



DECEMBER 16, 2016

NDP must distance itself from the anti-family, anti-parent and anti-choice rhetoric of ATA

The NDP refuses to release the names of the expert curricula working groups while issues in Alberta education keep growing, largely as a result of the influence of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), the NDP's chosen partner in the six-year curriculum rewrite.

Parents are deeply concerned by ongoing drops in student proficiency in mathematics, and while the NDP has finally stated that they will be making changes, recent curriculum surveys offered to parents show ongoing emphasis upon the failed 21st century, problem-based focus in curricula. What use are changes to testing and teacher training if the failed "Discovery Math" continues to be pushed in schools?

The ATA is a strong supporter of this curriculum experiment on Alberta students. In response to Minister David Eggen's call for changes in mathematics, the media reports portrayed ATA president Mark Ramsankar as diminishing the worthiness of testing, rather than showing concern for student outcomes.

According to ATA executive staff officer Phil McRae (Nov. 22, 2016 ATA column) the "real issues affecting society at this historical moment are the rise of societal inequalities, the need for greater social cohesion among polarized perspectives, and the collective actions necessary to combat climate change and its impact on local and global economies." This is the ATA's focus when it comes to curriculum reform.

The majority of parents believe

scholastic proficiency is the goal of education, and want schools to get back to basics.

What parents believe clearly matters little as ATA-supported legislation and school board policies disregard the importance of parents in the lives of their children in school. Legislation like School Act 16.1, school board policies, and curriculum decidedly circumvents parents and enforces one-size-fits-all clubs and activities into all schools; including schools that take no public funding.

Opt-out provisions for sensitive topics have been weakened and children can now be taught controversial lessons like "gender studies" through polarizing resources like the ATA Prism Toolkits, without parent knowledge. Parents that voiced valid concerns were labelled as 'fearmongers' in a recent ATA News cartoon.

Scarier yet, at-risk children in many schools may now receive counselling without the awareness of parents, regardless of the age of the child.

Egregious rhetoric is coming from MLAs across the political spectrum, accusing Alberta citizens of wanting to 'out gay children.' This superficial and insulting accusation is used to describe any concerned citizens who are calling for the legal protection of the family unit and does nothing to resolve the legitimate concerns of parents.

Research bears witness to the fact at-risk youth do best with strong family connections and parental support, yet caring Alberta citizens find themselves fighting for the right to parent their own children.

Many parents are increasingly seeking out alternative education options because

of failed curricula experiments and concern about the increasing circumvention of their parental role.

But those same alternative options are at risk of becoming increasingly limited in Alberta, which until now had been one of the most diverse and innovative education systems in the country.

The government has tampered with funding models such that school board support of home education students is increasingly cumbersome. Furthermore, the NDP partner — the ATA — is publicly calling for home educators to be restricted to registering with a resident school board. This would be catastrophic for rural home educators in particular, who depend upon distant boards for adequate support.

The ATA also continues to advocate for the defunding of the partial support offered to independent schools, sidestepping the fact this support has been shown to save Alberta taxpayers at least \$150 million per year. Low- and middle-income families would be the hardest hit by such a measure, while wealthy families would still have the means to access independent, alternative schooling. This move would create two-tiered education in Alberta.

The rhetoric of the ATA is anti-family, anti-parent, and anti-choice in education. The NDP needs to distance itself from the detrimental influence of the ATA if the priority is truly the needs of students and their ability to be successful after graduation on the world stage.

Donna Trimble is Executive Director of Parents for Choice in Education (www.ParentChoice.ca)