

Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

June 2010 Issue

Spring Meeting

The Association's 2010 spring meeting took place at the Matrix Hotel in Edmonton on May 7. Representatives from 12 charter schools as well as Alberta Education were in attendance. Committee reports were given in the areas of Special Education, ESL, the Principals' Group, the Board Chairs' Committee, the Education Advisory Committee and Alberta Education. As well, two excellent presentations were made to the group, the first by Dr. Mark Swanson, Chair of the Association of Alberta Deans of Education, who discussed the eight teacher preparation programs currently available in Alberta, and the part played by his association within the Alberta educational community.



Dr. Mark Swanson, Dean of Education, Concordia University

TJ Skalski and Bevan Janzen from Mother Earth's Children's Charter School provided delegates with a fuller understanding of the uniqueness of their charter school and the interesting approaches being taken to provide for the children's learning needs.



Bevan Janzen and TJ Skalski, MECCS

During the various committee reports, discussion centred on two recurring themes – financial matters and the Association's growing concerns with delays in rolling out the revised *School Act*. Alberta Education representatives were helpful in explaining the situation but nevertheless, it was suggested that the Association's executive send a letter to the Minister outlining these concerns. Discussion topics to look for in the fall include Bylaw amendments/approval, small group discussion on "Images of Research, Innovation and Partnerships", and the implications of closer connections to the ASBA and ATA.



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

“Inspiring Education” Report

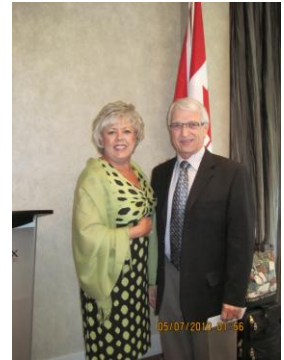
The Steering Committee of *Inspiring Education* released its report on June 2, 2010. “The report stresses engaged thinking, ethical citizenship and entrepreneurial spirit as the three foundational competencies that must be fostered in every student by Alberta’s education system”. Upon first reading, these are foundational competencies of which charter schools would be supportive, but we look forward to more information and dialogue as to how they will be operationalized. In this regard, on June 15, 2010 Minister Hancock will release an education discussion paper which is intended to “lay the ground work for further changes in the education system, including new education legislation”.

Changing of the Guard

We are saddened to say farewell to Mr. Merv Kurtz, who will be retiring this August after eight years as Superintendent at Westmount Charter School. Mr. Kurtz’ wise counsel, positive outlook and commitment to excellence in education will be missed by the entire TAAPCS “family”. We wish Merv all the best in his retirement. A celebration took place on June 10, 2010 in the school’s West Gymnasium.



Merv Kurtz, Jay Pritchard



Judy Gray, Joe Frank

Merv’s successor will be Mr. Joe Frank, currently a Senior Education Manager with Alberta Education. Prior to joining Alberta Education, Joe served very successfully as Superintendent at the Calgary Arts Academy and before that as Area Director with the Calgary Board of Education. Joe’s wide range of experience will no doubt be beneficial to both Westmount and the entire Association. Welcome Joe.

We are also saddened to say goodbye to Ms. Bev Hammond, Superintendent of Almadina Charter School. Bev is leaving to become Superintendent at Mystery Lake School Division in Thompson, Manitoba. We wish Bev all the best as she enters a new phase in her career. A replacement for Bev has not yet been named.



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

Directors' Professional Development

Three workshops were held in March and April for TAAPCS Directors. There was a total of 29 participants. The Calgary and Edmonton workshops focused upon the theme of *"Leading Self and Others"* while the Valhalla theme was *"Leadership and Governance"*. The results of these sessions were positive and more workshops are being planned for 2010-11.

Charter School Conferences

At least two charter schools are planning extensive conferences in the upcoming school year. **Foundations for the Future Charter Academy** is partnering with Foothills School Division and Solution Tree to present an "ASSESSMENT INSTITUTE" at the Calgary Telus Convention Centre on October 24-26. This conference will feature such assessment experts as Douglas Reeves, John Antonelli, Kay Burke, Damian Cooper, Cassandra Erkens and Chris Spence. As well, **Westmount Charter School** is planning a major conference entitled "PILLARS OF GIFTED EDUCATION". It will be held at the Greenwood Inn, Calgary on October 22 and 23. In addition to keynote speakers, Dr. Tracy Cross of the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA and Dr. Richard Olenchak of the University of

Houston, more than a dozen other experts will make presentations related to the social-emotional development of gifted students. For more information please feel free to contact the schools directly.

Research initiatives

For more than a year, **Foundations for the Future Charter Academy** has been involved in a research partnership with the University of Calgary (Faculty of Kinesiology) and Mount Royal University (Dept. of Physical Education and Recreation). The focus of the partnership involves an innovative study to better understand the use and impact of technology as part of the daily physical activity of children. As a result of this partnership, FFCA has been equipped with state-of-the-art active gaming equipment.



FFCA Southwest Elementary Campus "Exergaming" Class



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

The stage has been converted into a research lab that uses “exergaming” (exercise and video gaming equipment) to help children develop fundamental movement skills like agility, balance, coordination and laterality. Since January, Grades 3 and 4 students have been involved with researchers from the University of Calgary and Mount Royal University regarding the impact of exergaming on their physical development. More specifically, “the purpose of the research is to determine the impact of exergaming equipment (such as Wii Fit balance boards) and other innovative physical education equipment on the development of balance”. To carry out the research, students are placed in “one of three randomized groups (exergaming, innovative equipment, or control)” and balance tests are administered to determine whether one approach to is more effective than another. At a time when national data indicate that children’s physical activity levels are falling while obesity rates are increasing, it is becoming more important that studies such as this be conducted, and that the recommendations which arise from them be carefully considered. The results from this segment of the project are expected before the end of the school year.

The **Calgary Science School** is undertaking research into the topic of parent involvement.

Dr. Shelley Robinson, Vice-Principal, authored a paper entitled “*Parent Involvement: Building Parent Capacity at the Calgary Science School*”. Dr. Robinson outlines two questions to which they are seeking answers: 1. What can be deemed to be the essence of a home and school relationship that most effectively supports students and curriculum? 2. How does the community build these school-home relationships to sustain ongoing parent involvement that “fits” and feels right for everyone involved?” While Dr. Robinson feels the school has been historically very good at “fulfilling certain designated and important parent involvement functions” and has “a sense of parent efficacy”, she says “we are still on this journey of optimizing, welcoming and appreciating the power of parents in our school”. The research which forms the foundation for the paper stresses several important points. Included is the finding that schools should “prepare volunteers with targeted training so that their efforts are effective and.....prepare teachers to work well with volunteers”. Through the school’s newly formed “Parent Volunteer Development Committee” (PVDC) they are endeavoring to operationalize this finding and in so doing continue to “build an open and welcoming school climate... with parents at CSS”. For a copy of the paper, or to share research, please contact Dr. Shelley Robinson at the Calgary Science School.



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

Milestones and Honours

On May 14, 2010, **Suzuki Charter School** celebrated its 15th anniversary at Edmonton’s Francis Winspear Centre for Music. Although officially 15 years old, the school’s origin can actually be traced to the fall of 1985 when the Suzuki Kindergarten program was started with the support of the Society for Talent Education. Located at Old King Edward School, the kindergarten flourished for four years when the parents were able to receive approval from the Department of Education and, with the support of the Society for Talent Education Board, started a private “Suzuki Elementary School”. In 1993, STE, along with Suzuki Elementary School, relocated to its current home formally called St. Bernard School, which is leased from the Edmonton Catholic School District. In 1995, a five-year Charter from the Minister of Education was obtained under the sponsorship of the Society for Talent Education Board. Eliminating tuition by being a publicly funded charter school gave more children an opportunity to participate in an innovative educational experience. As a charter, the school was mandated to follow the Alberta curriculum integrated with music instruction following the Suzuki method. In 1997, the Charter was transferred from the Society for Talent Education to the Suzuki Charter School Society and a new Board of Directors, comprised of parents of SCS students, was established.



Suzuki Charter School Fifteenth Anniversary Gala Event, May 14, 2010



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

Still holding true to Dr. Shinichi Suzuki’s belief that through the process of learning a musical instrument we are developed on many different levels and, further, that peace and understanding can be achieved through the study of music, the school has flourished. Now celebrating its 15th year, there is an enrolment of over 250 students, and in addition to the study of eight musical instruments, extensive choral instruction is taking place. Congratulations, Suzuki!

Westmount Charter School had its paper on International Education published in the *CASS Connections* magazine’s spring edition. The article, written by Westmount Communication Coordinator Greg Wooley, provides readers with an understanding of a program entitled “Face to Faith”. In his article, Greg explains that a “culturally-diverse group of students was recently actively engaged in a videoconference with students from other nations and other faith traditions. The program that organized this conference, Face to Faith, is an initiative of Britain’s Tony Blair Faith Foundation, with Westmount as the Canadian Lead School”. To date, “grade seven students at Westmount have had an introductory videoconference with students from Westhoughton School in Bolton, England, have followed up via a facilitated email site, and plan to have further conferences to

deepen this relationship. A videoconference involving High School students is proposed with Eastwood College in Lebanon, and invitations have been extended for Westmount to take part in future videoconferences with a school in Jordan and two schools in England”. Credit for becoming involved in this initiative is given to teachers Neil Robinson and Peter Dziuba, who learned of the program while participating in a videoconference with the Global Nomads group. For more information, please contact Peter and Neil at Westmount Charter School or visit www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/pages/schools.

The **Calgary Arts Academy** has partnered with Tiajiao International Group to form the Tianjiao English Training Institute. This summer, three Calgary Arts Academy teachers/artists will travel to Xiamen, China to provide students the opportunity of learning the English language through Arts Immersion for six weeks. Using dance, drama, music, visual art and the literary arts to teach an internationally recognized English Language Learning program, Calgary Arts Academy staff will facilitate involvement and collaboration which is intended to result in enhanced student self-confidence. All students will have the opportunity to perform for family and friends.



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

Dates to remember



- September 17, 2010 - EAC meeting, Red Deer
- October 21/22, 2010 - Regular Meeting and AGM, Calgary
- November 19, 2010 - EAC meeting, Red Deer
- January 20/21, 2011 – Regular Meeting, Red Deer
- May 5/6, 2011 – Regular Meeting, Edmonton

Recent school “snapshots”

Almadina

The Almadina Youth Club, in its first year of operation, recently received an anonymous donation of over \$1,700 to assist in its activities. The Youth Club, under the leadership of Mr. El-Rafih, is for students 12-13 years of age. The donation will support short field trips and sports activities which are designed to enhance students’ development of social networks, as well as learning to get along with one’s peers through structured interactions.



Aurora

In the Edmonton Regional Science Fair 2010, Aurora students competed against 33 other schools from the area and set both a school record and a competition record by winning 42 out of a possible 127 awards (1/3 of all the awards available to be won). A record total of \$3,360 in prize money was awarded. Congratulations to the 38 Aurora students (Grades 4-9) who represented the school so successfully.

Boyle Street Education Centre



On April 26 and 27, Boyle Street Education Centre hosted a two-day student wellness conference. The annual student health conference themed “InnerNations” focused on enhancing the health of inner city youth through cultural arts, incorporating a hip-hop performance, a traditional dance presentation by a Boyle Street student, and motivational talks by local celebrities such as Edmonton Oiler Defenseman, Jason Studwick and well-known Hypnotist Wayne Lee. The conference kicked off a week-long youth exchange experience for students of AY Jackson Secondary School, North York, Ontario. The event was part of the final leg of a YMCA sponsored youth exchange



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

involving AY Jackson Secondary and Boyle Street Education Centre Charter School.

Calgary Arts Academy



On April 22nd, the students of the Spirit Choir united with internationally renowned Canadian singer/songwriter Ian Tyson, at “The Beach” recording studio. After months of preparation, together they recorded ‘A Song for Spirit’, the students’ tribute to Spirit, the golden eagle. It was a memorable day. The students were incredible, performing the song 23 times in order to get it just right. Mr. Tyson was very complimentary of the children, and a true professional in every way. The recording is being fine tuned and the finished product is sure to be a source of pride for the children, the school and Ian Tyson. *(courtesy of Cam Bourque)*

Calgary Girls’ School



The annual Women’s Eve Gala was recently held and as before, was a great success. With the leadership of volunteer Maja Petrovic, Grade 8 and 9 girls organized this event. Over 600 girls and their parents attended an “inspiring evening that honored women who have ‘Broken Boundaries’”. The event serves as a

significant fundraiser for the school and allows it to provide scholarship support for a Calgary Girls’ School alumna who, having completed Grade 12 elsewhere, will be pursuing post-secondary education in the fall. As well as scholarship support, the “gala fund” assists students to attend workshops and camps over the summer.



Calgary Science School

Two major renovation projects undertaken at the school are virtually complete. The Instructional Activity Centre, or IAC (formerly an outdoor area underneath the library) has been completed and the school is waiting for an occupancy inspection before opening the main entrance to visitors and guests. The IAC will provide a much needed instructional/multi-purpose area for larger groups. The second renovation project which was completed included work to the staff room. Part of this project involved making an office space adjacent to the staff room, plus building a new accessible washroom off the downstairs girls’ washroom. The school plans on hosting a grand opening for the IAC in conjunction with the family picnic. The tentative date is Monday, June 21st. *(courtesy of Darrell Lonsberry)*



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence (C.A.P.E.)



The official opening of a new modular classroom housing a new library, recently took place. The new facility is serving nicely as a main communication centre. To augment communication, two new smart boards have been purchased, and two more are on order. Enrollment projections for next year are positive, and there is a possibility that a second kindergarten class will be offered in order to meet the growing demand.

Foundations for the Future Charter Academy



The evaluation of FFCA was completed by consultants Bill Hoppins, Lyle Lorenz and Don Robertson in February.

Overall the consultants gave FFCA a grade of A+. The evaluation, an Alberta Education requirement, indicated that the school met “the evaluation criteria on the seven essential questions of a Charter School Evaluation”. Those questions are: Are the provincial requirements being met? Does the school meet the terms and conditions of its charter? Do the students, parents, teachers and community members see the school as being effective and successful? Is the school financially viable? Are innovative approaches to student

learning being used, effective and shared? Is the school being governed effectively? Is the school being administered effectively? Special commendations for a job well done were given in the following areas: Commitment to the Charter; Stakeholder Support; High Student Achievement; Continuous Improvement; Board of Directors and Executive Team; Professional Development; Character Education; Cultural Alignment; Sharing of Results and Best Practices; Communication. Not surprisingly, the school was encouraged to continue the investigation of securing “the most suitable facilities for their students”. No required changes were identified.

Mother Earth’s Children’s Charter School



Professional development receives strong attention at MECCS. During the spring break staff members attended an education conference in Calgary where Dr. Martin Brokenleg and Martha Kaufeldt spoke. Dr. Brokenleg is one of the founders of the Circle of Courage and co-author of the book *Reclaiming our Youth at Risk*. Having the opportunity to learn from him in person over dinner was an added bonus for staff members. As well, over the spring break, staff participated in a Traditional Games Workshop to learn games



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

designed to teach various skills and important life lessons for responsible community participation.



New Horizons School

In addition to receiving the Charter School Evaluation report from Alberta Education, which was very positive, the school recently received a report from Dr. Linda Sabatini of the University of Calgary's Center for Gifted Education. Dr. Sabatini was asked by NHS to update the research base for the school by examining the most current research which reflects best practice around six questions: What practices are being used to identify gifted elementary and adolescent students? What does the literature say regarding the effectiveness of different settings (e.g. congregated, cluster, inclusive, traditional) in serving gifted students? How can gifted education programs best address the social and emotional needs of gifted students? What current practices are being utilized in curriculum differentiation, especially in Mathematics? What insights does the literature provide regarding serving gifted students who experience other special needs or at risk conditions that may impact their learning? The school is now acting on the report's information.



Suzuki Charter School

In addition to celebrating the school's 15th anniversary, the task of finding a new, more appropriate building for the school continues. When it was reported that the Edmonton Public School Board voted to close five schools in the central Edmonton and Hardisty communities, the Suzuki board passed a motion to formally express their interest in leasing one of these schools (Capilano). As Board Chair Doug Farris said in his message to parents, the letter to EPS "is just the first step of many in the process of leasing a new school". As Mr. Farris went on to explain, whether Suzuki is accepted as a tenant for the Capilano site remains to be seen, as does acquiring occupancy by September 2010, if an agreement is reached. A town hall meeting will be held once more is known.



Valhalla Community School

The school is completing its second year of operation. Having begun as a K-6 school, Grade 7 was added this year with Grade 8 planned for 2010 and Grade 9 in 2011. While there is currently space for a new grade next year, it could be a challenge to house more students in 2011 if some adjustments are not



Working together to support choice and innovation in public education.

made to the facility. Cooperation from the community is strong and initial responses to registration announcements are positive.

Westmount Charter School

On May 3, Westmount hosted a student-lead initiative entitled "The Turning the Tide Summit" to provoke change in the world. The event was coordinated in conjunction with the Stephen Lewis Foundation and the Ujamaa Grandmas and while its primary focus was fundraising for orphans in Africa, there were a variety of speakers who, in 18 breakout sessions, focused on the Millennium Development Goals and how students can effect change themselves. Keynote speakers included Mark Kostash and Will Gadd. They spoke about the current epidemic of HIV/AIDS in Africa and how youth as a whole can get involved in the international community. The Summit included over 400 high school students from almost 20



Alberta schools, as well as teachers and the parent community. Westmount is planning to host another conference in the fall. The 1st Annual *Pillars of Gifted Education* conference is being planned for October 22-23, 2010 in Calgary at the Greenwood Inn. More information will be made available as plans are finalized.



Thank you to those who contributed to the June newsletter, and a reminder that if you wish to have your school's activities, research, milestones, etc. featured, we will publish again in December. Please submit to andrews.garry@gmail.com.

