

## **POSITION PAPER ON THE ALTERNATE SCHOOL CONCEPT IN ALBERTA**

LACOMBE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL BOARD – SPRING 2012

Christian schools in Canada that originated from a Reformed tradition have brought with them a unique school governance model that established significant parental and community authority over the operation of their schools. This “Society Governance Model” has its roots in the concept of “sphere sovereignty” developed by Dr. Abraham Kuyper in the late 1800's in response to the controversy over state control of Christian schools in the Netherlands. The pioneer leaders of Christian school societies in Canada within a Reformed perspective were convinced that local Christian schools should be governed by their supporting Christian community. Christian school societies were established and school board members elected in order to direct the provisions of Christian education to the children of all interested Christian families in their faith community. The Christian school board was charged with the task of operating the school in keeping with this communal conviction. These school societies were determined that their Christian school would not be controlled by the government, the church, or by a few powerful individuals. To maintain direct control over their school, the community exercised its responsibility of communal participation by electing a board. This practice of an informed community delegating its governance authority to its elected board while maintaining a strong sense of communal accountability for the Christian vision of the school continues to be a key characteristic of these schools. Communal authority over the school and its daily practices is granted to the school board which exercises governance and management responsibility through a committee structure that provides the framework and direction for the principal and the teaching staff. Considering the above information and the changing educational landscape in the province of Alberta, the Board of Lacombe Christian School has drafted this position paper on the alternate school concept in Alberta. It is important to note that LCS has not been approached by Wolf Creek School District nor has LCS approached the Wolf Creek School District with regard to alternate school status. In the past thirteen years a number of Christian schools have entered into an arrangement with a public-school board to operate the Christian school as an “alternate” public school under the direction of the superintendent of the public schools. Each contract was negotiated independently and is different from the other contracts. In this position paper, we wish to inform the Lacombe Christian School Society of some of the challenges associated with being a Christian public school as well as deal with the concept of Alternative Programs as is possible under today's laws.

1. When an independent school enters into negotiations with a public-school board it must determine what its non-negotiable core values are. These core values must include the following:
  - A. a Christian value based focus – an educational philosophy based on a Christian perspective
  - B. a Christian value based governance mode – control of the school must stay with the parents via the board
  - C. reasonable curricular control - the right to integrate Christian values, and the right to expand or exceed basic curricular requirements

- D. the right to select staff, administrators, and teachers on the basis of agreement with the school's Christian values
- E. Control over admissions based on the school's Christian values
- F. the right to maintain a code of conduct for the board, staff, parents and teachers
- G. the right to charge fees to offset the cost of programs not covered by the government as well as to pay for the capital projects
- H. the right to maintain ownership of the buildings, property and equipment (Items numbered b,d,e, and f are contrary to the Education Act and so could not be part of asset of non-negotiables. An alternative school must follow the Education Act.)

2. When a Christian school becomes an alternative school, a school council is established in accordance with the Education Act. The school council acts in an advisory capacity to the principal of the school. The majority of the school council must be parents of students in the school. This school council operates beside the Christian school board and has power to make and implement policies in the school that the council considers necessary to carry out its functions. In alternative Christian schools, there exists a school board that is in charge of facilities and the values and mission statements of the school, a school council that operates under the Education Act, and a principal who may or may not take advice from either of those two bodies but is responsible to the superintendent of the public-school board.

3. The alternate Christian school principal is pulled between the Christian school board and the superintendent of the public-school board, but the superintendent has the most power in regard to the day to day operations of the school.

4. In alternative Christian schools the parents do not have to be Christians, nor do they have to be members of the Christian school society that operates the buildings and advises the principal. By law the superintendent of the public-school board has control over who is admitted to the school. If a non-Christian is willing to sign a statement of agreement with the values of the school, then the school must accept that student regardless of the faith of the student or the parents.

5. In 1905 Alberta had two school systems, the Protestant and the Catholic school systems. The Catholic schools have maintained their faith basis over the years, but every Protestant school has turned into a secular public school. The historical evidence indicates that it will be very difficult to maintain the "Christian" aspect of education in light of the fact that every public school that has started as a Christian school has become a secular public school. The Catholic schools have survived because they have had a separate school system and therefore have been able to maintain their core values from the top down.

6. Financial considerations seem to be part of the decision-making process. Although tuition in an alternate Christian school is sometimes lower than in an independent Christian school, there still is a tuition cost. Some agreements have a ceiling on the amount of tuition that can be charged.

7. Teachers and principals must become members of the Alberta Teachers' Association and will have to adhere to the decisions of the ATA. Sometimes these decisions have caused conflict between parents and teachers. Currently we encourage a strong relationship between parents and teachers with the best interest of the child as the primary focus.

In keeping with the Reformed traditions of Christian education, the Board of Lacombe Christian School wants to emphasize the importance of maintaining parental governance of Christian schools. We strive to nurture and educate our children to be Spirit-filled disciples of Christ and responsible, discerning citizens in society. We believe that a parent-governed school such as LCS is the best way to accomplish this goal. We are thankful for the commitment of parents in the LCS community over the years, and we challenge parents today to remain faithful to this commitment.