

Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

December 2010 Issue

Despite the strange weather phenomena the entire province has faced this fall, our charter schools continue to flourish rather than flounder. Our enrolment continues to grow. Our teachers, administrators, parents, and especially our students continue to voice strong support for our schools and the quality of education being delivered and received. However like the weather, there continues to be a bit of uncertainty surrounding the future vision which is evolving for charter schools. The new Education Act is set to be made public in the spring of 2011 and, thereafter, the Regulations will be developed, so that by the fall of 2012 the manner in which schools and school authorities operate will no doubt be altered. While we have heard many times that “charter schools are here to stay”, it is still a time of uncertainty. In short, if we wish to have a say in our future, the Association needs to maintain a proactive approach. We need to continue meaningful conversations both inside and outside the association about what the mandate is and should be for charter schools, and then take action so rhetoric is not solely an academic exercise (or to continue the weather metaphor, “whistling in the wind”.) To that end, we trust that with modest publications such as this newsletter we can provide some level of information which will lead to discussions at the local level, and from there help strengthen participation in, and support for, our provincial endeavours. [Please see next page for reference to the Transformation Guide for

Charter Schools]. – Dr. Garry Andrews, TAAPCS Executive Director

Enrolment for 2010-11

As noted above, enrolment for our 13 charter schools continues to be strong, with many of the schools having significant waiting lists. As of September 30, 2010 the total enrolment was 7719.

Almadina – 668 (K-9)
 Aurora – 505 (K-9)
 Boyle Street – 149 (10-12)
 Calgary Arts Academy – 478 (K-9)
 Calgary Girls' School – 599 (4-9)
 Calgary Science School – 600 (4-9)
 Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence (CAPE) – 149 (K-8)
 Foundations for the Future Charter Academy (FFCA) – 2788 (K-12)
 New Horizons – 189 (K-9)
 Mother Earth's Children's Charter School (MECCS) – 119 (K-9)
 Suzuki – 268 (K-6)
 Valhalla – 94 (K-8)
 Westmount – 1113 (K-12)

January 13 and 14, 2011 TAAPCS Meetings

Please be reminded of the TAAPCS meeting on January 14th to be held at the Capri Hotel and Convention Centre in Red Deer.

Also please note that the Council of Board Chairs will hold its meeting at 3:00 PM on January 13th at the Capri.

The agendas for both meetings have been circulated.



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October 2010 Regular Meeting Highlight – Dr. Garry Andrews, TAAPCS Executive Director

A highlight of the regular meeting of the Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools on October 22 was the presentation of Mr. Todd Hirsch, Senior Economist, ATB Financial, and Co-Chair of the Calgary Arts Academy.



Following a video entitled “Where do good ideas come from?”, Mr. Hirsch spoke on the topic of “innovation”, which he said is a word that is overused in the business world. By highlighting the words “creativity, innovation, invention and design”, he drew clear distinctions as to how these terms apply to several everyday objects as cameras, MP3 players and cars. For example, the phonograph was an **invention** that led to the record player (an improved **design**). The record player led to the reel-to-reel tape recorder which

can be considered an **innovation**, and that in turn led to the walkman and MP3 players which are not innovations themselves, but rather improved **designs**. Mr. Hirsch noted that “creativity” grows out of basic design. **Creativity** adds value but isn’t necessarily innovation (e.g. design improvements in automobiles since the day of the Model T have been creative, but not innovative.) In Mr. Hirsch’s words, “Design improvement is the “tweaking” of existing systems or products. This is valuable, but it isn’t innovation”.

Following his presentation, a rich and extensive discussion took place. Participants were especially interested in how “innovation” in education connected to what Mr. Hirsch said. As well, with last year’s Charter School Concept Paper, Alberta Education indicated that our schools might ultimately become “centres of innovation and research”, and participants wondered what this might look like. There was considerable concern about the word innovation being overused and if there is no clear definition provided by Alberta Education, then a great deal of confusion will result. As more than one participant indicated, “If Alberta Education really means improved design, this could be considerably different from innovation.” There was general agreement that improving the quality of education our students receive, by improving the design of our programs and their delivery, is a laudable goal and one which we will continue to pursue regardless of definitions.

At the close of this session it was suggested that our Association work with Alberta Education in the



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future to hold a province wide symposium on “Innovation”, so that all parties can arrive at a better understanding of what innovation is, and what its application to schools might look like.

Transformation Guide for Charter Schools

As alluded to in the introduction of this newsletter, there appear to be changes being considered provincially for charter schools. In late November, we learned that Alberta Education would be releasing a document to solicit feedback from the province’s stakeholders concerning the future of charter schools. To date, the guide has not been released. In anticipation of its release, however, the Association is requesting that each school, its directors, and parents be prepared to read and respond to Alberta Education concerning the contents of the document. A special request is being made to have all schools invite the TAAPCS Executive Director, Dr. Garry Andrews, to attend a board meeting in the new year so he can provide an explanation of the Association’s position.

Highlighted Schools

As a new endeavour, TAAPCS asked for volunteers to provide features for each of our two annual newsletters. For December we are pleased to have had four schools volunteer. Representatives from Aurora, New Horizons, Suzuki and Mother Earth’s have done a fine job of highlighting activities, programs and people at their schools. Our thanks to them all!

History is Happening at Suzuki Charter School: The Realization of a Dream – Sharon Goulet, Suzuki Charter School

Twenty-five years ago, there were 17 little violinists in one preschool classroom learning to master their instrument, along with other more academic subjects. In 1985, with the help of the **Society for Talent Education**, who believed in the powerful connection music education and the Suzuki Method could have with our children, the first Suzuki Kindergarten opened its doors in the old King Edward School. With the strong commitment from staff and parents, a dream was ignited.

In 1995, Alberta Education supported our innovative method of integrating the Alberta Curriculum with music instruction, and allowed for us to become a charter school. This resulted in the dream where all students in all grades could benefit from the advantages of learning to play an instrument slowly becoming a possibility. It was Shinichi Suzuki’s belief that music would make the world a happier, more peaceful place. His primary goal was not necessarily to produce concert musicians, but beautiful people who would help bring peace and understanding to the world.

On December 1st, 2010, we at Suzuki Charter School hosted the official opening of our new school facility to a crowd of approximately 300. Thank-you speeches were interspersed with student musical performances. Students spoke



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proudly and appreciatively of their school, a PowerPoint presentation on Suzuki spirit was added, and a commemorative plaque was dedicated by our Board Chair. Castle Rock Contracting closed with high praise for our school, staff, and students, and a portrait gift to grace our walls.

With 304 students enrolled in Preschool to Grade 6 - playing 8 different instruments (cello, double bass, flute, guitar, piano, recorder, viola, and violin); enjoying choral and music theory classes in a facility that holds 14 academic classrooms, a preschool room, 9 music studios, a gymnasium (complete with a stage), with a library overflowing with books, and with a picturesque setting along the banks of the North Saskatchewan River – the dream has been realized!



At Suzuki Charter School, the dream of Dr. Shinichi Suzuki to “develop the whole child through the playing of fine music so that they can develop sensitivity, discipline, and endurance to become people with beautiful hearts” is thriving! Through the diligence, dedication, and determination of our staff, board, contractors, Suzuki Partners, parents, and students this dream has come to fruition. Thank you to all involved! Truly, **“when love is deep, much can be accomplished.”**

A new dream...junior high?

Walking on Sunshine – Karen Spencer,
Suzuki Charter School

For most, fall means back to school, getting pencils and scribblers ready for the year ahead, buying cozy coats and new shoes with a little growing room. For us, fall meant sharing our excitement, welcoming students, parents and staff to our new



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facility thoughtfully customized to meet our needs. It is a dream come true.

So many people have asked if I miss the old school. I must say that I don't but I do appreciate the lessons living in the space taught us: (1) When selecting schools, our parents looked past our humble shell to see the strength and beauty of the program within; (2) Our teachers demonstrated perseverance and dogged flexibility to provide a foundation of excellence for future growth. Their ability to illuminate lessons using minimal resources is masterful; and (3) Our students continue to work enthusiastically and grow, supported by parents and teachers. Challenges that consumed so much time and focused attention have faded, replaced with bright promise. Wider hallways facilitate quiet and safe transitions, a colorful playground, vast fields and outdoor shed filled with play equipment encourage positive play for all. A library invites opportunities to continue to dream, allowing us space to imagine a future space burgeoning with delicious books ready to be devoured by hungry readers.

The energy and heart of our program was not in the building it housed, but found in the relationships we cultivate from within. We thank TAAPCS and our partners within the Government of Alberta for all they have done and continue to do to support innovation and inspired initiative.

The Rewards and Challenges of Being Small - Ted Zarowny, New Horizons School

New Horizons School is small when compared to other charter schools; this year's population of 189 students from K-9 is the highest it's ever been. As with gifts, big things often come in small packages, and New Horizons is no exception. Yet, sometimes the small box creates its own challenges and makes packaging things a creative act! We can share with you how we are meeting some of those challenges as we move forward.

Since the move into our new facility from Sherwood Park to Ardrossan three years ago, New Horizons has been working towards enhancing its program to continually improve the way it meets the needs of academically gifted learners. Three charter goals keep our planning and purpose moving in the same direction: to meet the (1) academic, (2) social, and (3) emotional needs of gifted learners.

Being a small school has its benefits. We are a tightly-knit learning community. Students, parents, board directors and staff know each other well and work together with a common vision for student learning. Probably the best examples of how our partners work together is how our School Council has evolved over the last few years. Not so long ago, our School Council participated in training courses provided by the provincial body of school councils in Alberta. At the same time, the Fundraising Association of New Horizons School (FANHS) took time to redefine and establish itself as a separate entity from the School Council. Since then, the School Council and FANHS make a yearly plan that reflects our own Education Plan.



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Resources generated by our fundraising body and volunteer energy are funneled in various ways back to the students and school to help us reach our program goals. The partnership is supportive, cooperative, and an essential part of what defines our school.



Our small size also contributes positively to our programming. For instance, we accelerate students in math courses, and aligning our math schedules across all grade levels from K-7 allows students to physically move into alternate learning environments with similar ability students.

Our ability to create a climate that is safe, caring and supportive of the social and emotional needs of gifted learners is more easily done in an environment where staff members know most of the students and where students are familiar with the staff. Our continued efforts to use Restitution Self Discipline as the basis of our student behavior management system works well along with contemporary literature about meeting the social/emotional needs of gifted learners. This is

especially so with the current research work regarding “overexcitabilities” and “oversensitivities” based on Dubrovsky’s teachings. Our school is a place where students can feel secure and confident in addressing their living and learning needs.

Keeping technology current is easier in a school of such small size as ours. All our instructional spaces have wireless data projectors and SMART Boards and our junior high students each have a wireless laptop assigned to them. We are now working on establishing individual classroom video-conferencing capabilities.

We experience many more positives because of our small size, but those positives are balanced with challenges. One of the biggest challenges we have faced is our small junior high population. We enroll between 30 and 40 students from Grade 7 to 9 and that adds up to limited resources and limited staffing in a facility hampered by lack of space. Creating variety and an attractive program is a challenging task. The larger and more local junior high schools become alluring for students; with their more flexible facilities and overall resources they can create and offer programs that are beyond our ability to match. Add in the more dynamic and diverse social experience at larger junior high schools. Our grade 6 to grade 7 transition usually experiences a substantial loss of students through this attrition. This trend has characterized the junior high program for several years.

Over the last two years, we have been addressing that trend by using the Autonomous Learner Model (ALM) for gifted learners as our template and borrowing from George Betts’ work in this area. Doing so has resulted in some changes that are



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having a positive effect on our junior high population. For instance, we have expanded the Enrichment-Adventure Trip component. With the cooperation of our Board, some tinkering with relevant board policies has allowed us to take our students on adventure trips within and outside the province. Students in Grade 7 spend time in Jasper and the Columbia Ice Fields, while students in Grade 8 do a marine study on a sailing vessel in BC's Gulf Islands, and the Grade 9's visit Quebec and Ottawa. With in-house expertise, we've expanded our CTS programming for our Robotics courses to include programming microprocessors with "Aduino". As well, our music program has expanded to include guitars and a percussion band featuring drums and marimbas. Last year the troupe performed in Jasper and McBride, B.C.

We have adjusted other aspects of our program as well. We have included time in our junior high schedule for the Seminar dimension of the ALM. Once a month we now have community members and specialists present to students on varying topics such as careers and Internet safety. This time will transition to student led seminars. The transition is still in its infancy, but it appears to be paying off already.

Our small number also limits the number of staff we are able to maintain. We have a part-time superintendent and secretary-treasurer at the senior administration level. In school, the office staff consists of a principal (with a .15 classroom assignment) and 1 business manager/secretary. While we have approximately 3.0 FTE educational assistants (EA), we have no other support staff in the school or at our central office level. Our students could benefit from the services of a school counselor, along with a support teacher to

help manage such things as the 189 IPPs, but those things are difficult to realize without more funding that would come with a larger student base.

Again, a bit of creativity is helping us move forward. With the cooperation of our teachers, our educational assistants run a very flexible schedule, being in places with the highest need at any given time. As those needs change over days or weeks, our EA schedules shift as well. On the IPP front, we are integrating a variety of student data, including student learning profile information, assessment information, and assessment tools such as rubrics and checklists. Teachers can use this "all-in-one" integrated student data file system to develop student IPPs. With drop-down menus and access to a range of data from the current and previous years, the tasks of creating, monitoring, and managing student IPPs is more efficient. With a locally developed system, we can easily change any aspect of the IPP program to suit our needs.

Another challenge with our having a small population base from which to draw is our student admissions procedures, especially at the kindergarten level. The vast majority of our new registrants start at the kindergarten level. Once enrolled at New Horizons, students typically remain here until grade 6. After grade six, students either remain in our school or move off to a larger junior high school. We do get a few new elementary students when an opening occurs, and we do get new junior high students from time to time. By that age, however, we can refer to other school based information besides an intelligence test to help determine admissions.

At the pre-school level, we have very little data from which to draw. Some prospective students go



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to day-care, and some do not; therefore, other than parent perceptions and an intelligence test (which is difficult to do with confidence at such a young age), we have limited valid data to consider. Conducting interviews for the often 30+ registrations has time and money implications. We are thus researching a tool that can offer greater validity than our current parent checklist so that we can place more balanced consideration along with the intelligence test results.

New Horizons continues to grow and evolve as we focus on keeping our research base current. In addition to the concepts shared above, we are implementing numerous other practices informed

through research in other initiatives at our school, e.g., our AISI project on differentiation strategies.

Through the combined efforts of our dedicated staff, supportive parent community, proactive senior administration, and dedicated Board, we will keep driving down the road of continuous reflection and change so that our small school can be a most effective and powerful place for gifted learners to blossom. We welcome visitors and partnerships with those who wish to travel and learn with us.

“Ever child is entitled to a home, food, upbringing, and an education—and if so be he has no near kin, then he is a proper and honourable charge on the Tribe.”

The Gospel of the Redman
– Julia M. Seton – 1963

Mother Earth’s Children’s Charter School

– TJ Skalski and Bevan Janzen

Our children are greeted a minimum of four times before they get to the classroom each morning; when they get off the bus, at the front door, around about the cafeteria, and at the classroom. We have children from seven different communities and staff that travel from as far as downtown Edmonton to be with our children. When you engage in the community of Mother Earth’s Children Charter School you experience a culture of family.

Just this past Thursday, our children demonstrated their abilities in managing an array of dynamics and adapted their skills to meet the challenges of hosting a large sports tournament. MECCS hosted the Treaty 6 Jr. Volleyball Finals on November 24th, 2010. We witnessed kids sweeping and mopping floors, wiping tables, tidying bathrooms...and showing respect for their school. ‘Real Life Experience Learning’ was taking place in the canteen with students learning how to interact with customers and operate a cash register. Students experienced score keeping, linesman, and helped out at the registration table. I observed how our Mother Earth family dynamics and communication styles transferred over onto the court whereby both our Jr. Girls and Jr. Boys teams became gold medal champions.



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Our instructional teams are dynamic and connected. They ensure that our children feel safe at school and respond in a way that respects the child keeping his/her integrity intact. We have built-in supports through a mixture of cultural leaders. Each child is counselled through an Indigenous approach of experience and storytelling. The very experience of being in an Indigenous setting is in itself the heart of how learning happens at Mother Earth.

The school is located along the North Saskatchewan River just past the Genesee Bridge on traditional Cree territory. Although many of the children come from Paul First Nation, we have a mix of children and adults of African, British, Blackfoot, Métis, French, German, Czech, and Norwegian descent. The people of this learning community are tied to some part of Mother Earth whether it is through place or time. The community is filled with supportive mothers looking after each child as their very own. As an evolving school, there are many gifts and talents yet to be discovered as we learn to connect and reconnect to the land.



Our instructional teams have experience in an array of practical skills that are shared among adults and children. We have mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, beaders, singers, dancers, cooks, multi media adventurers, storytellers, musicians, athletes, builders and more. Each child and adult has some skill or gift to share with one another, whether they are the best yo-yo string tier, a talented DJ, or an imaginative artist.

In our journey of learning how to adapt Indigenous ways to meet the 21st century, we have a mix of Indigenous experiences and technology skills. The Coyotes (Grade 1/2) have engaged with iPADS to enhance their kinaesthetic learning and to increase numeracy and literacy skills. The Bear Cubs (Kindergarten) each have a camera to allow us to see the world through their eyes. Afternoons of hands-on activities enable children and adults to create 'flow' which is conducive to brain wellness. In the many approaches to learning we have a theme per term that ties us all together.

In working with Indigenous pedagogy, instructional teams work together to tie the curriculum outcomes into thematic learning experiences. As we shift and move towards this approach, we are very cognisant of keeping



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a balance, acknowledging readiness levels of all participants. With supports in place to meet the challenges this shift may encounter, we are developing system logistics to assist us in facilitating change and making adaptations to maximize effectiveness. This year instructional teams agreed on cycles as the concept within the water, sky, and earth themes. This allows for adaptive capacity while having a foundational concept to connect the learners.

Learners at Mother Earth seek out hopeful connections between themselves and their environment. Through Indigenous perspectives, hope focused relationships become key in how we interact with one another and our natural environment. When faced with conflict through differences, we work to find explicit commonalities and strengths. Using circles as a tool to demonstrate concepts, learners begin to see a visual representation of relationships from varying perspectives, whether it is in the study of self or study of water. In connecting our learners with other and the earth we experience learning within a family-like community

2010 APEGGA Teachers' Awards

– Ian Gray, Aurora Charter School

Aurora Charter School has the unique distinction of being the first and only school to have two teachers receive Excellence in Teaching Awards concurrently. Both Mrs. Tran and Mr. Raynard accepted awards for excellence in math and science. Mr. Dang, a two-time winner himself, was also presented with a nomination certificate. Congratulations go out to these three outstanding teachers, a reflection of the superior instruction present within Aurora's walls. To the right are Ms. Tran, Mr. Raynard, Mr. Gray and Mr. Simmons with the Honourable Dave Hancock, Minister of Education.



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Conference 2011 - Preliminary Plans

Planning is proceeding for the October, 2011 TAAPCS conference which is held every two years. It was determined that for 2011 the theme for the conference would relate to "Innovation", and it will take place in Calgary at the Coast Plaza Hotel on October 20 (evening) and 21. While the agenda is yet to be finalized, it is anticipated that we will begin on October 20th with a keynote speaker and follow this on the 21st with breakout sessions led by charter school teachers and administrators. The Minister and Deputy Minister have been invited to attend. The Calgary Regional Consortium is once again involved with planning and registrations. More information will be provided in the spring. In the meantime, we are asking each school to consider making Conference 2011 a PD priority for the upcoming year.

Professional Development for Charter School Directors

On November 6, TAAPCS held a Directors' professional development session in Calgary on "Governance and Change". Thirteen participants, representing four of the local charter schools, attended. Feedback from the sessions was positive. Several schools have inquired about having TAAPCS provide PD sessions delivered locally and, wherever possible, this will be

accommodated. Please contact Garry Andrews at andrews.garry@gmail.com if you are interested.

On January 15, 2011, TAAPCS will hold a professional development session for Directors and Superintendents in Red Deer (Capri) on "Government Relations". Bill McGregor, Chair of the Council of Board Chairs will facilitate the day's activities. Please contact Meredith Poole or Garry Andrews if you are interested. Cost is \$100/person.



Dates to remember

January 14, 2011 – Regular Meeting, Red Deer
 January 15, 2011 – Government Relations PD for Directors
 February 4, 2011 – EAC Meeting, Red Deer
 May 6, 2011 – Regular Meeting, Edmonton
 May 15, 2011 – Newsletter contributions due
 October 20, 2011 – Regular Meeting, Calgary
 October 21, 2011 – TAAPCS Conference, Calgary

*Merry Christmas
 and a very
 Happy New Year
 to all!*

