

BOARD NEWS



Issue 03 December 2010

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Board-Hosted Staff Appreciation Evening (L-R, Dave McElhanney, Gerry Schuster, Jay Pritchard, Shelley Schroh, Cindy Higa, Sandra Berner, Darrin Whitbread)

Message from the FFCA Board Chair



Hardly time to put my shorts away, and Christmas is upon us!

Your Board has continued its torrid pace through the fall, participating in school council meetings at each campus, administration team meetings, an admin retreat and a Board retreat, staff appreciation night, and many special events in the campuses. This is in addition to their regular responsibilities of attending Board Public and Committee meetings. Each Director has also taken an active role in the Board's Government Relations Initiative, meeting with numerous MLA's, Cabinet Ministers and the Premier.

In conjunction with The Alberta Association of Public Charter Schools, this Board has continued to push this government and Alberta Education to establish an opportunity for earned permanence; an opportunity to plan beyond the allowed charter life of five years. Our work has resulted in the growing support of many MLA's, the decision makers, to join us in our push for continued choice in Alberta's public education landscape through charter schools. We are proud that our Premier recognizes the successes of charter schools, and openly supports us.

We are closer than ever, but not yet there. The Minister of Education will present amendments to the School Act in the Spring 2011 sitting of the legislature. While the final wording of the amendments has not been shared with us, we are led to believe they will support the ongoing existence of charter schools in Alberta. As always, the devil is in the details! And the details that we are patiently awaiting will come as the Alberta Education Regulations that will define the future of charter schools.

Through this struggle, many of you as parents and staff have asked me, "How can we support the Board?" in this push for permanence. And I can now say to you, "GET READY!" Get ready to read and understand the amendments when they are

Please see Message from the Board Chair continued on Page 2

In the Media

As part of our Media Relations strategy, the Board monitors several media sources to watch for relevant articles or trends as they develop. In each newsletter, we would like to share an interesting article about Charter schools, education in Alberta, or maybe even about FFCA.

This month, we focus on the exciting media coverage on Exergaming and Kids at FFCA. One news video may be found here:

<http://www.globaltvcalgary.com/video/index.html>

Look up December 7th, and our news story is at about the 22-minute mark on the "time remaining" counter.

Please let us know if you find something of interest which we should highlight in our newsletter.

Please email it to:

board@ffca-calgary.com

presented. Get ready to participate in conversations around the playgrounds and school council tables. Get ready to ask questions of your MLA's, the Minister of Education, and our Premier.

And when we achieve our goals, get ready to celebrate the opportunity for your kids and mine to continue being educated by committed and dedicated, teachers, support staff, and administrators in a system that, together with parents, delivers exceptional life-long learnings.

On behalf of the board, may I wish you and your families the very best of the Christmas season and of the New Year.

Regards,

Bill McGregor
Board Chair



Meeting with the Premier!

In our continuing pursuit of timely and appropriate facilities for our school, this past September the Board directed our Chair to write letters to both the Minister of Education and the Premier, seeking meetings to discuss our issues. The Premier's Office responded almost immediately, and so Bill, Gerry and Jay met with the Honourable Ed Stelmach the afternoon of October 12th.

It was an informative and friendly meeting. The Premier clearly expressed his support and admiration for our school and the strong results that we achieve. He reaffirmed his belief that the public education system works best when there is choice available to parents and students. Premier Stelmach's desire is to see charter schools achieve earned permanence while continuing to thrive and succeed.

We explained our immediate needs, the steps we've taken thus far, and some of the long-term hurdles that we are facing. The Premier expressed sympathy with our concerns and asked us to keep him informed of our progress moving forward. It is good to know we have his support and the support of many other MLA's as the School Act is opened in the legislature this Spring 2011 session.

Your Board will continue to work hard at government relations to ensure that we are well positioned when that occurs.

Beyond the Bio

The Board of Directors has their bios posted on our website, but this is your chance to find out a little more about us.....

Some families have not had the opportunity to learn what our Board is doing or even had the chance to meet the Board members. In each newsletter, we will feature an interview with one of your Directors.

This is Darren Martin's first year on the Board and he has been busy learning about all the work of the Board. Darren has one daughter in grade four, but did you know.....

Q – HOW WOULD YOUR FRIENDS/FAMILY DESCRIBE YOU?

DM – I would be described as a sports enthusiast, good sense of humour, honest, hardworking and family oriented.

Q – WHEN YOUR FRIENDS/FAMILY FIND OUT THAT YOU ARE A DIRECTOR FOR FFCA, WHAT DO THEY SAY OR ASK?

DM – They usually ask what is different about FFCA and what a charter school really is. They also usually ask if I enjoy the work (which I do), as it is so different from my regular 9 to 5 job.



Darren Martin

Q – WHAT IS THE BEST/WORST THING TO HAPPEN SINCE YOU STARTED WORKING ON THE BOARD?

DM – I honestly haven't had a worst thing yet, so I will say a couple of best things. First, the opportunity to be involved in such a meaningful way in my child's education has been a great experience. Secondly, the ability to work with a great group of board members and to be able to draw from their diverse knowledge has been awesome.

Q – WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST CHALLENGING ABOUT YOUR WORK ON THE BOARD?

DM – The most challenging has been stepping outside my comfort zone. I have not previously done anything of this nature, so working on committees and participating in meetings with MLA's to further our government relations is not something that comes naturally to me.

Q – WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE NOT VOLUNTEERING WITH THE BOARD?

DM – Outside of my board duties, I really enjoy reading, watching movies, and doing family activities with my wife and nine-year-old daughter.



Campus Crawl (Northwest Elementary campus) (L-R, Denise Budgen, Bill McGregor, Monte Wilson, Jay Pritchard, Gerry Schuster, Shelley Schroh, Cindy Higa, Darren Martin)

Board Update

Teacher's Appreciation (Oct 14th)

Our FFCA teachers and staff work incredibly hard for our students, and the Board takes great delight in showing them how much their dedication and passion for teaching is appreciated. We hosted an event at McMahon Stadium's Red & White Club, and a good time was had by all. Our special guest speaker was Dave Dickenson, of the Calgary Stampeders, who spoke to us on the theme of "Teamwork". The Board (& a couple of unsuspecting staff) did some cheerleading, with varying degrees of successful pom-pom usage. At the end, each campus took away a puzzle to work on together (as a team) the next day – with the first completed puzzle winning a Board-hosted luncheon. Congratulations to the staff at SWE, who finished a whopping one minute ahead of the staff at NEE.

Board Retreat (Nov 19th -21st)

This year we gathered in Canmore for the Board's yearly Retreat weekend with the goal to better understand "What does FFCA mean to me?", and what it means to be "One School on Seven Campuses". We had the amazing opportunity to hear from an FFCA Parent, an Alumna, a new Teacher, and a new Board Director. We also had our extraordinary team of Administrators, the Coordinator of School Development, and the Coordinator of Instruction presenting on the defining characteristics that make FFCA unique. The Retreat was very productive and allowed us to share ideas through many in-depth discussions.

Campus Crawl (Nov 29th)

We truly believe that to make informed decisions as a Board, we need to see our whole FFCA community and each campus's unique characteristics, so for several years now we have made a habit of setting aside a day to travel to each of our campuses and observe their daily life. This year we have split the trip into two days in order to be able to spend more time in each campus. On this first Campus Crawl, we visited Northwest Elementary, North Middle, and Northeast Elementary.

Questions Parents Ask

In each newsletter, we will profile a question that our parents commonly ask us. Our hope is to provide some clear answers.

"How many charter schools are operating in Canada?"

Alberta is still the only province in Canada that currently allows charter schools. There are, at this time, thirteen separate charter schools operating in the province with a total enrollment of 7719 students, of whom 6246 are in the city of Calgary. FFCA is the largest of all the charter schools in the province with just under 3000 students across seven city campuses.

Did you know...how FFCA started?

In 1994, under the leadership of then Education Minister Halvar Jonson, visionary legislation was enacted in Alberta to allow for Public Charter Schools. A group of like-minded parents in Calgary formed the basic concepts that led to the eventual formation of Foundations for the Future, envisioning it as a more traditional – and more effective - school experience than was being provided in the main stream public schools at the time.

The original application to both the Calgary Board of Education and Alberta Education was turned down by both in 1996. The Charter was finally approved directly by Alberta Education under (then) Education Minister Gary Mar for a five-year period from March 20, 1997 to June 30, 2002.

In that first year (1998-1999), we had just 224 students from kindergarten to Grade 9, and a staff of just 12 under the supervision of Principal Henry Zondervan.

From these humble beginnings, we have grown to be a city-wide school of almost 3000 students, with over 200 staff in 7 campuses. This small school, born of protest, has developed into a unique treasure, providing an excellent academic setting, a well-rounded educational experience with emphasis on the Arts, Sports and Leadership, within a community that values, models and teaches good character. It seems the vision of our founders was worth pursuing vigorously.



Campus Crawl continued from page 3

At the Northwest Elementary, we had the great chance to sit in on a character play put on by the students, directed by one of their Student Teachers – what a great way to start the day! We also got to see their Holiday Concert rehearsal and Art class. If you are wondering why you are seeing bathrobes in the campus crawl picture on page 3, NWE was celebrating the birthday of their Principal Educator, Denise Budgen by making it “PJ day” at the school, and we were just playing along. We really don’t make a habit of showing up at our schools in a bathrobe...

At North Middle, we had a great discussion with the Administrators, then split up into groups and roamed around – it was very interesting to just pop into classrooms and see things in progress. For the newer board members in particular, this type of informal view of our school in action is invaluable.

At Northeast Elementary, we were thrilled to be met at the door by student ambassadors who knew us each by name and led us to classrooms to observe. Afterwards, we also had the privilege of attending a Character Assembly.

We had a great time touring each of these campuses, and are very much looking forward to completing the loop in February.

Upcoming Events

Public Board Meetings

Do you have questions for the Board? Would you like to know what decisions are being made on your behalf? All meetings are held on Wednesday evenings beginning at 6:00 p.m. in the Central Office Boardroom at #240, 688 Heritage Dr. SE, Calgary.

Our next three meetings are scheduled for:

December 15, 2010

January 12, 2011

February 16, 2011

Campus Crawl

February 7, 2011 - The FFCA Board will be visiting all south campuses.

School Council Appreciation Dinner

February 3, 2011 - Location to be announced

AGM

It was great to see so many families (over 30) attending our Annual General Meeting held on December 1st. We approved the financials of the previous year, and the proposed amendments to our bylaws were passed.

Attending the AGM is an excellent way to participate in the democratic process at FFCA, keep well-informed, and the time you spend also counts as volunteer hours! Consider joining us next year for this interesting evening!

Foundations for the Future Charter Academy



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