



Public Interest Alberta

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The Honourable Minister Dave Hancock
Minister of Education
#224 Legislature Building
10800 97 Ave
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Hancock

Re: Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans

Public Interest Alberta (PIA) has a strong interest in Alberta's K-12 education system, as an important part of our ongoing advocacy on public interest issues in our province. We have been advocating for significant improvements in our education system that will "Develop the Full Potential of all Alberta Students". PIA conducted an extensive on-line survey with more than 4000 people about critical issues and education and this report outlines numerous areas for improvement in our education system.

We are pleased that you have initiated a process by which the public can engage in rethinking the purpose of education and the essential ingredients of the institution of public education. We are also pleased by your commitment that a systemic review of our province's K-12 system will follow immediately afterward. We look forward to making submissions on key issues on behalf of our organization's members. In addition, we will be encouraging individuals and organizations to take advantage of opportunities to become involved in the Dialogue in the coming months.

Our public education system is a foundation for our democracy as well as a key element in developing our province's economic and social well-being in a changing world, and the issues examined should be of concern to all Albertans. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to ensure a process that encourages all Albertans to become engaged in identifying and providing perspective on the issues.

While we have been critical of the inadequate nature of some other Alberta government approaches to consultation in recent years, we regard this as an opportunity for your department to conduct a review that is exemplary in terms of inclusiveness and participation and that generates not only widespread engagement but also an abundance of helpful insights on the important issues facing Albertans with respect to K-12 education.

We appreciate your commitment to having a consultation process that is both comprehensive and effective, and we wish to make some initial recommendations with respect to what we see as essential to such an approach while there is still time to influence these important decisions on process. To that end, we make the following 5 recommendations:

1. It is essential that a major element of the review be focused on important issues, rather than simply offering an opportunity to make general observations on any topic in K-12 education. This goal can best be accomplished by having an early phase that focuses on identifying the important questions

and issues, along with options and alternatives. A second phase would then seek input on those issues and options.

2. A flaw in some previous consultations was that too often it was difficult for some individuals and groups to find the time and resources to participate, despite having a strong interest in the issues. It will be necessary to develop a clear plan for addressing this issue of inclusiveness, and to allocate resources to assist individuals and groups who have tended to be marginalized or ignored in the past, or who have had other difficulties in participating.
3. While it is very important that there be a variety of mechanisms and opportunities to participate in the process, the opportunity to make face-to-face comments has to be a top priority for the process, open to all who have an interest and point of view. This means that representatives of the Steering Committee must be prepared to take the consultation out to communities in different regions of the province. In addition, large-scale and professional public polling on the major issues is highly desirable.
4. In past consultations, there has tended to be a “one-time, one-shot” opportunity for individuals and groups to make observations or suggestions, which needs to change. For example, they should have significant opportunities to make recommendations on the process to be used, the substantive issues and options examined, and the draft recommendations. This last point is particularly crucial: In the Alberta Commission on Learning (ACOL) consultation process, there were no draft recommendations, and therefore no opportunity to suggest improvements before the final ACOL document. It is essential that in this new process there be a final round of consultations, where individuals and groups have the opportunity to suggest revisions to draft recommendations for consideration by the steering committee before the final report.
5. There is a need to ensure openness and transparency in the process, and in the information and insights generated during the process. Specifically, there should be a commitment to full public access to all of the submissions and data once the process is concluded.

We feel strongly that an authentic, inclusive and comprehensive process will not only give citizens the effective input into policy deliberations that is essential to our democratic system, but also will generate a wide range of insights that will result in more informed policy decisions. There are many serious and pressing issues facing our education system and we believe that an exemplary consultation process will lead to well developed policies that will address the public’s concerns and strengthen this vital public institution.

We look forward to your response to our recommendations on process, to making further suggestions on substantive issues, and to supporting the review process as it unfolds in the months to come.

Sincerely



Bill Moore-Kilgannon
Executive Director

Copies:

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