

# “Change in Action”

TAAPCS Annual Report  
2016-2017

October 28, 2017

[www.taapcs.ca](http://www.taapcs.ca)

## **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](http://www.taapcs.ca))



## **TAAPCS VISION**

*Working together to support choice and innovation in public education*

## **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 6/7, 2016 – Calgary
- January 14/15, 2017 – Red Deer
- May 5/6, 2016 – Valhalla Centre

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:

- November 18, 2016
- April 7, 2017
- June 9, 2017

## TAAPCS CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE



Co-President Dianne McBeth  
2016-2017



Co-President Yvonne DePeel  
to March 2017

*Change in Action* summarizes the work of TAAPCS throughout the past year and builds on the momentum of the previous year, *Planning for Change*, through three strategic goals: strengthening the Association's governance, improving communication, and defining the research expectations and opportunities.

### **Strengthening the Association's Governance**

**Bylaws:** The multi-phase process of reviewing, evaluating, revising, and recommending new Bylaws for the Association was a key step between planning and taking action. At the General Meeting in January, Consultant Becky Kallal explored several critical questions as she facilitated a final review of the draft Bylaws: "*What does improved governance mean to Directors? Do the proposed Bylaws support your vision of governance and the role of Directors in the Association? What actions should TAAPCS consider so that the organization better meets the needs of the Directors?*" Following the review, any final changes approved by the membership were incorporated in the version that was submitted to Alberta's Corporate Registry in March 2017.

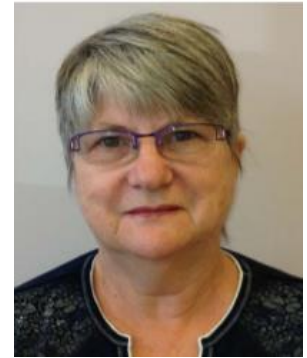
Many boards and individual directors thoughtfully and diligently supported this important work by reviewing the numerous revisions. Table talk from meetings was also helpful, particularly the re-imagining discussion at the October Directors' Meeting facilitated by John Picard and Jolene Kochendorfer: *If TAAPCS was a more effective organization for Charter Boards of Directors, what valued outcomes would be achieved?* Thanks to the membership for supporting TAAPCS in achieving its best iteration of the new Bylaws.

**Policy Handbook:** The Association is developing a *Policy Governance Handbook*. The Handbook is a work in progress; however, several essential policies were approved, at least in highlight of the new policy governance model, as well as the supporting organizational structure, is the opportunity for Directors to serve on various committees. The Association will benefit from the knowledge, skills and background of the many Directors who serve on the thirteen charter boards.

**Fees Policy:** The Association is currently reviewing its *Fees Policy* to ensure fees are fair and affordable for all boards. Various proposals for membership fees were presented at the May general meeting, however none were approved. Instead, a revised fee structure based on the current model was substituted and accepted for this current year only. A revised *Fees Policy* needs to address several potentially conflicting outcomes: membership is desirable for all boards, fees are affordable, a minimum fee establishes voting rights, fees align with the funding model (i.e., per pupil), fees are not connected to a weighted voting system. Boards were invited to submit fee structure proposals for the AGM. There is urgency in this matter as the annual budget will depend on the revenue from fees alone. The TAAPCS annual budget was impacted by the loss of expected revenue from an annual operating grant which Alberta Education no longer provides.

**Executive Director Role:** Shortly after Dr. Garry Andrews submitted his resignation at the end of August 2016, the Officers launched a search for a new Executive Director. The team considered the organization's needs in a time of significant change, as well as the desired knowledge and skills essential for the role.

The successful candidate, Kath Rhyason, was appointed in December 2016 with duties commencing in the new year. Kath served as the Executive Director for the College of Alberta School Superintendents and, prior to that role, she was Superintendent for the Fort McMurray Public Schools.



**Professional Learning:** This past year, Suzuki and Calgary Girls charter schools organized seminars for the charter boards in the north and south respectively. For the Calgary area boards, Consultant Becky Kallal facilitated sessions on Governance: *What is governance for a policy board? What governs the governors? What are the governors' roles?* and Effective Meetings: *What essential skills and knowledge support productive meetings? What are the Rules of Order and why use them? What processes apply to the handling of motions and amendments?* The same seminars were offered in Edmonton, but attendance at any session was open to all.

The School Leadership Learning committee met regularly to share and discuss school leadership. Two learning opportunities were well attended by administrators.

1. In March, Connect Charter School in Calgary hosted two sessions with a focus on (1) establishing, promoting, and sustaining inclusive learning environments to optimize learning for every student, and (2) exploring implications for supervision and evaluation using the new TQS and School Leader Standard.



2. On May 23, 2017, Mother Earth's Children's Charter School near Stony Plain welcomed charter school leaders to sessions that focused on (1) developing and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Metis and Inuit for the benefit of all students, and supporting the process of reconciliation, and (2) exploring implications for supervision and evaluation using the new TQS and School Leader Standard.

## Improving Communication

**Communications Consultant:** At the May 2016 TAAPCS meeting, Consultant Marie Rajic of Hill+Knowlton Strategies spoke on the importance of sustaining positive government relationships, and challenged the Association to promote better understanding and appreciation for the significant contributions of Charter Schools in meeting the needs of Alberta’s students.

**Communications Committee:** An *ad hoc* communications committee, with leadership from Ron Koper, Scott Rankin and representatives from the various boards, formed in May 2017 and moved forward in a brave and determined way. The committee is working on a video production that promotes a better understanding of charter schools – a public education success story! The project is on track and on budget and will be showcased as a pre-production mock-up at the 2017 AGM in October. Depending on budget and timing, the committee will also guide work to upgrade the website so that it functions effectively as the “go-to” for both internal and external communications. The *ad hoc* committee is also preparing an overall communications framework that will support the work of a standing Communications Committee to be appointed at the AGM.

**New Organizational Chart:** The Association also approved an Organizational Chart to clarify the intended flow of communications and decision-making within TAAPCS. The Officers and Executive Advisory Committee, which includes at least one member per organization, provide advice and support to the Executive Director and ultimately to the Board of Governors. Communication flows in a more streamlined process from the Executive Advisory Committee and Executive Director to the Superintendents who are responsible for ensuring their respective Boards and others within their organizations receive essential information.



Dr. Jim Brandon

**External Awards:** Halvar Jonson Awards were presented to both Dr. Jim Brandon and Bill McGregor for their support of Charter Schools. Jim provided outstanding leadership development funded by the System Leadership Learning grant from AB Education (regrettably, the SLL grant is no longer available). Bill was a long-serving Director with a member school board, a proponent of parental choice, and a supporter of charter schools. Awards have the power to communicate symbolically what is most important to an organization.



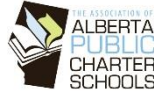
Bill McGregor

Honouring external supporters enhances the public awareness of charter schools, while acknowledging internal supporters builds culture by appreciating service to the organization.

**Biennial Conference:** Aurora Charter will host the biennial TAAPCS conference on October 27, 2017. The conference provides a venue for charter schools to share instructional practice and research within the Association. Approximately 500 delegates attend the biennial conferences.

**Advocacy:** TAAPCS is strengthening governance so that charter boards will have a powerful, collective voice when advocating with key decision-makers. The new Bylaws place governors in the role of spokespersons on behalf of charter schools and empower them to make the Association “their voice”. Several matters of concern to all Charter Boards continue to need

effective advocacy: enrolment caps, funding equity, facilities, inclusive education funding, and the right to tell our own story. Strong, collective advocacy is needed to address decisions like Bill 1 *An Act to Reduce School Fees*, which negatively impacted charter schools by excluding them from a significant benefit to all other public schools.



## Defining the Research Expectations and Opportunities

**Innovation and Choice in Public Education:** Bill 19, proclaimed in May, 1994, established autonomous public schools to provide choice and innovation in the public education system. Charter schools view themselves as innovative choices and research-informed opportunities for improving learning. More recently, however, charter schools perceive a distinctive research mandate which is undefined and probably underfunded. TAAPCS does not yet have a research policy, although member organizations do sponsor or participate in various types of research, usually through University-based research partnerships.

**Funding:** Each member organization is responsible for funding its own research initiatives. With the loss of AISI funding, it is reasonable to conclude that a research mandate applicable only to public charter schools is indeed both undefined and underfunded. In the past year, Alberta Education declined the TAAPCS's application for an annual operating grant as well as the System Leadership Learning (SLL). Even the request to carry forward unexpended funds from the previous SLL grant was denied. The unexpected and sudden loss of revenue further challenges the Association's or member schools' efforts to support research.

**Alberta Research Network:** Recently, Alberta Education established a research network to enhance collaboration, communication, implementation and mobilization of evidence-based and research-informed policy and practice for improving learning in Alberta. The network provides opportunity for education partners and stakeholders to collaborate on research matters. It is intended to support administration and dissemination of research studies. Kurtis Leinweber and Dr. Dale Bischoff were appointed to represent TAAPCS.

In the spring, TAAPCS submitted a research proposal in response to the call from the research network. The proposal was not intended to overshadow proposals from individual schools; rather, the opportunity to apply and signal our collective interest arrived sooner than the development of a TAAPCS policy. The proposal was to develop self-report instruments to measure elementary and junior-high students' perceptions of formative feedback and attitudes towards mistakes in *mathematical learning*. These instruments could be a significant addition to the resources available to Alberta teachers to address student math achievement. Regrettably, the TAAPCS/University of Alberta partnership research proposal and was not one of the five awarded grant funding.



## CHARTER SCHOOL RESEARCH MANDATE

*Dr. Lynne Paradis & Dr. Dale Bischoff*

Over the last several years charter schools have increasingly been reminded by Alberta Education (AE) to be responsible to “improve student learning”, not only in charter schools but also 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 requires this 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 have been involved in research and innovation. These include many school-based research projects and also many partnerships with post-secondary partners (e.g. University of Calgary, University of Alberta) in projects that inform teaching and learning.

Challenges exist within charter schools to engage in research. While charter schools are required to utilize research informed practices, 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.

Further, there is a gap in communicating the results of research findings to the mainstream public schools. TAAPCS leaders continue to request assistance from Alberta Education to assist in sharing results of research endeavours with other educational stakeholders.



## MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

### Almadina Language Charter Academy



- 15 Year Charter was approved for Sep 2013 – Aug 2028.
- In September 2016, ALCA celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- Former student, Altaf Haaziq, became "mayor for a day" on April 26, 2017 for the City of Calgary.

### Aurora Academic Charter School



- Our Grade 9 students Skyped with Harvard astrophysicist Dr. Stephen Portillo.
- Our research partners include the University of Alberta, Alberta Education, Alberta Teachers' Association, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and numerous school divisions and universities/faculties.
- Our most recent research is detailed in Volume 2 2016-17 Aurora Action Research Community of Practice Annual Report.

### Boyle Street Education Centre



- BSEC was thrilled to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this past June with a special dinner and a fun block party that featured former staff and students – a good time was had by all!

### Calgary Arts Academy



- Calgary Arts Academy has a new home! Students began classes there on October 16. The building is buzzing with excitement!
- The academy is grateful to have access to additional space at the Trans Alta Centre for Performing Arts, where our students practice dance, choral and band. Various outdoor spaces further enhance the experience for students.
- Calgary Arts Academy celebrated the grand opening of our Education Centre at the Youth Campus on Stampede Park on October 23, 2017. We were thrilled to be joined by Hon. David Eggen, Minister of Education.

### Calgary Girls School



- Facility Improvements: The Calgary Girls' School removed two old portables and replaced them with much newer modular units. The newer units needed some finessing, but the funding provided by Alberta Education supported the complete project which was on time, and on budget. The



units provide larger, more modern and comfortable classrooms. The Board approved the complete removal and replacement of all the flooring (except the gym and some tiled entry areas) at our Bel Aire campus. The facility, though more than 50 years old, seems to sparkle and shine.

- Fine and Performing Arts: The fine arts team collaborated for a successful production of Honk! – the musical. Approximately 80 students participated as onstage performers, dance captain, front of house, managers - costume, hair and make-up, marketing, ticket sellers, program designers in a musical production that featured 15 songs, 7 full dance numbers with extraordinary, professional choreography. The show was selected the previous year so could rehearse their audition pieces over the summer. Over 150 students auditioned and rehearsals began early in October. The sold-out show ran for three nights at the Central Memorial High School Theatre. Many graduates of CGS choose CMHS for its fine and performing arts programs. The school acknowledges the exceptional experiences and learning opportunities provided by the fine and performing arts team at CGS.

### **Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence (CAPE)**



- “Inclusion Through Personalized Programming” article was published in the CASS spring 2017 edition of The CASS CONNECTION.
- Planning phase for the new building completed.

### **Connect Charter School**



- Teacher Greg Neil was awarded one of Canada’s top medals in education, the *Innovation in Geography Teaching Award*, from The Royal Canadian Geographical Society for his dedication and ingenuity in geographical teaching.
- The school implemented an innovative Experiential, Place Based, Outdoor Education program - EXPO. Connect partnered with Mount Royal University on the research aspect of this.

### **Foundations for the Future Charter Academy**



- FFCA, along with Calgary Girls School, Connect and Westmount, is involved with the University of Calgary Werklund School of Education Partner Research Schools.
- Member, along with other charter schools, of the Alberta Research Network.
- FFCA has been involved with Mount Royal University in two recent research studies on elementary physical literacy and activity levels with one published and another to hopefully be published soon.
- FFCA’s Central Office has a brand new home in our very own building, with the Calgary Regional Consortium as one of our tenants (and best

neighbour ☺). We're living through renovations at the moment, but should be fully functional by December! Visitors welcome!

### Mother Earth's Children's Charter School



- We offer students the opportunity to learn the Stoney Language: The Stoney Language is considered to be in danger of disappearing, as it is only spoken by about 3000 people, (mostly Elders) only in Alberta. It is a challenging language to learn, as it is very difficult to write.
- Theresa Bird, a respected grandmother from the Paul First Nation, joins us every Wednesday to work with our young people. She is teaching students conversational Stoney so that they can make more meaningful connections to the grandmothers and grandfathers in the community, thus preserving their history.
- Drumming is led by Terrence Paskemin Sr. Terrence has led the renowned Drum Group, Blackstone, since the late 1980's. They perform regularly throughout Western Canada and Western US. Terrence is from Sweetgrass SK, but has lived in the Paul First Nation community for a number of years. Terrence Sr.'s children have attended MECCS for the past five years. The Blackstone Singers are one of the elite Pow Wow groups in North America. The group began performing and competing together in 1987, and took its name in honour of their Grandfather Blackstone. In 1996, the group won the World Championship Pow Wow competition in Hartford, Connecticut.
- MECCS partners with National Aboriginal organization *Indspire* through their researcher Sean Lessard. Working together, we engage in reflective practices, which will inform our future planning. Further to our partnership with *Indspire*, principal Danforth will present at the National Gathering for Indigenous Education in November 2017. Her workshop will focus on the benefits of having Indigenous students engage in cultural exchange programs and how to facilitate successful exchange experiences in First Nations communities. Principal Danforth is also a member of the Program Advisory Council for Experiences Canada, the non-profit organization that coordinates Canada-wide student exchanges, and will present to their board at the upcoming AGM in November 2017. In 2016-17 we took part in our 5<sup>th</sup> Experiences Canada exchange trip with a school from Kelowna BC this time.

### New Horizons Charter School



- Facility Modernization: An \$8 million modernization has improved every component of our school facility, from the classrooms to the parking lot to the Learning Commons to the mechanical and electrical systems. The project will continue into the 2017-18 school year, with completion scheduled for December 2017.
- Community Engagement: Facilitated by Alberta Community Development, our school's second annual Stakeholder Forum brought

together parents, students, staff, administration, our local MLA and our Ward councillor to discuss priorities for the school leading to the development of our Three-year Education Plan.

- Enrolment Growth: 2016-17 witnessed a 10% enrolment growth over the previous school year, the second consecutive year of a double-digit percentage increase in enrolment.

### **Suzuki Charter School**



Suzuki Charter School celebrated some significant changes in the 2016/17 year that are having a positive impact for all stakeholders:

- A complete revision of by-laws resulted in an improved system of governance where all Board Directors are elected for three year terms (previously elections were one year terms). This has improved opportunities for a Director professional development program, consistency in committee work and team building.
- A certificated staff professional development program was implemented which ensures ongoing annual funding for a) graduate study, b) school focus area P.D. support, and c) individual P.D. allocations.
- A review of compensations packages was completed and adjustments were made to both certificated and non-certificated salaries.
- All teachers progressed to year two of a partnership research study with the University of Alberta that explores various socio-emotional dimensions of learning.
- Improvements to the music learning program included the development and implementation of a revised kinder music program as well as revised schedules to facilitate increased integration between music and academic programs.
- These changes contributed to an outstanding public performance at the annual Winspear Concert in May where all 321 students celebrated music excellence.

### **Valhalla Community School**

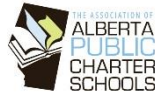


- Valhalla was very happy to have hosted TAAPCS meetings in May, welcoming representatives to see our school, hear about its history and learn about the community.
- We are also delighted to have established a new partnership with the GPRC Education faculty, in which we will receive student teachers, share our action research, and make presentations on Charter schools to student teachers.

## Westmount Charter School

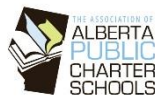


- Westmount continued the partnership with Briar Hill Elementary School (CBE) in a longitudinal study of academic literacy with Dr. Hetty Roessingh, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary.
- Two Westmount elementary teachers received a Community Environment Action Grant for \$149,200 related to our People for Energy and Environmental Literacy (PEEL) project to work with other schools in Alberta to better understand and address climate change.
- Westmount received a grant to complete the first phase of the outdoor classroom project at the Elementary campus.



## ISSUES AND TRENDS

- A challenge for TAAPCS is that many of our advocacy efforts seem to be dismissed. For example: caps on student numbers, funding equity, facilities, renewal of charters, new charter opportunities.
- We request invitations to the table when decisions are being made that impact charter schools.
- Part time superintendents are doing full time jobs along with expectations that they volunteer to be officers and/or members of EAC and other committees.
- Our financial situation is critical going forward. Member Boards will need to increase fees to keep an Executive Director and prepare the budget. A factor in these discussions is to balance Executive Director expectations within allocated contract time.
- There are the three strategy focuses - Governance, Communication and Strengthening Research. These three areas are a positive trend as we enter our third year using these strategies to drive our Association.
- First and foremost is the ongoing student achievement within thirteen diverse public charter school boards.
- Finally, we recognize the commitment of our Board of Governors to lead in manner best for all schools.



## LAST WORD – INTO THE FUTURE

*Executive Director Kath Rhyason*

The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools is the collective voice of 13 unique school communities who come together to speak on behalf of thousands of Alberta’s students and their families. This responsibility is not taken lightly. During 2015-2016, the Association purposely planned for change.

In the past year (2016 – 2017) we have seen “Change in Action” as the Association improved its organization through a collective review and amendment of the TAAPCS bylaws. In the future, we will see board policy developed to ensure that operations reflect the values and beliefs of our Board of Governors and our community.

“Change in Action” has been demonstrated in our efforts to find financial stability in light of reduced resources. This challenge addresses funding through membership fees and the need for more financial support for educational research. Financial solutions are vital in the next year.

The commitment of the Association for improved communications and advocacy is at the heart of changes demonstrated in the progressive planning developed to serve our present and future communication needs. The charter school video is a concrete example. We have seen communication “Change in Action” and have plans to carry it forward.

The thirteen charter school communities are united in their support for the continued work of Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools. We know where we are and where we are going individually and as an Association. We will always have what is the best for our students foremost as we consider changes. Our future is strong.

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On a personal note, I believe that any organization is only as good as the people in it. I have found the charter school staff members to be very professional and totally committed to the children and young adults they serve. Just as passionate about their schools and community are the many directors I have encountered. I believe Alberta is stronger for the charter schools’ commitment to doing the best for their students.

I have been welcomed and supported in the position of Executive Director. My thanks to all.

