



DR. CALVIN FRASER Canadian Teachers' Federation

Dr. Calvin Fraser stated that the promise of public education always looks ahead and speaks to the values of those projecting into the future. He addressed the question of whether the promise is being fulfilled for all groups in society, such as boys and girls, First Nations, children with special needs, immigrants and the poor.

He emphasized that the promise rests to a high degree with teachers and their organizations, and that all countries with strong education systems have strong unionized teacher organizations.

Dr. Fraser concluded by saying that the promise of education, whether for societies or individuals, is at the core of expectations for a positive future. Those expectations are achievable only when we work together: first to find common goals – because they exist – and secondly to maintain balance.

PANEL: WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES? Keray Henke, Carole Olsen and Dianne Woloschuk

Keray Henke's panel presentation focused on the funding of K-12 education in Alberta, including the funding framework (above the Canadian average spending per pupil) within the context of ministries competing for resources. According to Mr. Henke, if graduation is the ultimate goal of our investment in education, then the children who are not graduating in a typical time period are not producing the return on investment that we want and need. Mr. Henke also discussed how technology has impacted students and the challenge of "re-wiring" our educational approach to re-engage the iGeneration students of today. He identified a vision of inspiring students to succeed as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit within an inclusive education system.

Carole Olsen's presentation reported on the promise of public education and how it has changed over the last decade. She also focused on what the fiscal realities are and how we lead in uncertain times. She discussed various 21st century skills and competencies including the need to shift from what students know to how students learn and apply what they know.

She challenged the assembly to "think the unthinkable", imagining alternatives to enhance student outcomes.

Diane Woloschuck provided a teacher perspective on public education funding. She stated that public education is a human endeavour, and not simply a technical or economic one, and an investment in the future and our democratic society. Contradictions experienced by teachers in their work include the fact that demands and expectations are increasing as schools experience proportionally fewer resources. Public education funding should be guided by principles of adequacy, equity and fairness, stability and predictability, and transparency and accountability. She concluded by saying that as a teacher, on the first day of school, "you walk into your classroom, and you see all those pairs of eyes looking at you – brown eyes, blue eyes, black eyes, green eyes, friendly eyes, happy and eager eyes, mischievous eyes, sad and lonely eyes, sometimes angry eyes, all of them seeking a connection, and we look back with smiling eyes that say, Welcome!"

DISCUSSION FORUMS

Responsibilities of Different Sectors of Society Regarding Advocacy/Support

Breakout groups recommended a number of actions regarding each stakeholder's roles and responsibilities in fulfilling the promise of public education.

Government should invite authentic collaboration of all stakeholders to allow for good policy development; provide adequate funding based upon the mandated purpose of publically funded education and be prepared to fight for it; be a more visible advocate for public education and the professionals within it; use creative funding models to allow for more school-based decision making regarding the allocation of resources; move away from a census model of standardized testing and require the appropriate use of results

solely for educational purposes; and respect their obligations regarding minority rights (i.e. Aboriginal, minority language).

School Boards should collaborate with teachers and parents to support the local needs of education; make the effort to understand the nature of their schools at the grass roots level including cultural and linguistic needs; be representative of communities; advocate to maintain a strong system of community-based schools; and strongly advocate the need for resources to match mandated initiatives.

Teachers should develop and articulate a vision for education to share with other stakeholders; use sound research to develop and defend their beliefs towards fulfilling the

promise; defend relentlessly inclusive public education notwithstanding electoral results; advocate in a principled way for the legislated responsibilities of those in the profession; advocate for raising awareness of the difference between teachers tailoring instruction to individual student needs and the potential isolation of "any time, any place, any pace" learning.

To make collaboration meaningful, stakeholders must believe that it is authentic consultation and that all voices will be heard. Whatever model of collaboration is used, the conversation must turn to the "how" of fulfilling the promise, and to the most effective strategies of communicating how the promise will be fulfilled.





KARIHWAKERON TIM THOMPSON

Assembly of First Nations

In his keynote presentation entitled “Fulfilling the Promise of First Nations Education”, Karihwakeron Tim Thompson outlined these key messages:

- First Nation’s (FN’s) education is drastically under-funded.
- The role of INAC in FN’s education is unclear – policy and guidelines are ad hoc, outdated, and unaccountable to FN’s.
- There is a double standard in the way FN’s are treated in relation to what is provided in the provinces (funding; data demands; accountability frameworks).
- FN’s are focused on quality education; while INAC focuses on administering under-funding.
- Must strengthen FN’s infrastructure to address FN’s education issues – FN’s have waited 38 years for full implementation of Indian Control of Indian Education.

Stating that it is the position of the Assembly of First Nations that education is a treaty and inherent right of First Nations. Thompson outlined the components of a Call to Action by the AFN National Chief.



DR. GORDON PORTER

Special Education

In his presentation, “Water to wine: How special education funding can be used for school improvement”, Gordon Porter notes that reductions to special education funding are linked to declining school enrolment, however special education enrolment is actually increasing. We need to invest in supports for teachers and students, to make inclusion the default. He cites Article 24 – the right of persons with disabilities to have access to inclusive schooling – of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which Canada has ratified. Funding should be spent on increasing school and teacher capacity, better pre-service and in-service training, and more support for classroom teachers. Porter concluded that investing in inclusion – in teachers and students – has the potential to make our schools better places for all.



Watch the President Forum on UStream at www.ustream.tv/channel/2010-president-s-forum

DR. GORDON THOMAS

Forum Summary

Gordon Thomas opened by stating that he saw his daunting task as one of finding the common thread over the two days.

He noted the increase in blood pressure when Peter Cowley opened the session. To understand the Fraser Institute simply examine their mission statement: “seeking private sector solutions to public sector problems”. Blood pressure lowered palpably with the presentation by Bruce Campbell. He reviewed the change in the Canadian economy as it shifted from the Keynesian model to the Friedman neo-liberal model. He described Mr. Campbell’s critique as being “bang on”.

Bob Kim followed by trying to explain the education initiatives of President Obama, who came into power with the support of US teacher organizations. While the dramatic increase in funding has been well received, some of the policies of Education Secretary Arne Duncan have been embarrassing (i.e. RTTT). Bob Harris outlined the potential

risks ahead related to sovereign debt and a possible double dip recession. Susan Perry closed the day with an excellent literature review of merit pay.

Dr. Calvin Fraser opened day two by posing the question, what is the promise of public education? Deputy Minister Keray Henke reviewed educational funding in Alberta trumpeting a 30% increase since 2005. Dr. Thomas reminded the audience that this funding increase followed a decade of static increases in funding. Carole Olsen spoke to transformation and transitioning as we move to engage the iGeneration. Diane Woloschuk spoke passionately from the teachers’ perspective pointing out the contradictions of teachers’ trying to respond to increased expectations with a narrowing curriculum and a shortage of resources. In the afternoon, Tim Thompson spoke about the journey we need to take to fulfill the promise of education for AFN students. Dr. Gordon Porter outlined

the resources needed to assist teachers in fulfilling the promise for students with special educational needs.

Thomas noted that going forward the future will be a period of transformation and challenge as world financial directions almost ensure a fight for diminishing public resources. He concluded, passionately, that if we as teachers don’t fight for the children we serve – who will?

