

Education Should Be About Family

Albertans strongly affirm a belief in freedom. Yet the rights of parents to educate their children as they deem best is being attacked aggressively by the Alberta provincial government.

Education, properly understood, is the primary responsibility of parents. For much of human history schools were formed as an extension of family life and parental guidance. The historic birth of public education in Canada began with the good intentions of citizens in small, isolated communities. Parents with little time to educate their children would gather, build a school house, and invite a teacher, who respected the cultural and educational beliefs of the parents, into the community to educate their children on their behalf.

Today, the school has been reimagined as a separate, co-parenting institution, which increasingly isolates children from their families. All too often the provincial government is enforcing curriculum and engineering school culture in direct opposition to a parent's core belief systems, while engaging in increasingly coercive funding models that all but force parents to place their children into a one-size-fits-all public education.

Special interests have resulted in legislative enforcement of clubs that have stripped parental rights in Alberta. In March the legislature passed a Gay-straight Alliance law in just four hours, without public consultation or legislative committee review, which completely alienates parents from supposed anti-bullying advocacy that is meant to protect their own children. Whether one believes GSAs in every school is a laudable or not, there can be no doubt that such enforced LGBTQ advocacy contradicts the deepest convictions of many faiths and threatens religious freedoms and parental rights.

Teaching methods are also being rendered uniform through "Inspiring Education", which Alberta Education plans to impose on all schools and subjects by 2016. This "discovery learning" model will lower the number of education outcomes, increase dependency on expensive technology tools, further ingrain murky grading systems, and reduce standardized testing for outcome proficiency. In numerous studies this "inquiry method" of instruction has proven to be an abject failure, leading thousands of Alberta parents to sign petitions in opposition to this curriculum model.

Funding is another manipulative tool being used. We hear politicians seeking election talking about enforcing increasingly coercive funding models that impede a parent's choice to access unique education settings. Independent homeschoolers and private schoolers are being threatened with the possibility they may lose their funding for both core and extracurricular options. Ignored are the economic facts. Privately educated students already receive less funding than publicly educated students in Alberta, and each student in independent school settings saves the Alberta taxpayer as much as \$8000 per year. Private schools also receive no funding for their infrastructure, yet if independent schools closed tomorrow, close to 45,000 students-on top of the 12,000 already expected-would flood into an already crowded public school system.

We hear none of these facts on the campaign trail in Alberta. Public commentary is dominated by popular catch phrases limited to superficialities such as more money for public education, more schools to be built, school lunches for all, and smaller class sizes. If public schools become homogenous, poor quality institutions, that no longer serve the needs of students, nor respect the

direction of parents, it won't matter how many schools there are or whether students are educated in smaller classes.

Schools and educators must have the autonomy to choose the best tools and curriculum for their students. All education stakeholders-including parents- must be invited to support the cultural development of their school. Standardized testing - like the Canadian Test for Basic Skills (CTBS) - must be reintroduced to ensure educational outcomes are met by Alberta students so that our graduates can compete on the world stage. Finally, equitable funding must follow each student into which ever quality setting-from the wide variety that will naturally emerge in a free landscape-a parent might chose.

It is time for all Alberta candidates to remember that education is an extension of family, not a replacement for family. Do Alberta election candidates believe this to be true, or not?

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