

**SPEAKING NOTES
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**COLLEGE OF ALBERTA SCHOOL
SUPERINTENDENTS AND ALBERTA EDUCATION
ANNUAL JOINT CONFERENCE 2010**

RESILIENCY THROUGH HOPE

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8:40 TO 9:00 A.M.

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Education

- Good morning.
- Welcome and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.
- In times of uncertainty, I have often had to rely on hopes, dreams and aspirations to guide me through uncharted territories.
- And it is that same hope that will provide us with the drive and commitment necessary to respond to the transformative changes needed in our education system.
- Talking about transforming our education system may seem a bit odd when nationally and internationally, Alberta has a well-deserved reputation for the high quality of our educational system.
- The abilities of our teachers, superintendants and administrators are one of the reasons for that reputation.

- So, why are we asking, “What will we, the people of Alberta, require of education 20 years from now?”
 - When we look to the future, it is important to be forward looking; it’s not
 - “How good is our system?” but rather,
 - “Is today’s system good enough to prepare students for the future?”

- The educational imperatives of the future will be different from today. And now is when we need to address this. There will not be a better time.

- Every school year that we let pass without addressing this issue is another year for which we have lost or shortened the exponential learning opportunities of 596,000 students in Alberta.

- If you think I am overstating the need for transformative change in education, let me pose a few questions to you.

- Twenty years ago, who was worried about our students competing with graduates from Brazil, Russia, India and China?
- Who thought that students would come to class knowing as much, if not more, about the nature of the world than some of their teachers?
- Who would have thought high school students would have ready access to information their teachers had to go to university to acquire?
- Who would have imagined we would see 3D digital projectors, Smartboards and access to broadband that would enable students to learn in entirely different ways?
- Twenty years ago, who had ever heard of the term “digital literacy?”

- And who would have thought that virtual schools would be on everyone's agenda?
- Alberta is facing immediate economic, environmental and social opportunities.
- But, the need to transform K-12 education for the long-term is not always top of mind for many people.
- And I believe it should be.
- We can not overestimate the long-term value of a well educated population.
- Education is critical to the formation of the person, family, community and province. It affects personal and societal prosperity, and it is the base of positive economic, social and democratic outcomes.
- Our world has moved in a new direction, and education cannot be out of step.

- If we do not drive change in education, we will find ourselves scrambling to respond to change.
- So without transformation, our collective future is at risk.
- In fact there is ample evidence that we are already at risk. While we continue to perform well relative to the rest of the world, our performance improvements have slowed while the rest of the world continues to catch up, or in some cases surpass us.
- We have not met our goals for improvement of our high school completion rates, nor have we seen the scale of improvement for our First Nation's Metis and Inuit population that are necessary to give them equity of opportunity.
- Transformation of education simply cannot be put off any longer.

- K-12 is the very foundation upon which social, economic and educational outcomes are built. It is our one shared common experience from which all other life circumstances are launched.
- Students who complete upper secondary education are much more likely to report good health than those who do not (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009).
- Education contributes to the enrichment of scientific and cultural knowledge. It also gives citizens the tools they need to participate in social and economic life. The educational attainment of people in the labour force also influences the competitiveness and prosperity of economies (Council of Ministers of Education in Canada, 2009).

- There is a direct link between a well-educated population, a vibrant knowledge-based economy in the 21st Century, a socially progressive, sustainable society, and enhanced personal growth opportunities for all Canadians (Council of Ministers of Education in Canada, 2009).
- Cognitive skills generated in the school system lead to higher long-run growth of economies (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2009).
- Educational attainment is a quality of life determinant. The problems faced by those who do not complete upper secondary education increase and are long lasting. There is a strong positive relationship between education and the average earnings of individuals (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009).

- Learning lies at the very core of human potential. It fosters our ability to think, create and solve problems. It enables us to envision and embrace the kind of lives we want for ourselves and our children (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008).
- The economic loss imposed by poor educational performance might be even greater than the output shortfall in the current economic crisis. For example, if the United States had closed the gap in education systems such as Finland and Korea, GDP in 2008 could have been \$1.3 trillion to \$2.3 trillion higher (equivalent to 9 – 16% of GDP) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009).
- Research in the past 30 years has proven that the current model of schooling no longer adequately meets the needs of young people or of contemporary Canadian society (Canadian Education Association, 2009).

- Only 37% of student respondents were intellectually engaged in their language arts and mathematics classes. And levels of participation and engagement fall steadily from Grade 6 to 12.
- About one quarter of Canadian youth do not graduate from school. In Alberta, the 3yr High School completion rate is 70.7% (Accountability Pillar Results, Alberta Education, 2009). Only 52% of the Canadian population over 16 years reads at or above the level determined to be essential for living and working.
- Western Canada's labour force has a lower level of educational attainment than Canada overall (The Canada West Foundation, 2009).
- Although Canadian workers have more education than ever, numerous surveys of business leaders indicate that employers are dissatisfied with their employees' so-called "soft" skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving, communication skills and self-motivation.

- Employers also complain that necessary skills—including the ability to communicate effectively, manage information, use numbers, think and solve problems—are in short supply in the labour force. Just 47% of employers expressed satisfaction with the competencies of high-school graduates (*The Canadian Council on Learning, 2007*).
- Few would argue that our world and economies are changing at an unprecedented pace, and while there certainly are pockets of innovation, overall education isn't keeping up.
- Research clearly demonstrates that learning and training are more critical than ever. Shifting workforce demographics, rapid advancements in technology and increased global competition are transforming not only our society, but our understanding of the nature and purpose of learning.
- In an increasingly globalized world, advances in the production of new knowledge occur at an unprecedented rate (*Canadian Council on Learning, 2008*).

- The new generation of learners expects experiential, authentic learning experiences in knowledge-sharing, interconnected, engaging methods. They will challenge our current approaches more than any before it (*Alberta Education, 2008*)
- The key to success is no longer about being able to merely reproduce something you have learned, but about whether or not you can apply what you have learned to a specific set of novel and changing circumstances – the creation of new knowledge.
- Research from the last decade has revealed new information on the way we learn that is ignored to the detriment of our youth, and all learners everywhere.
- So, the next few years are not going to be a comfortable time for any of us – change is never easy – and transformational change is even more difficult to manage effectively.

- Our challenge will be to ensure that we are preparing students for a knowledge-based economy that is global and competitive and increasingly driven by technology and innovation.
- To date, we have responded to change - But now is the time to drive change.
- Now is the time to transform education – to equip our students to respond to the demands not only of today but of tomorrow and next year and the decades after that.
- And driving change will require a different set of skills, and a different set of behaviours than we have previously cultivated both in ourselves and in student.
- **Let me play a brief video for you that illustrates what I am talking about.**

http://www.ted.com/talks/tom_wujec_build_a_tower.html?utm_source=newsletter_weekly_2010-04-27

- So how does that video apply to the task of transformation that lies before us?
- I think that I am probably safe in saying that no one in this room has tried to build a spaghetti tower with a marshmallow on top.
- Just as doing so would be a completely new task for us, so too is transforming education.
- How do we emulate the success of the kindergarten class in its approach to problem solving?
- This is not an easy question to answer.
- We have no past experience in transforming education to draw on, no proven models we can employ, and no clear path for us to follow.

- For some of us this sounds like a system out of control, a system that cannot clearly identify where it wants to go – maybe even a risk of chaos bordering on anarchy.
- We have built an education system based on predictability and stability and have assiduously tried to avoid chaos at all costs.
- That is not surprising. Innovation and change are disruptive and threatening, stability is familiar and comforting.
- That is why much of what we have done in the past has centered on a compliance and attendance model taken from industry.
- But right now we live in a world which is anything but predictable.
- If we try to rely solely on what has worked in the past to navigate us toward the future, we will become lost in a sea of constant and unrelenting change.

- So what can we do?
- We can commit ourselves to collaborating and learning from one another.
- Collaboration is the key to dealing with the uncertainty about the future of education.
- Collectively we are a powerful force for driving and dealing with change.
- Our challenge is to find new ways of working together to achieve our goals.
- As leaders, we will need to build the capacity of those we lead not to survive change - but to thrive in change.
- So here is what I think we must do as leaders in education

- First we must work together to develop a compelling vision of the desired future for education.
- *Inspiring Education, Setting the Direction and Speak Out!* have given us some good material to work with.
- We must effectively communicate the need for change to those who will be required to facilitate that change.
- Then we must give them the freedom to innovate and experiment and make them comfortable with the fact that when you are moving into uncharted waters, a temporary setback may be a short stop along the way.
- Within our planning framework, we must put into place accurate indicators of the milestones we are trying to achieve in order to measure our progress.
- Those are just a few of the things that transforming education will require of us.

- We are going to have to be empowering and engaged leaders if we are to succeed at transforming education.
- I do not want you to think that I believe it is going to be easy.
- It isn't.
- Change is messy, unpredictable and difficult to manage.
- But if there is nothing else, there is one thing that will enable us to achieve our goals and you have made it the theme of this conference—**resiliency through hope.**
- Thank you.