

ASCA School Council Engagement Task Force – Nov 2019 RESULTS
(also contains General Survey results at end of document)

22 Responses submitted (as of Nov 7, 2019)

Request for input regarding **Choice in Education**.

Background/context:

It is known that the Minister of Education will begin work on the promised *Choice in Education Act*, for tabling in the spring of 2020. The Minister has indicated that consultations will be forthcoming, and it is highly anticipated that ASCA will be asked to contribute to consultations related to the contents of the *Act*.

At this time, ASCA has no distinct Advocacy Policies that represent Member perspectives related to *Choice in Education*. It is also possible that ASCA Member School Councils are not aware that greater access to alternative programs, like languages, sports, and other disciplines, is not likely what is intended with the *Choice in Education Act*.

The United Conservative Party (UCP) outlined in their [election platform](#) (page 57-60) a detailed [commitment to education](#) including one of 13 items, the following which indicates:

10. Affirm parental choice through a Choice in Education Act.

Alberta has a strong legacy of diversity in education. A UCP government will uphold the established right of parents to choose the education setting best suited for their children including: public, separate, charter, independent, alternative and home education programs.

[Click here for the entire excerpt](#)

1. What does “**Choice in Education**” mean to your school council/community?

- It means having access to publicly funded Catholic education.

"Choice in Education" to us means that we have the freedom to choose what we see as best for our family. We are a very small public school; so it also means that we have the freedom to advocate for keeping our small school open. When we have choice in education we can choose schools where it is easier to have a relationship and communication with our children's teachers.

- 1. Looks a lot like what we already have in Elk Island: choice of type of school: public; catholic; specialized (academic; athletic; second language; music) **Most advantageous and most accessible to most students**. 2. Some concern with families that have resources vs families that do not - example: families unable to get children to and from school. Possibly widening the gap between "have" and "have-not". Good balance right now with Elk Island that there is enough choices without tipping the scale. 3. Potential tragedy to have lower performing children encouraged to not write exams to skew results to benefit school.

Do not want to portray that the school does not believe in their students. 4. When teaching special needs children; are we eliminating exclusion? Additional stress on families trying to include their children. Great for parents of special needs children to have choices for their kids.

- French; Religion; Sports; Charter; Home School = current options in our community

Community would want to avoid a two-tier education system. Private/Charter Schools save the government money in the long run. The Choice in Education Act comes out end of November. What does the Choice in Education Act mean to families:-Bigger gap between haves and have nots-Better opportunities for our kids if can afford it.-Many rural people in our community will remain unaffected; unless their "public" school becomes charter and then they will end up paying more or they will be forced to travel further to attend regular school.

- Choice is important to our parents because it gives them the opportunity to determine which school better meets their family needs.
- When the government uses that phrase we feel like the underlying message is that the 'choice' is public vs private. We feel like its misleading parents to think more along the lines of having choice in such things as options/extracurricular/etc instead of a much larger picture. We are concerned that this is moving towards a more separatist form of education where as a public system levels the playing field for all students. Meeting everyone's needs regardless of family/home life and economic status. We also feel like this is the gateway to the government funding private and charter schools on a equal rate with public and catholic.
- We think there is a "broadening" of what education will be expected to be. Government funding will go to private choice. Elitist schools that will benefit the ones who can afford to do so; where the funding pulled will hurt those who cannot be part of. When it is all in one everyone (rich; poor or middle) all have the same advantage. Public has always accepted everyone; and worry that it will push it to become more selective. Sets up the possibility for a uniform group to set up their own elite school vs coming to a public school and immersing into the community. It separates the "groups". When there is public education it is global - every kid can access education regardless of their parent/family advantages or disadvantages.
- To us it means to have diversity in the choices of schools to send your child to. This may include schools within the public system that offer specialized education such as science and technology or French immersion as well as schools in the Catholic system and private schools.
- As parents with children in the Catholic school system; choice in Education means that we can continue to choose Catholic schools within our public system; without additional costs. We value the choice to educate our children in line with how we live our lives and the

opportunity to honour the traditions and celebrations that align with our Catholic faith.

- 1. Choice in education means having a voice in decisions that would change the mode and content of education that I chose for my children. Had the education looked different when I enrolled my child initially; I might have considered home or private schooling. We are now engaged and integrated into the school and changing the environment or curriculum without consultation in something so personal leaves me feeling that my role as an involved parent is undermined and unappreciated. 2. To whom it may concern; Education in Alberta is as diverse as the students enrolled into its programs. Not one child is the same and as the student grows often the method of education changes also. A program that best suits my child might be detrimental to another. When we try to assimilate a student into one method of teaching we are missing the beautiful things that that child has to offer. Alberta has one of the widest methods of education delivery in Canada however we also have a unique student population and parents to go along with them. Many home situations often mean parents are working unconventional hours therefore home school or shorter school weeks allow for more family bonding time when parents are around. Other families like myself wish to instill a faithful education into their children because we are unable to attend church regularly and need these teachings done during school hours. Other families have children with unique needs where a gifted or special needs school will best provide their child with the education they need. With all systems remaining equally in the grasp of families we can make the best choice for the child. However when we change funding this then puts road blocks as to what educational choices can be made. Putting roadblocks to a child's education will not only change the path they can take but also the route to the future adult worker and taxpayer they might become someday. When we provide children and parents a path to an education that can work for their needs we are helping to pave the way to a better future for our province. Thank you; From a parent who has had children in both public and catholic school education 3. Choice in education means the ability to decide the type of education my children receive. There are many separate schools who offer a focus that enriches the provincial curriculum. For many different reasons; we as parents choose these schools; with great thought and intention. I reserve the right to expose my child to any enriching program that is offered; as well as the right to voice my interest in separate schools maintaining provincial funding. Having a choice in education is vital in allowing parents to be a part of their child's elementary and secondary experience. The benefits of diversity far outweigh one blanket system. I am grateful for my ability to choose a faith filled education for my children. It not only helps my children feel more confident in the face of adversity; it connects our family on a deeper level. By enriching the conversation in the classroom; my children bring home meaningful questions. As a result of these conversations; our family unit is strengthened and the relationship is built on love and trust. 4. Catholic Education fosters a sense of community and abiding understanding of the importance of service to others. Having a choice in education; allows our diverse community the opportunity to expose their children to a faith based education. Choice in education is important to me; because I pay an education tax just like the parents in the public system; however I want my son to thrive in a faith based environment. I am not Catholic; nor was I raised with any type of religion; however I want my son exposed to it. Fostering a sense of

community and leading by example is what our world needs more of and it starts when parents have a choice in education. Choice in education is not about discrimination. It is about option. It is about giving parents the choice to send their child to a school where they know they will flourish. Choice in education is vital to the youth in our community

- Every child is different; every child learns differently and education should be able to accommodate these differences and parents should have a say in their child's education.
- That choice in Education includes schools to exercise choice in participating in GSA whose membership lists are not disclosed.
- 'Choice in Education' currently boils down to too many unknown fears and worries to us. What we'd like 'Choice in Education' to mean is one fully inclusive system that would serve the needs of ALL Alberta students. Neuro-typical students; students requiring medical assistance; students who are on alternate schedules; students who are receiving mental health supports at school; students who are gifted; students who are of any and all socio-economic backgrounds.
- We had a lengthy discussion about this question that ranged from wanting to avoid a voucher system to having concerns about the watering down of curriculum in varied types of schools to wanting to have 'choice' in education overseen by one public school district (one public school district could oversee non-denominational; Catholic; Christian; Islamic; Mandarin; etc schools; thus continuing to meet the need for choice) . We settled on agreeing that our primary concern is that ALL Alberta students should be following the same curriculum. There is room for extra; but students should not be limited by exposure to less. We are also concerned with keeping funding for schooling fair and equitable.

Ability to choose method of delivery of education; and to have a say in day to day decisions that affect child's well being as well as child's education. Choice of where education can be learnt and taught. Providing unbiased; non political education among grade levels. Options. Flexibility in how education is delivered. Being able to choose what education my child is able to attend based on what I choose for them (public ; catholic; separate) . Assisting in some of the decisions of education.

- Choice in Education means the following to our school council/community:1. Maintaining Catholic education as a publically funded education option for families within the province of Alberta. We support the current diversity in choice that is available and support the current UCP government protecting the rights of parents to make their own choice in education for their child(ren)2. Ensuring that the level of education our children receive through the education system in Alberta is not only maintained but improved on an ongoing basis. 3. Ensuring that classroom sizes are kept within the previously set parameters to allow for effective learning for all children and support teachers in their ongoing efforts for classroom management.4. Ensuring teachers are supported with Educational Assistants to support the learning requirements of all the children in the classroom under an inclusive model.

- It means; the parents can choose an education based on the values that the family prioritizes as first; whether it be academics; religion; language; inclusion or sports.
- Choice in education is very important to our school council and our community. Our rural community has a population of less than 6000 and we have both the public and catholic school divisions within our community. This choice allows for the two school divisions to be accountable; honest and offer healthy competition. Our school council believes that because our residents have choice; our schools strive to be the very best they can be in order to increase enrollment; school attraction and program offerings. This choice also allows families to choose a faith based education system which coincides with their morals and values. Both school divisions are pillars in our community and make our community more attractive and valuable to all residents.
- Choice in Education means supporting a variety of educational options; both within and outside of the public school system. We support Choice in Education and are eager to see stakeholders in all sectors of education cooperate together as they seek to meet the diversity of needs of Alberta's children. I agree that Choice in Education means that parents know their children best and have primary responsibility for their learning. I like what was said about offering different paths for education including a traditional school setting as well as homeschooling or independent learning or a blend of both.
- The ability to select a stream of schooling best suited to individual children's needs.
- It means that our public neighbourhood school provides exceptional education, programming options and supports for all students.
- It means that parents can be involved in teaching and supporting students in order to enrich education and share knowledge.
- It means that struggling learners or kids with complex needs have access to specialists and programming in their schools that will help them.
- It means that there are options of what school looks like depending on the needs/values of families (home schooling, language programming, sports, arts, and combinations of the above)
- It means that schools provide flexibility in learning environments and options based on the needs of students.
- It means that students can steer aspects of their education so they can learn about things that interest them. (Interest based learning/ and large selections of course options)
- It means that parents can opt out of participating in classes that go against family beliefs/values.
- It means that parents are involved in conversations around what schools offer and what students need.

- At the outset, our school council expresses deep concern for the language of “choice”. The vague nature of the question is concerning, and the platform upon which it stands appears to be a free-market approach to education. To be clear, this is a mistake.

We know from the birth of Charter schools in Alberta, that the private schools are expensive to run. That is their choice.

We refuse to support per capita funding, direct billing, voucher systems, or any other mechanism that erodes what we believe to be growing excellence in education. These divisive measures are not in our children’s best interest. One need only look to other jurisdictions like New Orleans to understand that voucher/charter system in education augments division, creates chaos that further divides people and erodes children’s ability to succeed in the future.¹ In our view, this debacle exemplifies the dangers inherent in abdicating government responsibility for the education of society solely to parents: at the end of the day, government is elected to protect the whole of society, not to abdicate responsibility to those who can afford it. We respectfully disagree with any platform that promotes changes to the Education Act or proposes a new Choice in Education Act because, in our view, these measures erode diversity, augment division, invoke chaos, and ultimately are counter-productive measures to the strength and freedom of Alberta. ²

Instead, we value the excellence that currently exists in public education. Our students are excelling. Our students have choice. Our students learn in a multi-cultural, multi-faceted environment, and we deeply treasure this diversity.

We have been clear as a society, through our courts, our academic research, and our understanding of Charter values, that Canada, and especially Alberta, is a place of tolerance: where we expect that the curriculum is followed in every school, including health and sex education, protecting the identity of students in a gay-straight alliance, presenting a multi-faceted approach to understanding history and politics, and by advancing measures in our education system that honours all religions (including no religion). Seeking diversity by segregating students into “haves” and “have nots” is not diversity: it is segregation. Seeking diversity by funding wealth with tax dollars (or vouchers) is not diversity: it is segregation. We know from our own experience that the current education system in Alberta produces exceptional trades people, professionals, and most importantly, tolerant citizens. We expect the Minister of Education to honour this success.

¹ See for example: Jenn Bentley’s article, “The Failed New Orleans Experiment – The Charter System Is Rife with Inequity”, online at <https://www.bigideasmagazine.com/2019/03/13/the-failed-new-orleans-experiment-the-charter-system-is-rife-with-inequity/>.

² UCP Platform, March 2019, page 59, online at: <https://www.albertastrongandfree.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Alberta-Strong-and-Free-Platform-1.pdf>.

We believe that choice has consequences. If a family chooses to opt out of the public education system, then a consequence of that choice is that the family’s tax dollars funds a system in which they no longer partake.

We expect equity. We know that parents and families are key stakeholders in a child's education...AND...we already have choice.

At our school council we accept the consequences that flow from our choices. Changing the whole education system to serve those parents who are unwilling to accept the consequences of their choices is a mistake.

2. Does your school council have any additional thoughts or concerns you would like the ASCA Board to consider in any discussions it may have with Alberta Education on this topic?
 - We have a lot of questions and feel the government has not provided adequate or any answers. Examples include: Does this become competitive for teachers? Will private pay more? Will we lose public school teachers to those programs? Another concern is that the private school gets funding but because its private they can also charge a fee where public will not be able to because it falls under the public. We are also very concerned with the fact that the word 'public' was asked to be removed from school names. On the flip side Catholic was not asked to be removed. So if it was about just making things 'even' as the government seemed to explain it; then why were all identifying words removed for different types of education. We feel like this is a small piece of a much larger puzzle and that the current government is really not showing the 'end game' to the public in general.
 - We feel the government has been very guarded with their information surrounding this and that it could be a 'snow ball' type situation. We feel like decisions are being rushed while others that have had extensive research done are being put on hold.
 - Our Council strongly supports choice in Education because one size does not fit all. We're grateful for this opportunity in our Province.
 - We do not believe that moving to an education system that values private school over public education is in the best interests of Alberta students. Those who 'have' will always have options for their children; but by weakening the public education system it will only serve to hurt the most vulnerable students.
 - Budget should prioritize increased funding for education. Smaller class sizes.
 - Although we appreciate some choice in education we need to be mindful of the funding schools that are not in the public systems as more choice in education mean less funding for schools to operate. In Red Deer we also appreciate that the schools have boundaries but there is an opportunity to attend other schools if there is space. Which offers some choice but does not leave some schools overflowing and others empty.
 - We believe choice in education also means the opportunity for parents to have access to a variety of options in a public school offering including specialized programs; such as sports; performing arts and language without a loss to the option of religion.

- Alberta has a long history of 'CHOICE' in education and it is still as important today as it was way back then . Faith based schools; not only educate and develop the child socially; academically; physically ; and emotionally; but also spiritually.
- Just that education should not be a one size fits all system. All children learn differently and the curriculum needs to reflect this and parents need to be involved
- Choice in Education implies a consumer model and that perhaps 'Diversity' in Education has stronger principles.
- Around our parent table we were very concerned with some of the points put forth in the Choice in Education Act. Additionally; we were worried about where some of them might lead; intentionally or not. We felt that our students; and society as a whole; are better served with an eye towards diversity and inclusion. We felt it was important that all Alberta students benefit from the Alberta curriculum. A curriculum that Canadian Military Bases as well as several embassy schools follow. A world class curriculum; even if it is so severely outdated. We should be offering students a deeper more enriched education. Separation is not the way to do this. We are worried that this is the beginning of a dangerous slide. A slide that will tilt towards the voucher school system that is decimating quality public education in the United States. A shift that will see families that are already struggling see increased struggle. Schools that are in economically depressed areas will see loss of supports or closures all together. Parent fundraising is most definitely at its limit in most schools. From the dollars and cents to the physical labour required of parents for fundraising; some families simply cannot participate. That doesn't mean their children deserve less. Even something as simple as a Scholastic Book Fair is too much to ask. The very best most affluent schools will without a doubt continue to have the biggest; best and safest buildings in the best neighborhoods and with the best programming. And even *if* there were to be equality enrollment statements put in place; we don't believe these students would truly have the same education and experience as the rest of the student body. We have too much to lose.
- We have concerns that this move on the part of the government; to promote Choice; may be about pushing private; special interests above the academic needs of students. The money should be going into classrooms; not funding separate systems of education and all the behind the scenes Admin that they require
- Once there is more information as to what possible level areas are going to be revised it would be worth while to send those particulars out for feedback. At this time it is difficult to comment when we are only speculating based on what we know with the current act.
- We strongly support choice in education and that is extremely important and valuable to Albertans.
- Traditionally; there has been significant mistrust between representatives of the public system and those of alternative systems. We are concerned that turf wars do not serve the children who should be our primary concern. What role can ASCA play in building greater

harmony between stakeholders and creating the spirit of cooperation that can best meet the needs of children? I am concerned by the statements about a return to achievement tests and the return to a 50/50 split between Diploma exams and school grades. Not every child shows what they have learned by taking a standardized test. There are other ways for students to demonstrate mastery. Maybe that should be taken into consideration. If there are different paths to learning because children learn differently; then there should be different evaluation methods to compliment the different learning styles. I'm not sure I agree with the emphasis on directing funds to the creation of charter schools. I don't know much about the charter school situation in Alberta; but what I read seems lopsided. I'd rather see that the rural schools have the resources to offer needed programs. It seems to me that it would be a more efficient use of funds to support an existing school than to build a whole new one; even if building new charter schools demonstrates that the government supports choice in education. I support having excellent teachers in the classroom and I guess regular assessment is necessary to ensure excellence is maintained. But without more information; I have the same concerns about teacher assessment that I have about student assessment. Lastly; I like the statements about transparency regarding the curriculum review; but I'm suspect about the accusations that the other party's reviews were conducted in secret. While a curriculum review would probably best be conducted by education 'experts;' public consultation provides needed checks and balances. I appreciate that parents can be involved. That's important to me.

- Concerns around adequately funding public schools, and sending public money to charter and private schools.
- Concerns regarding adequate funding and having the means to pay for staffing/support requirements.
- Concerns around classroom size growth due to insufficient funding
- Concerns around future school development as our student population ages and needs additional high schools.

ASCA General Survey - November 2019 RESULTS - 39 Responses

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Are you answering this survey on behalf of your School Council; or as an individual School Council/School Community member?

School Council = 3

Individual School Council/School Community member = 36

You are answering this survey as a:

Parent/guardian = 32

School Community Member = 3

School Employee = 2

Other = 2

1. What does “**Choice in Education**” mean to your school council/community?

Distance/Transportation

- Acknowledging that distance may necessitate the family providing the transportation
- I should not be bound by arbitrary lines drawn throughout our town; as to which school we can attend; when I have to drive to all the schools anyway.

Rural

- Rural communities don't have the population or resources to support multiple choices.

Resources

- Fragmenting of professional resources that are already scarce in Rural Our -- Professionals such as mental health workers or speech therapists already spend much of their allotment on windshield time (Editor's note: included exactly as submitted)

Faith/Beliefs

- This means we can continue to serve our students; staff; parents and community in our Catholic faith as fully encompassing beliefs and ideas throughout the day at school. We are NOT a public school; with religion as a class. Our religion is integrated in everything we do; from when you first walk into the school; to the way students act toward each other on the playground; and to the way staff interactions happen. As a parent; to have choice in education means I can choose to have my beliefs and faith continue seamlessly from home to school and back again.
- We are so privileged in Alberta to have choice in where we send our kids to school. Our family has personally benefited from this for the last thirteen years. Our children have attended a Christian School from Kindergarten to Grade nine. We appreciate the opportunity to educate our kids according to our religious beliefs and also have access to the high standards of the Alberta Curriculum. We are so privileged to be able to talk about the issues and concerns that are unique to our school community. We do not want to lose this choice and are thrilled that the UPC government is upholding this choice.
- Choice implies that a parent has an option to choose a school which is philosophically consistent with teaching that takes place in the home. It is not good enough to simply have a school with the same values. It also must have a compatible understanding of how truth is found and 'what is real' in accordance with that truth.

Equal Opportunities

- Means access to choice under the umbrella of equal; quality; public education for all children. Privately funded education erodes one of the bedrock foundations of a pluralistic; diverse; tolerant and thriving democratic society. When our children learn with and from each other; we build futures where our citizens can live with and learn from each other.
- That public schools be fully funded and encouraged to provide choices in education that are supported by a group of parents; needs skills to succeed. Schools should be open to all; not allowed to charge tuition fees or select students; private schools have no place in a democratic society
- Choice in education in our school community means making decisions to strengthen and promote high quality public education that is equally accessible to all students. Being located in a rural area with a smaller population; it is also critical to support a structure and a funding formula which ensures adequate resources to deliver programs in an equitable way to all

students. Although promotion/expansion of more charter/separate/independent options may look like it provides families with more diversity and may be economically attractive for the government's bottom line; it does not strengthen opportunities nor accessibility for ALL students and is therefore a concerning trend.

Education/Programming/Student Success

- Parents being able to choose on how to educate their children (public; private; charter; separate; homeschool; etc.). = 5
- Means we can choose to keep the curriculum already proposed from last year by the teachers and educators. Please keep it.
- Means that we can choose the style of education/learning for our students. Not everything need be in a sit-down classroom setting. Many kids learn better kinetically or multi-sensory. We need to think outside the box for these needs = 1
- Fundamental to the wellbeing of children's whole person and the rights of families; children and parents to have their preferred choice regarding how and where students receive their education. Every child is unique and parents should be given the opportunity to choose how each child is educated that best fits each child for their individual success.
- Choice refers to having the ability to decide between two desirable educational institutions for children that best suits their learning needs. The word 'choice' suggests that parents have the ability to freely choose the school for their child based on the child's learning needs and abilities. However; school choice is limited by access to transportation; school enrollment limits; tuition fees; and area boundaries. So; choice is a loaded term that implies a freedom that does not actually exist in the educational system.
- For me personally it means that EVERY kid has a right to education. And every parent has a right to CHOOSE the type of education their child receives as long as the learning fundamentals are achieved. Each child learns differently; and families have different values.
- The right to choose how and what my children learn in school in regards to curriculum
- The ability to utilize distance learning as part of the school experience when needed; to choose to do one course through outreach/ADLC if I so choose; whether for time reasons or teacher issues.
- The choice to move within the school district to a school that is better suited for my child. His/her education should NOT be based on where they live.
- It means that parents have the ability to choose the school program best suited to their child and have the ability to work with administration to ensure their child receives any required and available supports.
- Having access to nature immersion programs and arts and music and languages in the schools; a school which is inclusive of indigenous students and indigenous history and living cultural practices
- It means we; as parents; have the right and ability to choose the education platform that best suits the needs of our children. We are capable of making the decision for our children what is beneficial for their growth: educational; social; and spiritual. It means that we retain a sense of community and relationship with others by choosing the school that we want to be a part of.

Choice in education gives us the opportunity to raise well-rounded spiritual; educated and socially productive members of society.

Funding

- Fragmenting of already inadequate funding.
- Means to me that those that can afford other educational options will be funded by public money. I believe too many choices further stretches our dollars for our public education system where no one can be excluded. I am against more choice and feel that our limited resources should be spend on providing an education where all children learn to read; write and do math.
- For me personally it means that EVERY kid has a right to education. And every parent has a right to CHOOSE the type of education their child receives as long as the learning fundamentals are achieved. Each child learns differently; and families have different values. For me this means that the basic amount that each child's school receives for education is not threatened because a parent chose a school outside of the Alberta separate or public school boards. Each child's school should be entitled to that basic amount REGARDLESS aid what school they attend. (After all it is MY taxes going toward education; and if I have to send my child to school; I should get to choose what school). Private schools are expensive; but it should not be made even more expensive if the schools don't even get the basic amount that is granted for education. For my school and community Choice in Education means that the public school I have chosen gets the same funding as every other publicly funded school. Including bussing! Not every child learns the same. And each family has to consider the unique learning needs of their child. We chose a public language school and it is exactly what my child needs to challenge his giftedness in Math and Science. Our neighborhood school cannot provide the learning environment he needs to succeed. But bussing is not funded to his middle school. He needs to take a bus then a train then another bus to and from school. It makes for a very long day. Yet this is his designated public school for this public bilingual Spanish school. I feel like removing our funding was punishing our choice to send our child to a school other than his designated neighborhood school. Effectively increasing our costs as parents and increasing our child's time on the bus. (He leaves at 7:25 and gets in the door a 4:55 - after a bus; a train and a bus (proving no bus is late); that's a long day for an 11 year old!). It also means that in the future; should we see the need to switch to a more specialized school for my child's unique learning needs; that there are option available to us. Currently there are very few options. There are long wait lists; higher costs; and further distances from our home for the charter schools. Making it that only the lucky or elite get to participate in these schools. It wouldn't be a problem if schools were given more resources and aides to accommodate kids with learning needs; but as it is schools are limited in what they can offer kids.
- Fully supporting public schools so choice of courses and options is available. Not funnelling money to private or charter ones.
- I hope that choice in Education doesn't mean that my tax dollars are funding private schools; or home schools that are not following standard curriculum; or programs that focus on faith and religious studies. Public tax dollars should be for public education.

- It raises the concern that the branching of education funding into six different streams will leave only a small trickle making it to an excellent school like ours serving a small community.
- Means political stupidity. Public funds should be for public schools. Quit trying to privatize.
- More choices adults have; ends up with less choices/impact for the students. There is only so much money for education; if it is divided too much; everyone suffers.

Responsibilities/ Rights

- It means parents have the primary responsibilities of their children; their children's education; and their children's extracurricular activities. Parents need to be involved in all aspects of a child's life.
- It means that as a parent you have the right to choose an education system including that the Public or Catholic for your child.
- It means that parents have the right to choose the type of education their child receives; and that the gov't continues in supporting and funding the various systems.
- Parents having choice in exempting children from activities or class. Parents knowing if and when their children are off school property.
- To me personally choice means everything. Less government interference and more parental rights is paramount to a free society.

Miscellaneous

- Absolutely critical! We need all the education options available for the unique needs of our kids!
- Collaboration between choices is required to get the best education for the students.
- We have gifted children; one of which also has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. We would like there to be availability of specialized programming available for kids with specific unique learning profiles such as LD; ADHD; ASD; Twice Exceptional (Gifted with a separate learning issue such as Dyslexia; ASD or ADHD). We would like there to be availability of higher level classes (and/ or IB; AP courses) as they enter high school and second language immersion programs in French; Spanish; Mandarin.
- While some would think this threatens public school existence; I believe it keeps public schools accountable for their performance and willingness to work with the community.
- Means separating kids into have and have nots. It has not worked in the states and it will not work here. Please keep our children in a community school learning together.
- This will further create schisms within the town. There are already 6 schools split by church groups. People don't know their neighbors; even stores have unwritten designations. Community is lost. It is just a place that many groups of strangers live in. There is almost no cooperation for 'community events' and volunteering is restricted to the church organizations.
- Safety Room
- I think that "choice in education" is a sanitized way of trying to push through an expansion of the private/public model of choice which could have the effect of doing two things: first; it will take pressure off the government to fully fund the public sector in a way that would guarantee access to quality education for all. Second; and related; it could create a hierarchy of educational opportunities. For those with means; they can choose "alternative" educational models that

may attract the best teachers and stronger programming in specialized fields; leaving those without economic means resigned to the public school option; that now may be underfunded and unable to offer the kinds of programming that enriches the lives of young people (music and the arts; for example). Having classrooms comprised of students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds enriches everyone; and we run the risk of losing this if the public/private dichotomy becomes entrenched.

Alternative Programming

The following is an important message for consideration while reviewing the Alberta curriculum and the recommendations set forth in The MacKinnon Report regarding The Department of Education, directions and funding. (Editor's note: input from individual)

Specifically, addressing the issue of public funding for private and charter schools in Alberta, it is important to be aware of the unique option that Alberta Education has to offer students and parents regarding Choices in Education within the province. This option is not available in The United States or all provinces and speaks to how well developed and advanced education actually is in Alberta.

This important and vital option is that of **ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS**, which was implemented to address the need for choice within the public school system in offering parents the ability to establish their own programs with their own unique emphasis on whatever particular mission, ideology, pedagogy and approach to education they seek, while developing in students leadership skills and an awareness of moral responsibility and civic duty. As with charter schools, initially the programs establish a Board whose members consist of parents, committed leaders in their field and a qualified Program Head who together sit on the Board to ensure the mandate of the program is followed and the principles upheld under the oversight of The Department of Education. **Alternative Programs** include Academic programs with a traditional teacher focused methodology, Christian programs where the curriculum is taught through a Biblical perspective, Language Arts programs and programs that focus on the arts, ballet, hockey and sport, languages or with a specific cultural, ethnic or faith based emphasis. As all schools in Alberta, including private and charter, must follow the curriculum as set out by The Department of Education, each of the **Alternative Programs** are given the latitude and license to do so according to their own particular focus and mission. It is imperative to highlight, for discussion, the tremendous success of these programs within our very advanced educational system, as they constitute a critical component of choice and options available in Alberta Educations' public school system.

Alternative Programs such as **COGITO** and **LOGOS**, for example, exceed what charter and private schools can provide while remaining within the public school system in Alberta. As **Alternative Programs** are housed in public schools they have available to them a full range of existing infrastructure such as libraries, computer labs and facilities, technical equipment, science labs, gymnasiums, outdoor fields, art rooms, mechanical and carpentry facilities to develop skills for the trades, music and dance studios and other facilities that charter and private schools may not provide, and they do so without the redundancies in administration, custodial services and the additional cost of the buildings and real estate private and charter schools would require. Indeed, many public schools in Edmonton house at least one **Alternative Program** with over thirty four programs in more than one hundred schools in the district and a growing demand by hundreds of students each year.

There is no need in Alberta for further funding of private schools as it would require much needed public funding that could better be used to expand and enrich existing highly successful and adequate program options within the public school system. This is particularly true as private schools in Alberta already receive the highest public taxpayer subsidy per student in Canada, while public schools are bursting at the seams. Many charter and private schools are also often unable to provide the vast infrastructure as that of public schools, thus they are limited in their ability to broaden and enrich the full development of students. **Alternative Programs** provide diversity and choice to parents and families without duplication and additional cost to the provincial government and public. It is important to note that teachers in Alberta are also pleased to have programs available that facilitate the choices parents desire for their children regarding education in a manner that suites their needs while being thoughtful of the well being of students, parents and the community at large.

The **COGITO Alternative Program** began as a pilot project in 1995 within the Edmonton Public School District with the objective of becoming a “Model School for Academic Excellence”. It was founded under the leadership of then, Edmonton Superintendent Emery Dodsall with the assistance of Stuart Wachowicz of Prairie Academic Educational Consulting and Publishing, who was commissioned to develop the scope and underlying principles of the program. They appreciated the need for both the freedom and responsibility to select the most appropriate resources for their particular programming emphases and to provide students and parents choices in education. The program has established the model criteria for a successful **Academic Alternative Program** within the public school system.

COGITO is a knowledge-based program with clearly defined standards of achievement and measurable learning objectives clearly laid out for each grade level. As stated in the Cogito Handbook from Mount Pleasant School, “Cogito students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, skills and training necessary for success in a rapidly emerging global economy. Students will develop strong ethical and civic standards and a solid commitment to their neighbourhood, province, country and global community.” Cogito provides a Classical Liberal Arts Education where critical thinking is stressed in an environment that encourages self-discipline and offers additional opportunity to study core subjects in depth. The traditional Liberal Arts Education offers a comprehensive Language Arts program where there exists the teaching of phonics, grammar, spelling, punctuation, recitation, novel studies, poetry, penmanship, composition, higher level reading and writing skills through sequenced knowledge content delivered by a systematic teacher oriented methodology which is reinforced through daily homework. The program encourages the pursuit and development of higher level thinking skills through debate, expanded to incorporate the ability of students to view topics from different perspectives, essentially allowing them to see issues from both or opposing points of view, thus enhancing a diverse social awareness with the potential for acquiring methods of resolving conflicting opinions and an appreciation of the views of their opponents. The Math program is comprised of sequential mental and written math skill development and a mastery of math facts, mental calculation, computational skills, problem solving and repetition to ensure full comprehension of concepts. Scientific knowledge is developed and explored while the mastery of points and concepts are identified, followed by experimentation to reinforce the material taught and to encourage curiosity and reflection with the expectation that students will endeavor to contemplate new areas of research and new perspectives in scientific pursuit while facilitating discovery and creative solutions to problems that affect the human condition. While the mastery of fundamental points are identified in all subjects, opportunities exist to enhance the

curriculum. In social studies there is an emphasis on the study of geography, mapping and an historical perspective is added. The unique characteristics of the **Cogito** program offer an enriched curriculum with strong parental involvement. **Cogito** boasts a highly developed and succinct mission and philosophy including teaching methodology, learning standards and a systematic approach to teaching, while also encouraging students to be reflective and analytical and to develop a sense of civic responsibility and leadership skills. It has become the template for several new private and charter school programs in Alberta.

The **LOGOS** program is a non-denominational Christian program that has many academic and methodological similarities to **COGITO**, but the focus is incorporating Christianity into its curriculum and teaching is done through a Biblical perspective. The program aims to develop an understanding of scripture as it integrates this perspective into all subjects.

Due to their tremendous success, demand for enrolment into the **COGITO, LOGOS** and other **Alternative Programs** within the Edmonton, St. Albert and Calgary public school systems is so high that there are long wait lists and many families cannot be accommodated. Clearly, their strong popularity indicates the need for the expansion of such programs within the public school system. This also holds true to the conviction of Albertans that public funds be reserved for essential public institutions such as education while providing the much needed choices for our diverse community.

When I attended UCP forums in Edmonton prior to the election, I heard support for the Australian model of charter schools. This view however, is antiquated and does not reflect the current view, as Australia is now recognizing the limitations of this approach. Private and charter schools in the USA appear to be the only way in which the need for choice to parents is available. Education in Alberta is highly advanced and Albertans, on the other hand, remain relatively mainstream and eager to embrace the options and choices available to them through **Alternative Programs**. These programs are able to function with autonomy within the public school system and appear to have the most success over the long-term as they are flexible enough to adapt to the broad needs of Albertans.

The development and expansion of **Alternative Programs** within the public school system is ultimately where Alberta Education should focus it's funding and development strategies. There is virtually nothing that a charter or private school can offer that an **Alternative Program** cannot and at huge cost and logistical savings, coupled with tremendous public support by all participants. This is particularly true as the large majority of Albertans view a shift towards more charter and private schools in the province as simply a cost saving device that will reduce teacher pay and eliminate job stability. Ultimately, this will discourage quality individuals from entering the teaching profession. The move would also allow charter and private schools to avoid the Inclusion policy in practice in the public system where students with disabilities, which currently can be as high as eleven in one classroom, are accommodated in regular classrooms. It would allow these schools to exclude these students as well as those who come from under privileged families. While this might result in higher achievement results in these schools, which might undoubtedly make their teachers appear better than they actually are, it would do so by exacerbating issues in the public school system which the majority of Alberta families prefer.

Years ago I met with a former Conservative Alberta Treasurer and Minister of Education where we discussed the need to expand alternatives to the curriculum and the delivery of education in Alberta.

Soon after he invited me to attend the Provincial Roundtables on Basic Education in Calgary and later I became a Board Member of the **Cogito Alternative Program** in Edmonton.

I urge you to look into these programs, to read their handouts and other pertinent articles, which define their mission, goals, success and popularity. I believe you will be sufficiently impressed with this option for Choices in Education for Parents in Alberta.