

# Strengthening Alberta School Board's Association Provincial Voice Task Force Report and Recommendations

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November 2014, Revised February 2015

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## **Part II**

(to be provided when interested parties request further detail after reviewing Part I)

### **Issues Presentation Process and Discipline**

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## Task Force Consultations

- The Task Force’s first meeting was January 19, 2014. From that point in time onward, each member of the task force had informal conversations with their own board’s trustees and other members of ASBA when the opportunities arose.
- The Task Force consulted in the summer of 2014, with the following Past Presidents of ASBA and other provincial association leaders:

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Michele Mulder  | ASBA President 2001-2004   |
| Maureen Kubinec | ASBA President 2004-2007   |
| Heather Welwood | ASBA President 2007-2010   |
| Jacquie Hansen  | ASBA President 2010-2013   |
| Cheryl Smith    | ASBA Vice President 2010-2013 and interim President                |
| Patty Dittrick  | Past President of the Public School Boards Association of Alberta  |
| Sandra Bannard  | Past President of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association |
| Fred Kreiner    | Federation des conseils scolaires francophone de l’Alberta         |

- The Task Force presented a basic description and sought input from all Zones at the regularly scheduled Zone meetings in September and October 2014
- The Task Force reported to and was provided useful feedback from the ASBA Board of Directors at their meetings on
  - March 13, 2014
  - May 8, 2014
- Following the May meeting with the Board of Directors, the Task Force also asked some basic questions at the ASBA Spring General Meeting. They were not decision making questions but simply seeking members’ opinions at that point in time.

Here are the questions and the voting responses:

Do you believe that ASBA needs a stronger voice with regard to political advocacy on provincial issues? 97% Yes

Do you believe that ASBA needs a better process for determining which issues are “provincial” and which issues are “local”? 83% Yes

Do you believe that ASBA needs a more efficient process for taking a position on provincial political resolutions? 83% Yes

Does your board support Theme #4 of the ASBA Governance Task Force (school board chairs are leaders and should be given a mandate to represent your board)? 90% Yes

- The Task Force reported to the Board of Directors on November 6, 2014
- The Board of Directors then decided to present to the November 17th Fall General Meeting a set of principles for consideration by the membership. Following this presentation ASBA is to survey of members on these principles and then to determine what may brought to the membership at the Spring General Meeting.

## **Task Force Membership**

Colleen Deitz, Chair, Palliser School Division, (Zone 6)

Ken Checkel, Chair, Clearview School Division, (Zone 4)

Michael Ouellette, Vice Chairm Grand Prairie and District Catholic School Division (Zone 1)

Michael Janz, Vice President ASBA, Vice Chair Edmonton Public School Board (Zone 2/3)

Dave Price, Chair, Golden Hills School Division (Zone 5)

David Anderson, Executive Director, Alberta School Boards Association

Scott McCormack, Acting Executive Director, Alberta School Boards Association

## **Terms of Reference**

- To explore potential avenues to strengthen ASBA's provincial voice and the collective voice of school boards on matters of provincial interest and/or impact on students and school boards in the province.
- To examine the possible leadership role of board chairs in decision making on provincial issues.
- To seek input from a wide variety of stakeholders, potentially including but not limited to, past and present school trustees, ASBA executive members, and members of other provincial or national organizations which effectively represent their members.
- To produce a report including recommendations and potential alternatives for consideration by the ASBA Board of Directors

# Strengthening ASBA's Provincial Voice Task Force Report and Recommendations

## Executive Summary

The Alberta School Board's Association has a rich history of providing support to its members. This support has been outstanding in the areas of professional development opportunities and advice for its member's trustees and Board Chairs. It also has provided legal and Governance advice at the member board level. Over the last decade in particular, there has been the need to develop provincial level policies, and to become more active and adept at taking a provincial position on behalf of its membership. In this area, the organization has been much less successful. A combination of the provincial pursuit of centralization of authority and frequently unilateral provincial political actions, along with an inability for school boards to come to a single strong position and then stick with it, has resulted in the provincial government imposing two consecutive employment agreements with the Alberta Teachers Association on school boards, the actual employers. Other examples also are apparent where ASBA is not respected by the Province, as the voice of all school boards.

Our Task Force examined the issues ourselves and interviewed a number of Past Presidents and key related association leaders. We concluded that a new option needed to be developed for ASBA's members and for its leadership at a number of levels, in order to respond to the following frequently identified needs:

- Elevated member engagement on provincial issues**
- Responsive, nimble, efficient and binding member decision making process**
- Clear member mandate given to ASBA Executive and Board of Directors**

Bearing in mind these needs, and the "**Reimagining school board governance: A call to action**" report recommendations stating "*Designate and prepare the school board chair to be the sole spokesperson for the school jurisdiction*" our Task Force developed the recommendation to form a Council of Chairs decision making body. We also developed a process to hear and decide on the merit of "provincial issues" and the principles that define them. This in turn will support provincial policy or provincial positions on behalf of ASBA's members and the students that members represent.

### Key principles:

- **Strong organizations have strong and active engagement of their members.**
- **Members need to "decide" not "give advice" on provincial issues.**
- **The decision making process must be efficient and timely, while providing ample opportunity for discussion, debate, and position development.**
- **Those chosen to speak for members through our association, (in particular the President) must not only be given a clear direction and mandate by its members on provincial issues, but also must have the confidence to take a firm public position on these issues.**
- **Members must also be prepared to and willing to advocate on these issues at their own level with other local elected officials and stakeholders.**

The foundation for this new option (all other existing policy development avenues are expected to remain in place) is the elevated, and we believe more efficient, opportunity for individual member boards to bring provincial issues forward for decisions by the provincial organization. The activity around developing the potential provincial position, and then the fact that every board will have an opportunity for influence in the double majority based decision, will not only make for a well-considered position, but also provide some experiential training for later advocacy efforts.

The act of making a decision is fundamentally different than the act of giving advice. The level of engagement and commitment is far greater if an individual, or in this case a member board, makes a decision (recorded) than if all that is expected is for “advice” to be given. This elevated level of commitment will help give the confidence needed by our spokespeople to fulfil their role on member’s behalf.

We recognize that engaged Trustees and Chairs are very busy people and it is for this reason that we believe that most issues can be discussed and decided “electronically” using ever evolving digital technology. This can be done without the kind of investment in time, or in travel costs, necessary to meet at a central location. While we expect there will be “in person” meetings possible associated with currently scheduled AGMs and FGMs it will not likely be the method used to consider most provincial issues.

Ultimately, in order for ASBA to be able to gain the support for a strong provincial position on an issue, there must be a knowledgeable public across the province as well as a clear and strong mandate given by members to its leadership. Members and the leadership need to work together in order for this to be developed and in place to effectively guide the provincial government on these issues.

We believe the Council of Chairs structure, along with a clearly defined and disciplined decision making process, will elevate the level of membership engagement and commitment. This will occur at the same time as providing very useful options to the Board of Directors and to the President for testing their own issues and for the organization to develop strong ASBA provincial issue positions.

Once again, the Council of Chairs is an additional option for ASBA, and does not detract or replace any of the currently existing processes or structure. It is intended to be an option that may be used to help strengthen ASBA’s voice on provincial issues. Its addition creates the opportunity for additional support and clarity of mandate.

## Some History

ASBA began with, and continues to have a major portion of its operational activity as a service organization supporting members delivering education and advice and providing a forum to develop some member based policies. For many years, individual Boards were responsible to their local taxpayers for the collection and use of the funds for the delivery of education in their division, and to the Provincial Government to meet the minimum standards of the education of students in their local jurisdiction.

In the mid-90s this changed with the Provincial Government forcing regionalization and the significant reduction in the number of Boards at that time, and even more significantly, removing the taxation power and the local direct responsibility to and interaction with taxpayers. This was replaced with provincial government funding.

One of the supposed goals of the removal of the taxation authority from local Boards was to have the province distribute the funds more fairly across the province, offsetting the financial "haves and have-nots" that existed at that time. In fact what has resulted is the general levelling of base-funding, while the capital and operating funds have been driven by provincial politics creating haves and have-nots in this critical area. In turn, this also impacts funding for the on-going maintenance and to some extent results in the operating funding shortfall for older versus newer facilities. We also have seen that provincially driven annual budget based decisions have in practice, eliminated the ability to have predictable and sustainable funding for our local Boards.

This all is very understandable when the Province, with its own provincial political priorities takes over financial management of local jurisdictions. The outcome is Provincial politics driven decisions, disconnected from the strengths and opportunities of the local jurisdictions. There are still winners and losers financially, now driven by perceived provincial political influence and opportunism, and locally elected school boards lose the ability to make their own, local strengths based decisions with their constituents and for their students.

ASBA as an organization has also developed and provided advice on provincial government policies largely when asked to do so by the government as part of a wide consultation process. Pre-regionalization and certainly pre-removal of the taxation authority, there was little opportunity or need for ASBA to take an active position to negotiate with the province on behalf of all boards. Bargaining with its employees was done by the employer, the boards themselves, either singly or in some cases, as groups of boards.

The regionalization was imposed by the Province as was the removal of the taxation authority without ASBA being structured or prepared to be an effective negotiator with the government on these huge issues.

Indeed when the Task Force interviewed the Past Presidents, we were told of how the ASBA team at one point in time, negotiated with the provincial government to get some measure of the taxation authority back for member boards. ASBA's leadership had been given the mandate to do that by its members. They were successful in achieving agreement with the Minister and the Cabinet at that time. To the leadership's surprise and considerable disappointment, the members of ASBA voted down that opportunity and the arrangement was lost. That reversal of direction (and counter to ASBA's taxation policy that exists today) was a heavy blow to the organization from a variety of angles including the government's perspective of the ability to count on ASBA to effectively represent its member's views.

The first time the provincial government moved to impose their settlement with the ATA on school boards who were and are the employer of the teachers in their divisions, was a further

step in the direction of undermining individual school board's authority. It also was more evidence that ASBA was unable to act effectively against the province's action. It is worthy of note that some member boards in fact had achieved settlements and already had signed agreements with their teachers. These signed agreements were ordered by the Minister, to be torn up (in some cases at greater cost to the School Divisions) or face the individual boards' of trustees dismissal. While the leadership of ASBA may have done all they could have to influence the government to not take that step, it is a certainty that individual boards that were threatened could not stand on their own. The only way that there would have been any chance of causing the government to back away and honour the school board's authority as the employer, would be if ASBA had a clear and strong mandate from its members that they were prepared to vigorously support ASBA's position publicly and not waiver.

Following the first imposed settlement by the government with the ATA, ASBA requested and was provided the Mackenzie report which was a plan for the organization to put in place in order to be prepared for the likelihood of the province attempting to impose a settlement again. The plan was adopted by the membership of ASBA however a minority (17 boards) chose to not honour the decision and actively worked against it. Ultimately ASBA itself felt unable to act strongly to implement that plan.

When the first imposed agreement expired, and while there had been years of so-called Tripartite discussions (between the government, ASBA and the ATA) ultimately the government (the Premier inserted herself in the process) imposed on the school boards of the province another agreement that the government had negotiated directly with the ATA. Again, during the process, when polled by ASBA, a strong majority of member Boards advised their position was in opposition to the GOA-ATA deal. However as heavy pressure was brought to bear on individual school boards by both parties but principally by the GOA's representatives, many of the individual boards changed their position. Government pressure included inappropriate messaging from senior government officials to school Superintendents encouraging them to influence individual school boards. A small number of boards resisted until the last hours before the government's deadline for agreement. In the end, the government told them that the deal could be imposed with or without the board's agreement. It also was made clear that in the event that the individual board continued to oppose it, the costs of the deal still would be imposed by regulation and the required government funding to cover the increased costs would not be made available to the dissenting boards. Faced with the damaging financial impact on their students, all but one of the last boards then had to put their students first in the short run, even if it was judged to be not in the best interest of the students or the school division in the long term.

While the leadership of ASBA resisted the Government's actions to the best of its ability, what was lacking again was a clearly defined process and structure to have all member boards make a provincial decision together, and having made it, stand firm on it. Had that been possible, the political risk to the Premier and the provincial government of not recognizing ASBA's position would have been much greater and may have caused much more second thought about imposing their will on the locally elected school boards of the province.

Another example of the provincial government taking a position different than what was ASBA's position includes the strong demands for predictable long term funding for its members. One could say that ASBA had been successful as a 3 year funding regime had been put in place and boards began operating on that basis. In the spring of 2013, part way through the 1st year of that 3 year funding period, the province not only cut funding commitments going forward, but cut

funding levels part way through the current year. It impacted programs already in motion and put boards in poor positions with good faith commitments and contracts already in force for the current year. The political consequences to the provincial government of that dramatic change were not significant. The public accepted the action without any substantial push back. For whatever reason, the position and needs of school boards was not and is not understood and respected by the public versus the less than full and transparent disclosure of the issues by the provincial government. School boards as a group need to have the ability to gain the public's understanding and support.

The world of influence has changed and the need for a strong voice provincially for school boards has increased dramatically. ASBA needs to adjust to meet this demand. ASBA needs to have more efficient methods of gaining the decisions and mandates from its membership.

## **Where is ASBA now?**

Today, the route for members to make decisions concerning ASBA policies or to take action come from long established processes leading up to decisions being made principally at the Annual Spring General Meeting. (see appendix A for the detailed flow chart of the current practice)

## **Political Influence Opportunities and Needed Action.**

The Task force believes that quick and firm action needs to be taken in order to strengthen ASBA's ability to speak on all issues of a provincial character in a way that is effective in delivering the outcomes needed in the best interest of ASBA's membership, our students and families.

There is a greater opportunity for influence associated with the new leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party and therefore the Provincial government. While the Task Force hoped that our recommendations could be acted on before the next provincial election, it is likely that this opportunity will pass in the next couple months. We believe it is critically important that steps are taken soon though, to prepare for that outcome. ASBA needs to be in a strong position to provide provincial leadership on behalf of its members and their students, families and communities.

The Task force believes that:

1. In order to have ASBA achieve this stature it needs to develop with its membership a structure and a process which can deliver to ASBA's spokes people the mandate and the confidence to speak firmly and quickly on identified provincial issues every time it is needed.
2. This can be done in a way that is complimentary to the existing organizational structure which serves the strong service and support character of ASBA and the government advice activity that exists today.
3. It can be done in a way that continues to respect and support local decision making, indeed even strengthening this position while being able to develop a provincial voice that cannot be ignored.

The Task Force also believes that without action very soon, ASBA will become even less relevant to discussions with the provincial government on the issues of importance to School Boards, their students and families. While ASBA has evolved out of an organization geared to provide support and in some ways an educational body for its members, it has not yet evolved into the organization that can represent its members in provincial matters effectively enough.

The greatest examples are the two imposed settlements by the provincial governments with respect to school board employees, and their union, the Alberta Teacher's Association. Back to back actions taken by the provincial government, over a 5 year period, in spite of an effort by ASBA to be better prepared after the first time and before the next round of negotiations were scheduled to occur. Of course, these two instances are major ones but along with this is the reality that unless ASBA is respected and is seen as a critical partner and even the "go to" organization that speaks on behalf of the province's school boards, then virtually all opportunities for influence are downgraded to ones of convenience, rather than ones of significant meaning.

## **What is it going to take?**

The Task Force believes that in order to develop and to support the strong provincial positions for ASBA, two things are needed.

First there needs to be strong Member engagement and understanding of the issues. Every strong organization gets its strength from its members. Without member support and meaningful engagement, organizations drift and become at best reactionary, or in some cases, simply a group that is comfortable not dealing with challenges but instead more of a social network.

The Task Force believes that meaningful member engagement comes from the opportunity for each member to raise and discuss issues important to it and in this case, issues that may be ones that are common to other members and of a provincial character.

Given this, there also needs to be a clear structure and decision making process that can be used to identify these potential provincial issues and then advocating or dealing with them. The structure needs to be such that in addition to anticipating issues on the horizon, it can move quickly for members to make decisions to address new ones that suddenly arise. It has to be open in a way that allows all of our member stakeholders to raise issues of concern when they arise, into the funnel for consideration.

## **Additional Benefits**

We believe that there are a number of benefits to creating the direct opportunity for members to identify and discuss potential provincial issues. Discussion elevates knowledge and understanding at all levels and in different "camps". It also provides the opportunity for each trustee, including newly elected ones, to expand their thinking on issues beyond the local horizon to those provincial in character. We also believe that even if the issue raised and discussed doesn't result in a new or a change in provincial policy, everyone is in a much better position to speak to it locally, and our organization's representatives (Executive and Board of Directors) will also be able to work from this understanding provincially.

We believe a critical component of our organization's strength needs to come from the advocacy of individual members at the local level with our students' families, constituents and local government representatives. It is these publics that help build understanding and support for a provincial position and who ultimately help prioritize issues for the provincial government. The political strength of ASBA is built on the foundation laid locally by members. The necessary provincial political strength needed to be the organization recognized by the provincial government as the voice of school boards across this province must come from the combined efforts of individual member boards laying this foundation and ASBA itself acting on this strong member support.

## New Entity

The Task Force recommends the creation of what we are calling a Council of Board Chairs. This Council would be made up of the Chairs of each of ASBA's member School Boards. This, to some extent, follows on from the recommendation made by the Reimagining Board Governance Task Force indicating that there should be an elevation in the responsibility of Board Chairs.

The key recommendation that we are utilizing in our report are:

“Designate and prepare the school board chair to be the sole spokesperson for the school jurisdiction...” (page 18 Theme 4: 10)

In today's digital communication world, the ability for the Board Chair to connect with their home Board is much easier as well. We believe in most instances, where it is determined by the member Board that all trustees need to be involved in the run up to the decision to be made, that electronic consultation could be done in "real time" if necessary.

## Definitions and Descriptions

**Guiding Principles** - are intended to be very brief statements of founding principles supporting a stance associated with the provincial issue raised.

- are not expected to number more than 5
- will not require more than 30 words to describe each principle
- are not intended to be fully described positions for this fleshing out of the public ASBA position is to be done by the President and Vice President, Board of Directors and Executive Director working from these principles.

**Eligible Proponents** - are the 4 different interested parties who are the only ones that have the authority to bring forward potential Provincial Issues and related Guiding Principles to the Council of Chairs for its consideration.

The 4 are:

- Individual Members of ASBA
- An ASBA Zone
- ASBA's Board of Directors
- ASBA's President

## The Council of Chair's Responsibility

The Council will be charged with the responsibility to receive and make decisions on potential provincial issues identified by each of these Eligible Proponents, or combinations of them:

**Member Boards** (and their trustees through those Boards),  
**Individual Zones**,

**The Board of Directors of ASBA,  
The President of ASBA.**

Once received the Council, either electronically, or on a regularly scheduled, or if necessary on an urgent basis, will examine the identified issues and decide by the established double majority voting method, first whether the issue is a Provincial issue which ASBA should develop a provincial position on, and if it is, then to decide on the broad strokes or principles of that Provincial position. If it is not deemed to be a Provincial issue at that time, then there will be no new action taken on that issue by ASBA as a result of the question coming forward. Such a decision could be because it is judged to be better handled at the local or regional level by Zones or groups of boards or individual school boards.

In the event that the Provincial position is developed, it will be provided to the ASBA Board of Directors and to the President for use in the Provincial political arena, and to disseminate it out to all Zones and member boards. It will also be used by the Executive Director in dealings with government counterparts.

At the individual member level, it is understood that the mandate to decide on and to develop provincial positions for its organization, ASBA, rests with its Council of Chairs and once decided the decision is on behalf of and binding on all members unless the position is otherwise described (i.e. there could be a provincial decision that applies to only a specific subset of the province or membership).

Of course there is on-going opportunity for review and adjustment to the provincial position by the Issue being brought forward to the Council to consider again, in the same manner as any other or new Issue.

Unless and until the provincial position is changed by the Council of Chairs however, members shall accept the Council's decision on that position and shall not publicly advocate against it. In fact, the greatest strength for ASBA would result from careful advocacy of the position by member Boards with their own constituents and stakeholders.

The Task Force believes that well considered decisions, following investigations and fulsome debate through the Council of Chairs process (with appropriate support by ASBA's team), will form strong and supportable positions that will need to be communicated both at the grass roots constituent levels (local communities, local stakeholders and MLAs) by members, and at the Provincial levels by the President on the political side and the Executive Director on the bureaucratic side. This multilevel approach will solidify the necessary political support to make ASBA's voice the strongest possible and one that should not be ignored or disregarded without anticipating significant political risk.

It is important to note, that this structure and process reinforces the ability of each member Board (through their Chair) to be part of each decision made on its behalf, provincially. In the event that the Council considers that members would benefit from a strong provincial position on an Issue, then it will be judging that this is in fact will be better for the majority of individual members to approach it together provincially, than to leave individual members or small groups of members, exposed to it on their own. Of course there is also the opportunity to take a provincial position on an issue that will be positive for some members while not being of consequence to others.

The Task Force recommends that regularly scheduled, in person meetings of the Council of Chairs occur on the day following the Spring AGM and Fall AGM.

In addition to these in-person meetings, the President may also call one in the event that they are convinced that this needs to occur in order to deal with what is seen to be an important provincial issue that cannot be dealt with effectively another way.

(The details of the Issue presentation discipline and the time frames established around the consideration and voting process, for each of the potential levels of priority are not presented as part of Part I of the report but have been written and will be available as Part II when appropriate.)

## **The Role and Opportunity for Individual Member Boards**

Each member board will have the opportunity to put forward issues to be considered by the Council of Chairs. In this case, the sponsoring member will be expected to develop the statement of the issue for consideration whether it is supported as a provincial issue, and also the outline of the supporting principles for it.

Of course, it would be expected that individual trustees would be part of this process locally but it also follows that each trustee, and each member board, would actively consider and discuss all issues put forward to the Council of Chairs. The recommended structure and process creates the opportunity for engagement and to be part of the decision making process on these provincial issues. We expect that as the system gets working, there will be increased engagement and input at all levels, starting with individual member boards.

## **The Role and Opportunities for the Zones**

The Task Force believes that it is likely that the Zones will be the most active forum for individual members to discuss and develop the provincial issue question and the principles describing the position for it. While each member will have the opportunity to carry the issue forward, the additional opportunity to compare notes and to test their own ideas on fellow zone members will be valuable in the providing additional support to the successful development of strong provincial positions for ASBA. Obviously if a number of zone members support the issue, the zone itself can choose to be the proponent for the issue. Some discussion at the individual zone level could also come from the review of other submissions to the Council of Chairs, from other boards or zones, or indeed from the ASBA Board of Directors or President. Again, the traditional forum format where representatives have been physically present may also be supplemented by less expensive and flexible opportunities through video conference, conference calls, or indeed digital forums.

## **The Role and Opportunities for the Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors will have a new mechanism and tool to find out what the membership's position on issues that the Board anticipates will become provincial in the future, in part out of their interface with all of the representatives of the members, and also its exposure more directly to the provincial issues related to the provincial government's activities or developing political priorities.

The Board of Directors also has the benefit of hearing from zone directors about issues that may be developing at individual zones prior to being brought forward to the Council of Chairs. In the event that an issue is developing in more than one zone and the Board wishes to accelerate the decision making process, the Board can decide to bring that issue to the Council of Chairs itself.

Of course all of the current responsibilities of the Board of Directors will continue but should there be a topic or an issue that is provincial in character and the Board wishes to seek the support for a particular direction, the Board can choose to bring this to the Council of Chairs under the standard process as well.

## **The Role and Opportunities for the President (and Vice President)**

There was a consistent message from many of the Past Presidents that in order to strengthen ASBA's provincial voice, there needed to be an improvement in the ability to learn and confirm the position of the membership on quickly developing provincial issues and having the decision made, be able to rely on the mandate given to the President to move forward to speak and to negotiate provincially on behalf of the membership.

In addition to the specific roles (described above) of being the contact for issues being brought forward to the Council of Chairs and facilitating the decision making process, the President is also able to bring issues forward to the Council, including on an urgent basis. As the directly elected leader for the membership, this relationship and responsibility is important for the organization and its ability to be on top of issues ASBA faces.

The Vice President, who also is directly elected by the provincial membership, has a supporting role to the President and in the case where the President is a proponent for an issue, becomes the facilitator and manager of the decision making process of the Council of Chairs.

Both the President and the Vice President have important roles in the advocacy of the issues and principles approved by the Council of Chairs. This advocacy will be both in the provincial political arena, including leading the negotiation where required, and also in assisting in the advocacy on these issues at all levels and with all stakeholders within ASBA's membership (Board of Directors, Zones and individual members) and other organizations with a common interest or opportunity to advance the position. (School Councils, PSBAA, others for example including potentially the AUMA, AAMDC)

## **The Role of the Executive Director**

In addition to the existing and on-going multiple responsibilities of the Executive Director in developing and supervising the support for the organization with the President, Vice President and the Board of Directors, the Executive Director and his team also will assist the President in the development of the facilitation process for the decision making by the Council of Chairs. Once the decisions are made and issues and principles are approved by the Council of Chairs, the Executive Director (and his/her team) will help develop the fleshing out of the messaging around the approved issues according to the approved principles. This work will ultimately be used by all speaking on each issue publicly, and will provide the foundation for advocacy on them at all levels.

There is also the specific and important role of the Executive Director in advocating to and working with the senior members of the government or other stakeholders teams (Deputy and Associate Ministers for example as well as with CASS, ASBOA and others related to or impacted by) the Issues approved by the Council of Chairs.

## **Conclusion**

The Task Force believes that in order for the Alberta School Board's Association to be able to deal effectively with provincial issues, it must have strong engagement of its members on provincial issues and it must know what its members believe and are prepared to decide to support and to advocate for. The Task Force also believes that the addition of the Council of Chairs structure, and its associated decision making process meets this requirement. It will also provide the ability of the Board of Directors and the President to efficiently get the clear mandate needed to advocate on member's behalf. There are important roles for everyone in the pursuit of what is best for our students and our stakeholders.

Our Task Force also knows that there is a variety of opinions among the members and our representatives, about the need to strengthen ASBA's provincial voice. It is important to understand that what we are proposing is an additional option to what already exists. An option that only will be used, if members or groups of members choose to use it.. Our proposal does not replace or eliminate anything that currently exists. It is a new option with its own advantages.

During our presentations to the Zones, and to the Board of Directors, we found that there are some that feel that this option is not necessary, and that ASBA is capable of doing everything that it needs to. We also found at Zones, that many individual members felt that this additional option would be an enhancement and would be useful to bring potential provincial issues forward on a more timely and efficient basis, working from the grassroots membership.

Our task force also heard very clearly from the Past Presidents we spoke with, that they felt that some improvements were needed. They supported the ideas to enhance member engagement, and strongly supported the need to strengthen ASBA's provincial voice. Many of the Presidents were very passionate about the need for members to arm their spokespeople with a clear mandate and the need for members' decisions and commitment to stick to them. As a Task Force, we listened very carefully to these leaders, for it was their personal experience during times of challenge that provided guidance to us both in terms of the important need for improvement, and the principles that must be met in order to support positive change.

The evolving provincial political landscape and associated political opportunism must be dealt with from a position of greater strength in our organization. The Alberta School Board's Association, through its members and local trustees, is the elected voice of the province's students and their families. Our association must be able to speak more strongly and if necessary push for more appropriate priorities for our students than what the Alberta Government may choose when pursuing their own political priorities and opportunities.

We believe that the addition of the Council of Chairs structure, and the associated disciplined process of testing and ultimately establishing principles of support to deal with provincial issues is the best strategy for our organization going forward. It takes nothing away from ASBA's existing structure. It provides the option of a new, efficient process to engage members at the grassroots level. It provides a new optional process to find out their decisions on important provincial issues and as a result will provide the clear mandate for our spokespeople to work from on behalf of all of us. Without this option, we believe that our organization will continue to struggle to reach its true potential.

# Appendix A

