

A Review of Inspiring Education and Inspiring Action Reports

June 25, 2010

The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools is pleased to provide a brief response to Alberta Education's request concerning the *Inspiring Action* document. Our response begins with a short summary of several aspects of the *Inspiring Education* report and their relevance to our organization.

Inspiring Education Report

The key principles presented in the report are comprehensive and sound. That is, education needs to change in order to meet the demands of the 21st century and by identifying the "Three E's" of education, this report has taken an important first step in providing an understandable framework upon which to build. While some individuals might question whether the outcomes of "Engaged Thinker", "Engaged Citizen" and "Entrepreneurial Spirit" are appropriate, they will nevertheless provide a clear direction for educators to follow.

Where direction is concerned, the Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools has three main goals:

- 1. To implement an enhanced research and innovation agenda.
- 2. To promote a culture of responsible and flexible governance.
- 3. To achieve permanent charter status.

The first two of these goals can be related to the three E's. First, through our enhanced research and innovation agenda we are beginning to build support both inside as well as outside our Association regarding what 21st Century learning and teaching should be (e.g. learner-centered) In doing so, we are looking at how innovation can be defined and ultimately measured because we believe in the importance of data-driven decision-making. Of particular importance to us is the aspect of "engagement", not only of learners but also of the entire community. It is therefore noteworthy that our philosophical position supports the report's contention that "our concept of education should expand beyond the school and make the community a true partner".

Further, our Preferred Future Direction paper, "Freedom to Create-Spirit to Achieve" (2009) emphasizes the "development and implementation of a culture which values and lives relationships, partnerships,

inclusivity, participation and community". Recent research on leadership in an "entrepreneurial world" points to the importance of such values. Interestingly, these values closely parallel the six core values identified in the *Inspiring Education* report – opportunity, fairness, citizenship, choice, diversity and excellence.

Finally, the report emphasizes the need for "informed transformation" of education in order to meet the changing demands and, in so doing, refers to the need to discuss possible adjustments to governance. TAAPCS believes that its model of "responsible and flexible governance" is an example of providing its stakeholders with not only "fiduciary and strategic" leadership, but also with "generative" leadership. As such, our association welcomes the opportunity to engage in governance discussions.

Inspiring Action report

The *Inspiring Action* report is in some ways a restatement of the *Inspiring Education* report. There are however, several significant additions. For example:

- 1. Inspiring Action draws the connection to "the overall economic future of Alberta". While some individuals may dispute the need to connect education's future with economics, there is logic in doing so because without a viable economy there will be less funding to support the efforts of educators and, subsequently, the growth/development of students and their place in the world, etc.
- 2. *Inspiring Action* also highlights the various discussions and initiatives which have provided input into the *Inspiring Education* process (e.g. "Setting the Direction for Special Education" and FNMI Education Partnership Council, etc.) The needs of various demographic groups are acknowledged and are therefore being taken into consideration.
- 3. Systemic changes are identified (e.g. New Education Legislation.) A good summary is provided. TAAPCS appreciates the positive philosophy of upcoming changes (i.e. "Future legislation will be more enabling, empowering, supportive, and less prescriptive"), but more information is needed to determine how changes will impact school authorities.
- 4. *Inspiring Action* outlines the report's "Guiding Statements" (vision, values, principles, Competencies of an Educated Albertan). Again, these are very clear and rational.
- 5. Of particular interest is the extensive explanation provided regarding "Competencies of an Educated Albertan". This is very thorough and provides a clear explanation of the vision being presented.
- 6. Under the title "Policy Directions", there is a series of 14 very relevant questions and answers, some of which have already been featured in earlier documents, for example "Setting the Direction": What is Inclusive Education? How it could be achieved? etc. Nevertheless, this section of the report is excellent and will form the basis for significant group discussion activities over the next several months, thus assisting schools to more easily provide feedback.

As noted above, the key principles of the *Inspiring Education* report are sound and while there is congruence with the position and values of TAAPCS, there are nevertheless several areas where questions arise from the accompanying *Inspiring Action* report:

- 1. While each of the competencies is well explained, there appears to be only limited reference to student assessment in the document. Will these competencies be the focus of provincial student assessment? Local student assessment? What will be mandated? What will be optional?
- 2. Since charter schools have, as a key component of their mandate, the requirement to undertake research and be innovative, the "research" competency is of particular interest to us. As noted earlier, one of our main goals is to "implement an enhanced research and innovation agenda" and we have begun to do so. We do not see ourselves as the "source of all wisdom" where research and innovation is concerned, and truly wish to collaborate with our educational partners. What part will Alberta Education play in this undertaking?
- 3. Also noted earlier is reference to governance and our Association's goal of promoting "a culture of responsible and flexible governance". Is there a part our Association can play in helping to frame this dialogue more fully?
- 4. How does the list of competencies which arise from the 3E's discussion in this paper relate to the list of competencies included in the *Inspiring Education* paper? For example, *Inspiring Education* lists the competencies as "how to learn, think critically, identify and solve problems, manage information, innovate, create opportunities, apply multiple literacies, communicate well and cooperate with others, demonstrate global and cultural understanding, identify and apply career and life skills". *Inspiring Action* lists the competencies as "Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Creativity and Innovation, Social Responsibility and Cultural, Global and Environmental Awareness, Communication, Digital Literacy, Lifelong Learning, Self-Direction and Personal Management, Collaboration and Leadership". While both sets of competencies are comprehensive and valid, they are not exactly the same.

In closing, The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools congratulates Alberta Education for the extensive efforts which have been undertaken to "transform" education in this province, and trusts that our brief response will be of some benefit to the process.

Respectfully submitted,

Jay Pritchard
Co-Chair TAAPCS

Judy Gray

Co-Chair, TAAPCS