

Media Release

PSBAA expresses concern over removal of charter school cap in Bill 8

June 7, 2019 (Edmonton, AB) ... On behalf of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA), President Cathy Hogg today expressed concern about removal of the cap on charter schools in Alberta, and a change in the restrictions under which such schools can form.

“We believe this will lead to a further fragmentation and splintering of public tax dollars in offering duplicate and parallel publicly-funded education systems throughout Alberta under the guise of ‘parent choice,’” said Hogg. “We also believe that, based on the experience of charter schools in the United States, Charter schools have not improved the educational outcomes for their students.” On international exams currently, Canada is in 5th place the USA in 30th place.

After years of operating in Alberta, there is no published data to indicate that Alberta’s Charter schools have advanced test scores – provincially or internationally – nor have their practices provided improvements to the system as a whole.

“We are also concerned that – while Charter schools receive public funding – they are not governed by locally-elected school board trustees in the communities in which they serve. This is contrary to democratic principles, local autonomy and the role of elected school board trustees,” said Hogg.

Some of the current criteria for the existence of a charter school is that it “has the potential to improve student learning outcomes” and that it “has the potential to provide improvements to the education system as a whole.” What is now missing is consultation with the local school board in the jurisdiction in which a charter school would be established. This omission is contrary to the Minister’s statements regarding her support for local autonomy. In a conference call with Alberta school board trustees following tabling of Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, the Minister stated that “there will be no need to consult with boards or community at this time.”

The current language of the *Education Act* states that “a charter school shall not be affiliated with a religious faith or denomination.” While a few students currently in a separate system might enrol in a charter school due to the school being closer to their home or the charter

school's philosophy, the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta believes that charter school enrolment will grow at the expense of public school enrolment.

Finally, the Education Amendment Act now gives the Minister sole authority to issue a charter, thus putting the government in the role of administering and supervising schools, which is not their mandate. "It is at variance with the government philosophy of letting the broader society or business take a lead in these matters," added Hogg. "This matter is basically one of public accountability and transparency. Charter school expansion does not address the inequity of opportunity between urban and rural schools and program availability. In fact, charter school expansion further splinters our precious resources."

"Instead, we would appreciate a focus on creating excellent and innovative programs within the existing public school system, and not on taking actions that further segment and duplicate our education system. Our existing schools need to be modernized and efficiencies sought to allocate resources in support of student programming. We are committed to working with the Minister, but feel we would be remiss if we did not address this specific matter that has the potential to profoundly affect the existing public school system, one that serves every student regardless of ethnic, religious or economic background."

The Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA) is the only association advocating exclusively for public education in the province. We believe public schools are the first choice in our communities, where children can go to learn and live the values of democracy together, reflecting our hope, and shaping the future of our communities.

- 30 -

For more information, please contact:

PSBAA Communications 780-479-8080 (office)

ExecutiveAssistant@public-schools.ab.ca