

Dear Mr. Teghtmeyer,

As a lifetime member of the ATA, I would like to respond to your *ATA News* editorial entitled, "Home education should be supervised by Alberta's school boards."

First of all, I agree that all school authorities (public and private) should operate with the highest standards of financial accountability. All public funding should be used ethically, and with transparency, so that taxpayers can be assured their money is handled carefully. With that in mind, I cannot speak to the specific allegations made by the government about the use of funds by Trinity Christian School and Wisdom Home Schooling.

However, the method chosen to deal with those allegations was unjust and unfair. The Minister of Education cancelled the registration and accreditation of Trinity Christian School without providing any opportunity for the school or Wisdom Home Schooling to respond to the accusations. As well, he publicized and disseminated the accusations before informing the school about them. The school apparently found out about its closure afterwards, through the media!

The Minister's course of action violated the basic principles of justice. Trinity Christian School and Wisdom Home Schooling should have been provided an opportunity to respond to the accusations before being publicly condemned. The Minister acted with undue haste and without procedural fairness. I believe that there could have been less interruptive drama through the use of an interim trustee until this matter was resolved.

As a teacher should, you express more concern about the educational aspects of this situation than the financial aspects, which is good.

However, I think you are in error in suggesting that the current level of supervision for home educating students is insufficient. I have personally been involved in the supervision of home educating students for over twenty years, and in almost every case, the students are doing well. Furthermore, most studies conducted to date indicate that home educating students perform at or above the level of traditionally schooled students. Home education works.

You argue that all home educating students should be required "to register with their resident public, separate or francophone school authority" rather than with an accredited private school. You suggest that this would not erode "parents' decision to provide a home education program that is consistent with their values." However, past experience shows that it would, in fact, erode parental rights.

Before a new School Act was adopted in 1988, home educators were required to register with their resident board. I'm old enough to remember those days. Many school boards were unfavourable to home education and unfriendly towards parents who wanted to choose this option. As a result, the parents had to follow procedures that were often cumbersome and stressful, if they were permitted to home educate at all.

With the change in 1988 allowing parents to shop around for a board favourable to home education (a willing non-resident board), the red-tape involved in home education became much less burdensome. And when accredited private schools also began to act as willing non-resident boards, home educators found schools that were positively favourable to home education. This greatly enhanced parental choice in education.

Removing accredited private schools from among the current options would then certainly constrict the ability of parents "to provide a home education program that is consistent with their values."

Home education has proven itself by allowing children to flourish with individualized educational programs tailored to their particular needs and interests. Any policy changes by the government should serve to make home education more accessible to parents rather than constricting their choices. Restricting the registration of home educated students to a resident board would be a big step backwards.

Finally, while I applaud your concern for the educational welfare of students, I do question your suggesting that all students be registered only through ATA affiliated public, separate and francophone schools. Since this article was written by the ATA News Editor-In-Chief, could it be that your primary motivation may have more to do with putting thousands of students under the supervision of unionized, dues paying teachers than actual student welfare? Just asking!

Yours truly,

Léo Gaumont