting the needs of Alberta's students. She also warned that "acting like the opposition will result in being treated like the opposition." The Association recognizes the need to work cooperatively and respectfully to ensure positive relationships with our new government.

A letter (2016/04/26) outlining the challenges and results from the communications work was posted to the TAAPCS website and also sent to parents and staff of the various Charter Schools.

To keep the momentum, it is recommended that TAAPCS further develops the communications strategy by focussing on two priorities - sustaining positive government relationships and promoting a better understanding of the charter school success stories. The plan needs to be both ambitious and realistic. Limited resources suggest leveraging existing activities to support the work.

Submitted by:
Dianne McBeth
TAAPCS President
Superintendent, Calgary Girls' School



CHARTER SCHOOL RESEARCH MANDATE

Over the last several years Charter schools have increasingly been reminded by Alberta Education (AE) that we are responsible to "improve student learning" not only in our own schools but also by our efforts to inform improved learning in mainstream public schools. Further, Charter schools are expected to provide "innovative approaches for improving student learning" and to utilize "research informed practices" to create "innovative learning environments." Alberta

Education (AE) provides three distinct references to the Charter Schools “mandate” to utilize and conduct research including:

School Act: Section 32 (b) the program to be offered will potentially improve the learning of students as it is measured by the Minister in schools operated by boards that are not charter schools.

Policy and Requirements for Charter School Planning and Reporting required component of the Three Year Plan (3YP)... charter schools have an unique purpose in Alberta’s public education system to provide different and innovative approaches for improving student learning, not only for the benefit of their own students, but also to inform other schools for the benefit of students throughout Alberta’s public education system.’

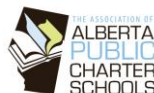
Charter Schools Regulation

7.1(1)(d) there is evidence that the charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning outcomes.

Historically, Charter Schools believed that their excellent student learning outcomes measured by Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs), Diploma Examinations and heightened community satisfaction results reported on our AERR reports, were strong evidence of individual Charter School success. Schools also commissioned university researchers to examine Charter School effectiveness and particular school features and programs. One might assume that it was self-evident that public schools could have similar success if they emulated the successful programs of the Charter Schools. However, the recent increasing pressure on Charter Schools to “improved learning”, provide “innovative learning environments” and deliver “research informed practices” all point to the need to challenge our former assumptions of apparent success.

Exacerbating the challenge is that the emerging Charter School “research mandate” remains undefined and unfunded by AE. While charter schools are required to utilize research informed practices does it follow that Charter Schools research would inform improved practices in the mainstream public schools? If so this presents and an onerous task for TAAPCS superintendents. There are considerable financial implications for conducting and disseminating a research program expected to influence the larger education field. In addition, while the various Charter Schools are attempting to address the research mandate in a variety of ways, it is also unclear how our various Charter School approaches to this task will be evaluated by AE. TAAPCS superintendents continue to discuss this challenge and the regular TAAPCS provincial meeting “research report” is indicative of the state of our continuous progress in this area.

Submitted by:
Dale Bischoff
Superintendent, Aurora Charter school



TAAPCS SCHOOL LEADERSHIP LEARNING GROUP 2015-2016 SUMMARY

The steering committee started with 7 and was open to others who were interested in serving the group in this capacity. The goals of the steering committee were to examine input and feedback from the group, plan upcoming sessions, look for capacity among our charter school partners to

act as facilitators and use existing or forge new connections to bring desired expertise to our group.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the SLL group met three times: October 29, 2015; April 8, 2016; and May 25, 2016. Within these meetings, presenters and facilitators included administrators from Suzuki, CAPE, Boyle Street, Connect, and FFCA. As well, outside expertise was provided by Dr. David Townsend and Dr. Sharon Friesen. Attendance at each meeting averaged 20-30 participants, with about 12 participants forming a core group and other attendees representing participation from the various schools as schedules allowed.

The topics covered at each session came from feedback from the group. The topics covered included instructional leadership, having difficult conversations, supervision and evaluation, observations of learning, coaching, understand and implementing the new TQS, walk-throughs, and nurturing excellence in instruction and leadership. Participants indicated that most influential learning pieces were developments with Alberta Education, working with charter school colleagues as administrators, the university expertise from professors, and coaching practices.

Moving forward with 2016-2017 planning, we asked SLL participants to complete an online survey to help guide planning for the coming year by identifying preferred number of meetings per year, daily time preferences, meeting spaces, funding, meeting format, and most importantly, topics of interest. We have already identified that end of June surveys may not receive the highest numbers of responses, so the survey link was left open to gather as many responses as possible. So far the responses indicate:

- Participants wish to have between 2 and 4 meetings per year: about a 30% split for each 2,3, and 4 meetings
- 81% of participants wish for meetings to be independent from the TAAPCS dates and hosted by charter schools
- 64% of participants would participate if funding was not available from TAAPCS. However, if funding was available, 90% of participants would continue attending
- Preferred formats include speakers from universities and research articles (91% each), authors (73%) and book studies (64%).
- Topics that emerged as being most prevalent included FNMI Understandings (100%), Teacher supervision and the revised TQS (40%), inclusive education and LGBTQ policies (30%).
- Other BIG ideas included how to mentor teachers, research co-ops, assessment and reporting, roles of various administrative bodies, and an introduction to the technologies that various leaders use.
- Meetings should start at 9:00 am and go to 3:00 pm as consideration for those travelling from outside the host area.

While we wish a few of our charter school colleagues all the best in their new endeavours, we are excited to welcome new leadership into the steering committee and into the SLL group. Within the next few weeks, we hope to finalize our dates for the 2016-2017 year and welcome new leaders into our fold.

Submitted by:
Jeney Gordon
Principal, CAPE School

2015 HALVAR JONSON AWARD

Each year our Association sponsors the Halvar Jonson Award to recognize an outstanding contributor to the cause and advancement of charter schools.

In 2015, the award went to Jay Pritchard, former TAAPCS Co-President and FFCA Superintendent.

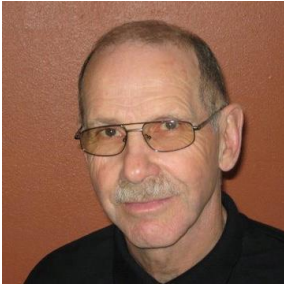
From 2004 when Jay assumed co-leadership of TAAPCS, attendance and active involvement steadily increased to the point where we now routinely see 40-45 members at our meetings. To the point where we have developed strong, productive relationships with Alberta Education. To the point where meaningful participation by our members has resulted in significant gains for charter schools and the recognition of the legitimate place of charter schools in Alberta's education landscape. A point where the last few Ministers of Education have repeated the phrase, "Charter Schools are here to stay", and repeated it with enthusiasm and conviction. We owe much of this progress to Jay Pritchard, and the outstanding leadership he provided to this Association.

From 2004 to 2014, Jay took the TAAPCS message to the ATA, to ASBA, to the universities, and to any number of government offices within and outside of the Ministry of Education. The participation of the membership was invited in re-establishing the goals and objects of the Association, the Education Advisory Committee (EAC) was formed to ensure that we were taking concrete steps to realize them. He was instrumental in requesting and receiving an annual grant from Alberta Education to help finance this important work. He advocated for the right of charter schools to have access to not only adequate but appropriate facilities, and to receive funding commensurate in all aspects with the large Boards in the rest of the province ("Are our kids less deserving?"). He fought for and saw the day where our Association did not have to beg to be included in discussions that impacted our future; today TAAPCS input is sought on many, if not all, major departmental initiatives. Jay had the wisdom and experience to provide focused leadership to our Association, and was steadfast and strong in advocating on behalf of all charter school students. Jay Pritchard is a true champion of charter schools and a most deserving winner of the Halvar Jonson Award.



Jay Pritchard, second from right, with (l-r) nominators Justin Kool (FFCA), Yvonne DePeel (Almadina) and John Picard (Valhalla)

THANK YOU AND FAREWELL



In August, The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools was disappointed to have to say goodbye to Dr. Garry Andrews, who served us so faithfully in the role of Executive Director since 2009. A true friend to all, and well known and highly respected within the Saskatchewan and Alberta education communities for the past 30 plus years, Garry brought a wealth of wisdom, experience and calm, capable leadership to our association. Palliser School Division's gain is surely our loss. Garry, you will be deeply missed, but we hope our paths will cross again in the future!

