



PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA

An Open Letter to Albertans

On behalf of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, I would like to address some misinformation that has been recently reported in the Medicine Hat News (19 September 2017) and My Grande Prairie Now (18 October 2017).

I am deeply troubled when I read statements such as *"the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta questions the legitimacy of the constitutional right of Catholics to have their own system."* (Medicine Hat News 19 September 2017) and *"Catholic Education is constantly under attack by the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta"; "They're always trying to get rid of Catholic education. They say that they can amalgamate the boards; they say that they can teach Catholic education in the schools."* (My Grande Prairie Now 18 October 2017).

The Public School Boards' Association of Alberta does not want to see an end to Catholic programming in schools, in fact we support and respect the rights of Catholics to access separate education. We know, however, that continuing to separate our students into different buildings based on what makes them different isn't the answer to creating a more inclusive and loving society.

The misinformation reported in the media, serves only to foster a culture of mistrust and supports the continued fracturing of our families and communities.

The goal of our Association, is to work with our partners and Albertans to explore an educational system that serves *all* children; a system where Albertans' hard earned tax dollars are used to create *equity* and *equality* for every Alberta student regardless of where they reside; a system that respects the Charter and Constitutional rights of all Albertans; *a system that serves children - not systems.*

Currently, the Government of Alberta fully funds four Education systems: Public, Separate, Francophone and Charter. We believe that these four publicly funded Education systems can be housed under a single, inclusive system.

The Association's single system vision, proposes individual learning, while being fully accountable to Albertans; one system that reflects Alberta as it grows and changes to meet the present and the future. We believe that in these fragile economic times, we need to have respectful and honest conversations about how we can use limited financial resources, to best serve the needs of all children within our collective care.

While some may suggest there is little expectation that every child's needs in Education will ever be fully funded, we still have an obligation to be effective with every dollar collected from taxpayers. Competing school systems are costly and unfriendly to the idea that we can learn together. One publicly funded and inclusive system can respect and accommodate the Constitutional rights afforded to minority faith rate payers (Catholic or Protestant) and align with the values of Albertans today and tomorrow.

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Finally, I would like to speak to the 19 September 2017 Medicine Hat News article “Catholic board election attracts packed ballot” which states *“the Theodore case in Saskatchewan challenges the constitutionality of publicly funded Catholic Schools”*. The case in Saskatchewan, did not challenge the constitutionality of Catholic schools, it provided clarity, regarding Constitutional rights. Justice Donald Layh provided a common-sense description of the original and continuing understanding of Catholic Schools. He stated, “if *separating students was the essential reason for separate schools’ existence, I fail to see why the minority would simultaneously seek a right to admit children of the majority faith from whom they took deliberate action to separate. One act belies the other. Like it or not, the defendants must accept the foundation of their case: separate schools were meant to separate students.*” We wonder if Albertans would create the two systems, if the Education system was designed today in 2017.

Our Association believes that one single, publicly funded inclusive school system, is the best way to support Alberta’s students. It is incumbent upon the locally elected voices of our students, families and communities to come together in good faith to create a new, inclusive and positive future for every child.

My invitation to engage in a conversation about a vibrant and positive future for all children is open to all who care deeply about our communities, our families and our children. Let us not focus on that which divides us, rather that which unites us – Alberta’s children. Our children are watching and counting on us.

Arlene Hrynyk, President
Public School Boards’ Association of Alberta

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