

"Partnerships, Patience and Progress"

TAAPCS Annual Report 2008-2009

October 22, 2009

Prepared by Meredith Poole TAAPCS Secretary-Treasurer

www.taapcs.ca

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE – Jay Pritchard and Judy Gray, TAAPCS Co-Chairs 2008-09



PARTNERSHIPS, PATIENCE AND PROGRESS

A YEAR IN REVIEW



As you examine the contents of this year's Annual Report, you will realize that TAAPCS members have been actively and passionately engaged in many important initiatives that are both broad and deep in scope and potential impact. Our contributions to each of these initiatives have been distinguished by the qualities of partnership and collaboration.

In some years, as we reflect on the accomplishments of our organization, we are able to report on significant decisions made and actions taken as a result of our efforts. The work this year, however, has required patience, commitment and a belief in the power of partnership; we know that our involvement in the projects listed on the following pages will, in time, bear fruit. As well, we are optimistic that, through our leadership in providing professional development within the Association, we will solidify our base of knowledge and build capacity with committed educators, administrators and board members. The upcoming year holds the promise of many positive changes for charter schools; it is our belief that opportunities will continue to abound, enabling charter schools to be perceived as highly credible players on the public education landscape.

Your Executive appreciates the contributions of each individual member and each member school, as well as the partners who have worked with us this year.

WHAT IS TAAPCS?

The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools is currently comprised of 13 member schools, which are located throughout the province and are united in support of the following <u>mission</u>:

"Working together to support choice and innovation in public education."

The Association has been in existence since 1998 and over the last several years has held three meetings annually for the purpose of furthering four primary <u>objectives</u>:

- 1. To promote and facilitate public charter school education in Alberta.
- 2. To speak with one voice on behalf of public Charter Schools in Alberta.
- 3. To provide a forum for public Charter Schools to meet in support of common goals.
- 4. To advocate for continued innovation and choice within public education.

❖ Introducing our New Executive Director!

Thanks to our TAAPCS selection and interview committees for their successful efforts in hiring a part-time Executive Director for the Association – **Dr. Garry Andrews** comes to us from Lethbridge with over 20 years experience in education administration, including as a Superintendent and Director of Education in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Garry describes himself as a life-long learner whose most recent project, for



Lethbridge College, was to research, write and teach a series of Leadership Development modules, refining his own idea of leadership in the process. We are excited to have Garry on board and look forward to benefitting from his extensive knowledge and experience!

Charter Board Chairs (CBC) Committee

The "CBC" Committee, led by Bill McGregor, engaged in some valuable professional development this year with 35 Directors from 9 charter schools attending a February "Government Relations 101" workshop in Red Deer. Bill conducted the session himself, drawing on his experience within Alberta's political landscape. Topics included the design and implementation of a Government Relations plan, including the "Golden Rules" of GR; an overview of the Stelmach government; and the role of the Agenda and Priorities Committee in government decision-making. The feedback from this session was very positive and the knowledge gained will inform future interactions with politicians and government leaders, as well as an upcoming presentation to Rural Caucus (Spring 2010).

Several Board members from other Calgary charter schools and CAPE also attended a governance "Best Practices" workshop contracted by FFCA with Centre Point Services in June. Professional development is alive and well among our charter school directors!

* "Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans"

Approximately one year ago, Alberta Education introduced its *Inspiring Education* initiative. From the inception of this project, TAAPCS has had representation at the Working Committee level. As part of preparing committee members for involvement and leadership in the project, a series of professional learning opportunities was offered. Central to these was the introduction of "Theory U", a highly generative and dialectic process which has framed the work of both the Steering and Working committees. Over the course of April through June, a series of 10 community conversations was held to share ideas, experiences and insights to inform the creation of an education system designed to meet the needs of the 21st century learner. Information regarding the specific themes, perspectives and hopes and dreams is available on the *Inspiring Education* website. One significant application of the work of the Dialogue will be to inform the creation of a new School Act; other important data will be gathered from the "Speak Out" and "Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta" initiatives. It is anticipated that the Act will be opened at the Spring sitting of the Legislative Assembly, and TAAPCS is in the process of preparing input to this process as well.

We feel fortunate in having been invited to participate in this exciting venture and to have had the opportunity to represent our member schools in creating a new vision for public education in our province.

Charter School Message Spreads to Quebec!

Last May, FFCA South Middle School Principal Educator John Picard was invited to make a presentation on Charter Schools in Alberta to a conference of Quebec school administrators in Quebec City. The Federation of Quebec School Administrators has been lobbying for many years on the subject of increased autonomy for local public schools. The invitation followed a number of meetings in Calgary in the spring of 2008 during which Joe Frank and John met with representatives of the FQSA. His presentation looked briefly at:



- The history of the "autonomous" school movement as it has taken form in Britain and in New Zealand prior to the beginning of the charter school movement in the United States;
- The reasons and rationale for the development of autonomous and charter schools, including parental choice and the ability to respond and create in an efficient and effective manner;
- The development of the charter school movement in the United States;
- The legislation, mandate and development of the charter school movement in Alberta:
- The work of TAAPCS and the member charter schools;
- Some aspects of the focus of the various charter schools in Alberta;

The school administrators gathered for both presentations were very receptive to the opportunities that the charter school legislation has offered to Albertans and interested in how they might pursue this avenue in moving towards more school autonomy in Quebec.

Charter School Principals' Group

At the initial suggestion of our Alberta Education liaison, Joe Frank, there has been a new development this year with the inauguration of a Charter School Principals' Group. Their first meeting was held in March in Calgary at the FFCA Central Office and a second is planned in conjunction with the regular October meeting in Calgary. The agenda of the March meeting included such topics as the Principal Quality Practice Guideline, charter school code of professional conduct, and legislation applicable to charter schools, and built in some networking time to facilitate the sharing of other information and issues of common interest to charter school administrators. Subsequently, Ian Gray (Aurora) and Jeney Gordon (CAPE) stepped up to lead the steering committee, whose members also include Jamal El-Rafih (Almadina), Martha Faulkner (Westmount) and Ted Zarowny (New Horizons). (What great representation from all over the province!) Their plan is to meet three times per year to build on these new and welcome relationships.

New Home for MECCS!

Mother Earth's Children's Charter School has moved out of their strip mall facility to a much more appropriate home on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River (formerly the site of the St. Johns' School of Alberta.) The traditional heart of the St. John's philosophy - outdoor education, creating, independence, life skills and leadership – will be alive and well in the realization of MECCS' vision of being able to educate students "on the land", in a facility ideally suited to that purpose. Congratulations to



Principal TJ Skalski and Superintendent Ed Wittchen - their perseverance and hard work,

and the support of staff, students, families, Board members and Alberta Education, have made a dream become a reality!



MECCS held their Grand Opening on September 22, with invited guests from Alberta Education and several fellow charter schools on hand to celebrate the event with a pipe ceremony, fall feast, student performances, draw prizes and tours of the facility – all in all a great day, and an exciting beginning for many future successes.

Charter School Concept Paper

The long-awaited "Concept Paper" finally surfaced and was distributed to our members. Drafted during Hon. Ron Liepert's ministry following a study of the impact of charter schools, the document has many positive things to say about the success of Alberta Education's 1994 "experiment". It envisions the next generation of charter schools as "catalysts for critical thinking about education": potentially permanent, acting as "pilots or incubators" for the testing of ideas, having an increased responsibility for spreading effective education practices, incorporating a variety of governance options, and engaging in dialogue with post-secondary institutions in pursuit of optimum student success.

FFCA's Summer of Musical Schools

FFCA had a challenging summer on the facility front, receiving Ogden School to accommodate an ever-increasing number of High School students, relocating their North Middle School students from the CCBE St.

Clement School to the CBE Greenview School on McKnight Blvd., and moving the Northeast Elementary students into the now vacant St. Clement building in response to CBE requiring the return of their Renfrew building (whew!). Once again, an elementary school had to be converted into a high school (a major allocation of resources), and many other refinements had to be made in order to accommodate students at all three levels – elementary, middle and high school – appropriately.

Principal Quality Practice Guideline

Following up on a recommendation of the 2003 Alberta Commission on Learning, a stakeholder advisory committee was formed to develop a draft Principal Quality Practice Guideline document. The goal was to define and describe the broad range of competencies needed by principals to successfully fulfill their complex roles in today's education system. That document was finalized early in 2009 and outlines 7 "Leadership Dimensions" to which all school leaders are expected to commit. These are: 1. Fostering effective relationships, 2. Embodying visionary leadership, 3. Leading a learning community, 4. Providing instructional leadership, 5. Developing and facilitating leadership, 6. Managing school operations and resources, and 7. Understanding and responding to the larger societal context. TAAPCS is proud to have had representation on this committee in the person of FFCA Northwest Elementary Principal Educator Denise Budgen.

View the entire document at http://www.education.alberta.ca/admin/resources.aspx.

❖ In-House Vision Committee

This committee, consisting of Judy Gray, Jay Pritchard, Bill McGregor, Laurie Westwood, Ken McNeill and Kurtis Leinweber, put together a document outlining our preferred future. Obviously much will depend on the recommendations emanating from the *Inspiring Education* outcomes, but our vision hinges on the concepts of charter school permanence (and all its ensuing benefits), a focus on research and innovation, and responsible, flexible governance.



"Vision without action is a dream. Action without vision is simply passing the time.

Action with vision is making a positive difference."

Joel Barker

***** TAAPCS Funding & Finances

Membership dues remained constant this year at \$1000, pending a review of the budget visà-vis the Executive Director position. In support of this initiative, TAAPCS requested and received an increase of \$10,000 (to \$30,000) in our grant this year (our thanks to Alberta Education!).

* "Opening Minds, Inspiring Hearts" – This year's Charter School Conference committee, headed by Hal Curties of Westmount Charter School, has benefitted from a partnership with the Calgary Regional Consortium which has facilitated the organization of the October 23 sessions at the Greenwood Inn. On the evening of October 22, participants will be treated to an evening wine & cheese, and some inspirational words from Alvin Law. Mr. Law was born without arms and performs routine activities using only his feet – not only the essentials of eating, dressing and grooming, but also driving, sewing, participating in sports, and playing the drums, piano and trombone – more than most of us accomplish with two arms!

❖ Tidbits

- ❖ TAAPCS bids a fond farewell to Marie Keenan and welcomes Bev Hammond as her replacement in the role of Superintendent of Almadina Language Charter School. We wish Marie every success in her future endeavours! We were also sad to say goodbye, and send our best wishes, to Dr. Terry Wendel who no longer has charter schools in his portfolio. Our friend David Woloshyn will be joining us in his place. Welcome David!
- * TAAPCS Representation on Provincial Committees
 - Setting the Direction for Special Education Steve Simmons (Aurora)/Jim Rigby (New Horizons)
 - Jurisdiction Survey Advisory Group Gordon Welch (CSS)
 - School Leadership Framework Committee Denise Budgen (FFCA)
 - English Language Learning Marie Keenan (Almadina)
 - Inspiring Education Working Committee Jay Pritchard/Judy Gray (FFCA)
 - CTS Advisory Committee Alan Crooks (Westmount)
 - Off-Campus Handbook External Advisory Committee Darrell Lonsberry
 - "Community Conversations" related to *Inspiring Education* Freddi Bromling & Jolene Kochendorfer (Valhalla), Ches Cowley (CGS) Judy Gray (FFCA), Teresa DiNinno and Jeney Gordon (CAPE), Gordon Welch (CSS), Pat Cavill (CAA), and Steve Simmons (Aurora).

The dedication of these people, who gave freely of their time in order that the charter school voice might be heard, is nothing short of amazing!

Thank you from your TAAPCS 2008-09 Executive:

Jay Pritchard and Judy Gray, Co-Chairs Meredith Poole, Secretary-Treasurer

