



Léo's Email To The Minister

From: Leo Gaumont [<mailto:leo@educationunlimited.ca>]

Sent: Tuesday, November 26, 2013 9:02 AM

To: Education Minister

Cc: EDC EDAct-Regs

Subject: A few observations regarding the alignment of regulations to the Education Act.

To The Honourable Jeff Johnson, Minister of Education, Province of Alberta

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion and concerns respecting the alignment of regulations with the new Education Act. I have had the good fortune to have been involved in education in a professional manner for over 35 years and, to the best of my knowledge, I have taken every opportunity to participate in related decision making matters.

To start, allow me to express my appreciation for the fact that you and the education ministry have the best educational interest of all of Alberta's students. Although there may be some differences of opinion on exactly how this can be accomplished, it is comforting to know that students and their parents are of paramount importance within the ministry. I am thankful for the new direction being advanced by the Inspiring Education document and the new Education Act and trust that the associated regulations will likewise bring greater freedom and corresponding greater opportunity to the education arena.

My first observation, after being involved in every facet of the public consultation that took place, was that it was not really a consultation as much as a directing influence to have the public endorse the bureaucracy's preplanned objectives. At least, it appeared that way to me. To state that the department is seeking stakeholder input when, in nearly every topic, a very few questions were presented in such a way as to direct the answers, is both unfair and dishonest. For instance, to ask "in what measurable ways can the Minister account to Albertans for the achievement of students in a home education program" of the 98% of Albertans who have no idea of what home education is and who have only been personally

exposed to testing, would most likely deliver the sought for answer of testing the students. Similarly, to ask Albertans, over 90% of which send their children to public school, their opinion on how “effectively private schools prepare students for post secondary education or the workforce” is to invite the masses who assume firstly, that the public education system is indeed able to deliver on this assumption and secondly, to conclude that private schools do not! Whether participating in the online survey or attending the face to face meetings, thinking people would have had to come to the conclusion that the questions were leading and restrictive, such that any real concern would not have the opportunity to be addressed. The entire exercise was so carefully orchestrated as to appear as a charade, leaving one cynical of any real intent of the bureaucracy's truly wanting to hear from Albertans in their respective field of best interest.

Education has been my life not only as a lifelong learner but as a professional teacher, principal, director and facilitator of home education. My life path has provided me with many and diverse opportunities for observing how things function, or don't function, both within the education system and from the parental perspective. I presently am responsible for the oversight of the home education program for several hundred families on behalf of our accredited-funded private school, which has provided many opportunities to observe the education system from a parental perspective. As a consequence of having this extensive and diverse experience within the education arena, I could certainly make a number of suggestions related to a broad range of topics. However I will restrict my opinions to three topics and for the sake of brevity, I will simply provide my conclusions on each topic. Thank you for giving me your attention in these matters.

Private schools should be given far more latitude in decision making. Both the questionnaire and the face to face meeting was orchestrated to give the impression that private schools need to be more transparent and accountable than what is presently (unjustifiably) required. Twenty-five years in the public system has certainly made me very suspect of the public accountability and transparency of government schools. I could, and probably should, write the book on the creative ways schools have for maximizing their portion of taxpayer's money. Private schools receive far less money than public schools for the express purpose of having greater latitude in decision making along with an already significant level of accountability. I believe that private schools offer an alternative choice for parents and that they should be protected from unnecessary bureaucratic intrusions and

allowed to make the decisions their clients are willing to pay extra money for, or walk out of if they disagree.

The new Education Act gives school boards the powers of a natural person. These powers include the right to contract. There has been a concerted effort, of late, to do away with the contracting of organizations with specific knowledge and expertise in home education. Parents have been fairly cooperative with government agencies, largely due to being able to register their students with these third party contractors in association with private schools. It is my opinion that if home educators are denied this opportunity, a very significant percentage of them would simply not register their children at all. Unless the government is prepared to find itself with a large group of parents willing to go to court rather than be subject to organizations who do not understand or sympathize with their desires for their children, I would highly recommend that it cease from making private schools discontinue their use of third party contracting of home education.

Home Education is one of the choices that Albertans have for the education of their children. It should be obvious that parents who are willing to sacrifice so much for the educational welfare of their children and are with them nearly every hour of every day, are far more qualified to assess their own children's achievements than external agencies that build instruments based on an immeasurable standard! Having spent many years watching questionable actions of less than competent teachers to "monitor and assess" their students makes me wonder how a distant bureaucrat can accomplish what can't be adequately done within the public system. I can assure you, after having dealt face to face with several hundreds of home educating families over the last twenty years, that any attempt to "monitor and assess" home educated students will most likely be met with widespread non-compliance. It is highly recommended that the government leave that responsibility to the parents who know their children in way that the classroom teacher or bureaucrat never could.

The Inspiring Education document was right in its prediction of the changing educational environment brought about by modern technology. As a consequence of this shift in learning methodology, there is likely to be an educational revolution where we will see less government-provided education and more home-based education. More home education will mean very significant savings to the government and correspondingly, fewer jobs in both schools and ministerial bureaucracies. This change is not likely to happen without a fight from affected unions. I suspect that this may have had some influence on the negative light in which both home education and private education was portrayed.

Blended programming was simply not on the agenda for discussion! While the public was being led through “public consultations” to seek the monitoring and assessment of home educated students and greater accountability and transparency of private schools, not a word was said about the potential misuse of millions of taxpayer dollars by the providers of blended programming, “fully aligned” programming, or the various other “creative ways” of delivering government-accredited programming, done in order to access the greater funding that comes with the increased delivery of school at home. Clearly defined rules requiring the use of government programming, delivered by certificated teachers using approved resources are being re-aligned, redefined or simply ignored through the continued use of parent chosen programming and resources delivered by parent representatives of certificated teachers, while billing the government as though the rules were indeed being met. This opportunity creates an environment of compromise, graft and dishonesty that is nearly impossible to correctly monitor as both parties involved would lose should either report on the other. Under any other authority, this kind of activity would be considered fraudulent. Why would this topic not be up for discussion?

In summary, I personally take exception to the ministry wanting to make private schools and home education more accountable for the possibility of misappropriating pennies when multiple millions are squandered in public schools who think nothing of billing the government for programming that is plainly not being delivered, as I have observed throughout my career. Blended programming has been so monetarily successful for the public institutions who have been able to resourcefully use it, that it is now being employed by private schools who, having taken note of how the “bigger” brother is getting away with it, have also started cashing in with this opportunity. If the education bureaucracy is truly concerned for the assessment, monitoring, accountability and transparency of those who report to them, I would suggest that the ministry start by first doing so within the bureaucracy itself and on the public institutions who may be implementing “creative” ways to increase their funding. However, I suppose that is not likely to happen as it is far easier to pick on home educators and to bully the private schools who can be made scapegoats for bureaucratic incompetence and ineptitude. I am sure you agree that taxpayers and their children deserve better than that.

I realize that the tone of this letter is somewhat negative, however, I am passionate about this topic. We are truly blessed in this province and country to have freedom

in education. Freedom, however, is a combination of choice and control. To take away either is to deny freedom. Our biggest Alberta advantage has always been its education system. Let's continue to provide opportunity to prepare the next generation for the greater good of the province by providing real choices and let's allow the parents as much control as they want. The Inspiring Education document clearly indicated that this was the only realistic option, considering modern technology. I applaud the effort of those who were forward thinking enough to make this statement and I pray the government do what it can to bring its education bureaucracy in line with this philosophy rather than to perpetuate the antiquated, authoritarian thinking that has become endemic within the system. I implore you to adopt our former premier, Peter Lougheed's position that Alberta would be best served by having the greatest possible freedom, choice and control, in education. His visionary leadership resulted in the incredible province we inhabit today. Tomorrow's Alberta will be determined by how we set the regulations to the new Education Act. I pray this opportunity allows us to move forward and not inward.

Thank you for listening to the sincere concerns of a passionate parent, grandparent, teacher, administrator and facilitator of many years. I would like a response to this lengthy note so that I may have some kind of assurance that my voice is being taken seriously. I would also very much appreciate having an opportunity to meet with you personally, at which time I would be happy to share of my extensive experience and wisdom regarding education. I appreciate all of your efforts to make Alberta's education system the best that it can possibly be.

Sincerely,

Léo Gaumont

Director

Education Unlimited

Box 4, Site 7, RR #2

Tofield, AB T0B 4J0

Ph. (780) 662-3634

Toll Free 1-877-662-3630

www.educationunlimited.ca

The Minister's Reply To The Email

Dear Mr. Gaumont:

Thank you for your November 26, 2013 email sharing your observations about the consultation process for the Education Act Regulatory Review.

The online survey was designed with input from Education staff knowledgeable about content related to the Education Act and its regulation-making powers. The question in the online survey about home education attracted a great deal of interest, with almost 1,700 responses.

The fall consultation processes were designed by a neutral facilitation team from the Ministry of Culture, supported by content experts in my ministry. I have heard extensive positive feedback about the processes; however, Albertans do not always share the same perspectives, so I appreciate your thoughts on this.

As you point out in your email, the broad context within which all of the regulatory review is taking place is the [*Inspiring Education*](#) vision. When we move into the decision-making phase of the regulatory review over the next few months, the values, principles and policy and governance shifts laid out in *Inspiring Education* will guide our choices.

I appreciate your strong interest in the Education Act Regulatory Review and, specifically, your comments on private schools, home education and blended programming. Your comments on these topics is being forwarded to MLA Maureen Kubinec, Chair of the Education Act Regulatory Review Committee. It is also being provided to Education staff responsible for leading the regulatory review process on both home education and private schools.

One of the key roles of the Education Act Regulatory Review Committee is to be a liaison with stakeholder organizations. I am not able to meet with you myself, but I have copied MLA Kubinec on this response, as she may wish to explore the possibility of scheduling a meeting with you.

Your perspectives on these matters are valued and will be considered as we develop recommendations related to possible changes to the regulations. Please note that at this point, no decisions have been made on changing any of the regulations. Formal

public consultations on the regulations have recently been completed, and we are still in the process of compiling and analyzing all the information we have received.

Representatives of the home education and private school stakeholder communities are formally engaged with Education in the ongoing work of determining if there is a need for changes to the regulations. More information will be forthcoming as this work progresses over the next several months. Please visit [Education's Engage website](#) or [sign up](#) on our distribution list for updates.

I appreciate you sharing your feedback, and I thank you again for your interest in this important work.

Sincerely,

Jeff Johnson
Minister of Education
MLA, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater

cc: Maureen Kubinec
Chair of the Education Act Regulatory Review Committee
MLA, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock