

Good morning colleagues.

It is hard to believe that we are back here together again at the Spring General Meeting. For some of you, this is your first SGM and so - welcome. I hope that you forge new friendships with fellow trustees and gain a better understanding of the important work you were elected to do.

But before I go on, I want us, collectively, to acknowledge High Prairie School Division and Living Waters Catholic Regional Division. Both of these boards were profoundly affected by the devastation of the Slave Lake fires. Please stand and let us acknowledge you. We want you to know that we are here to support you in any way that we can and will work with you closely to help those families facing new circumstances, transition as seamlessly as possible. We are in awe of your courage and stamina in light of the tremendous events that have taken place. The ASBA has made a \$1000 donation on behalf of the school boards to the Red Cross to help your community rebuild.

Thank you to all for opening your doors to help these families get back some normalcy to their lives.

I can't begin to describe the feelings of pride that are in my heart as I stand before you. Fellow trustees, we have had a tremendously taxing year and I do stand here with great pride – Pride for the work you do each and every day for the students of this wonderful province.

Wonderful work. Important work. Work that often goes unrecognized. And unrewarded.

As I have travelled the province, I have had the opportunity to get to know many of you much better over this year and for that I am grateful. You truly are a great group of people – filling a very important role and I continue to learn more and more about your local realities.

While we have worked hard this year on behalf of Alberta's students, today, I want to speak to you about the need to not rest on our laurels – on our past accomplishments – but the need to look to the future. A future which holds great promise, but a future that also holds significant challenges.

Alberta has an excellent education system – one of the best systems in the world. I'm sure you're tired of hearing this. It's become a bit of a platitude that we must pay homage to.

It's true though. -

But it won't be one of the best unless we continue to do the best we can for each and every child in our system....and not just students that fit nicely into a regular program,

And Not just for the children who are “neatly dressed and “well fed” ... and who come to our school “ready to learn”.

But all students. Students who come from less than ideal situations, students who each and every day are afraid for some reason or another, students who are hungry and have no decent home life. Students who struggle with a disability on a daily basis, students whose parents don't know how to parent.

We, trustees who represent the public, separate and francophone systems serve all students.

Not some students,

But **all** students!

And we must never forget this.

And, fellow trustees we need to do a better job for **all** students.

And, speaking frankly, I think we can all do better.

As people have often pointed out, we need to change our thinking – our old ways of doing things – in order to effect change.

And I agree – we must change our thinking – our attitudes - to ensure that each and every child succeeds- which is what, in my mind, Action on Inclusion and Inspiring Education are really all about.

Fellow trustees, Mr. Minister, we collectively got it right when the Action on Inclusion and Inspiring Education were adopted.

Every child does matter and we need to wrap around each and every child to show them that they do matter.

But I can tell you that while attitude shifts are important – indeed critical, they aren't in and of themselves sufficient to accomplish this objective.

School boards also need the resources to accomplish the Action agenda – an agenda which is firmly anchored to the “every child matters” belief.

I know that school boards are ready to move forward - and in fact have moved forward with an attitude of transforming

our system into the best it can be. We have engaged our communities and are planning initiatives that support a new way of thinking in education.

Now - let's have the financial resources to accomplish this laudable objective.

We need a system of education funding for both our infrastructure needs and our operational funding that is "sufficient, predictable, and sustainable."

Come on: say it with me:

"Sufficient, predictable, and sustainable".

That's a phrase that will become our new mantra.
Sufficient, predictable and sustainable funding.

If the government can provide five years of funding for health care – surely they can do it for education!

Now, there is another point I would like to make today, and it relates to coming together for a common purpose. The best example of this is right here in this room with the devastation experienced in Slave Lake. School boards came together for a common purpose to aid in that situation.

You know there's an old African proverb that is often retold at challenging times.....

“When the waterhole starts to dry up – the animals begin to look at one another differently.”

Well, ladies and gentlemen, fellow trustees, I sense we're all beginning to look at one another differently as the first “real” cuts to education since 1995 take hold.

We're all so focused on our own boards and balancing our own budgets – that I fear a sense of parochialism is creeping into our thinking. And that's a natural reaction to the fiscal pressures that face us.

But I want to ask you to be generous in your outlook. Resist the temptation to retreat solely to your own reality.

Instead, I invite you to use this opportunity to expand the relationships you have with the other “animals” around the shrinking waterhole. Look collectively for ways to expand the range of cooperative initiatives you share with your neighbouring boards – be they public, separate or francophone. Be bold. Be open. Be creative. But above all, be generous of spirit.

Because if we all just act in our own self interest – well the result can be a collective “tragedy”. Those of you who have

read or heard of the modern “tragedy of the commons” parable will be all too familiar with what I mean. But for those of you who haven’t heard – let me skip to the lesson that is to be gleaned from this parable –

If we all act in our own self interest with respect to those things we hold in common – inevitably, we will all lose.

And in education – what’s our “common purpose” – it’s our children – our future generation. We can’t lose sight of the common purpose, can we....

We have no more precious resource than this...

We need to ensure that we do the best we can for these children and young people - Because their parents, who are their first and most important educators, expect us to.

They expect us to spend our time and resources on providing opportunities for their children to succeed. And every single thing that we do should be measured with that purpose in mind.

I know that you all deeply respect the work of school boards around this province and so, it seems fitting that we take some time and learn more from each other. With that in mind, I challenge you to meet more often with your neighbouring boards, to seek cooperative initiatives that

will provide greater opportunities – together – for the benefit of students.

As these initiatives are identified and implemented, ASBA will recognize them in a special session at our Fall General Meeting showcasing creative and innovative partnerships. Partnerships that ultimately advance student learning.

I want to close by recommending that you read the recently released final report of *the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy -- Shaping Alberta's Future*.

The report outlines a compelling vision for Alberta and underlying it all – underlying it all - is the need for a strong, innovative and vibrant education system.

An education system that we have now, but that must evolve to meet the future needs of young Albertans. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity – to be creative, to innovate, to work with our neighbouring boards and our communities. After all, we can and must design our own future and that of all Alberta's students.

Thank You.