

Faith-based School Choice in Alberta: The Advent of a Pluriform Public Model?

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Introduction

While several Canadian provinces are currently in a state of upheaval over the place of faith in the provincial school system, Alberta is pragmatically establishing a new model for relating faith to schooling. Both the nature of Alberta's over-all school system, as well as the various roles that religions and other philosophies can play in schools, have changed dramatically during the past four decades. In the past, scholars have classified Alberta's school system as *non-sectarian public schooling with minority denominational districts*. Today, the data suggest that we are seeing the advent of a *pragmatic pluriform public school system*.

This study:

This paper has two aims: First, to present the wide diversity of types of school authority and schools that currently function within Alberta's overall school system. The paper examines the wide range of types of faith-based schooling offered within each type of school authority and schools. Secondly, based on these empirical findings, to show that Alberta's school system should be given a new classification.

In this study, we examine the types of authorities that are legally permitted to run schools¹ in Alberta. This study uses the 2001-2002 school year data from Alberta Learning, unless otherwise noted.² The government officially presents its data using, in part, four *public authorities*: public, separate, charter and francophone authorities. It further recognises a variety of independent *schools*,

¹ The Alberta *School Act* (2000, s.1(1y)) defines *school* as "a structured learning environment through which an education program is offered to a student by: a board, an operator of a private school, an early childhood services program private operator, a parent giving a home education program, or the Minister."

² "Student Population by Grade, School and Authority, Alberta: 2001-2002 School Year," Information Services Branch, Alberta Learning, 2003.

home schooling, provincial schools, and Federal (aboriginal on reserve) schools.³ This study analyses this public data on schools under each authority in order to determine their faith-based components. We have expanded the traditional idea that regards ‘faith-based’ to be almost exclusively the presence or absence of a direct connection between a school, program or authority, and a particular church, denomination or sect.⁴ In this study, a “faith-based” school or school program is operationalized as schools or authorities that (1) publicly self-identify themselves as religious, (2) openly affiliate with a religious group, or (3) are run by, or exclusively serve, a religious group or society.⁵ The practical implications of a school being ‘faith-based’ may vary from allowing religious observances and symbols, offering religious courses (almost all Alberta schools may do this), to allowing faith to be integrated, or permeated, throughout the curriculum and practices of the school. In this study, words such as religion, spirituality, and faith are alternatively used interchangeably.

This paper is structured to reflect the reality that the Alberta school system is really a ‘system of systems’ regime. We have identified seven unique types of school authority, many in turn offering several types of arrangements for faith-based schooling. The first five sections of the paper deal with faith-based schooling in public, separate, ‘blended public-separate,’ charter, and francophone school authorities. We also analyse various options for faith-based schooling within many of these systems, such as alternative programs, ‘de facto reserved schools,’ and Hutterite schools. We then examine arrangements for faith-based schooling found in independent schools, home education, and First Nations on reserve schools. In each of these types, we examine the types of faith communities that have taken the opportunity to express their faith in the schooling of their children. Finally, the paper proposes a new type of model that best describes Alberta’s unique approach to diversity, faith and schooling.

Classifying Canadian school systems and religion

The Constitution Act 1867 gives the jurisdiction over education to the provinces, enabling each province to freely develop its system in response to its local conditions and public philosophy, limited only by the distinctive constitutional limitations of its entry into Confederation. Historically, the British North American colonies, and later the Canadian provinces, struggled with the questions concerning the place of faith in learning and the role of churches in schooling. In response several different models emerged for how state, church, and faith should be related to schooling.

In *Public Schools & Political Ideas: Canadian Educational Policy in Historical Perspective*, Ronald Manzer identifies four basic types of “educational regime” that were produced in nineteenth century Canada by conflicting “political ideologies of church and state in education” (1994, 33).⁶ These educational regimes continued to operate into the 1960s when Alberta’s private school funding debate transpired (165).

First, the *non-sectarian public school system* reflected a strict liberal understanding of the separation of church and state. In this regime, Manzer argues, a government department rather than an ecclesiastical body has authority over local board-run schools. Clergy are forbidden to play any kind of authoritative role within the school system, e.g. as teachers, trustees, or inspectors. Churches are also prevented from sectarian engagement with the schools, e.g. instruction in religious dogma or creeds. Even so, public schools were not originally assumed to be fully secular but to advance some version of

³ The Government’s presentation of data maintains this troublesome distinction between public and private sector schooling. Perhaps all schools serve the public purpose of educating citizens? See public sector vs. private sector, as well as public, separate, private definitions, in Bezeau (1995, 182ff).

⁴ The old formulation of church and state is riddled with problems associated with the liberal historical thesis concerning the separation of church and state. (see C.T. McIntire, 2002). To some degree, religious or equivalent philosophic or ideological, worldview(s) shape the practices of all schools.

⁵ We rely on published, internet, and limited personal-interview data to determine the faith-based components in schools.

⁶ See Bezeau’s (1995) very similar typology, chapter 3, p. 27.

non-sectarian Christianity (55). British Columbia adopted this regime in 1872 while Manitoba replaced its earlier *dual confessional school system* with this regime in 1890.

The next two types of educational regime were created when liberals were forced to enact “substantial compromises with religious conservatism” (65). The second type of regime, *non-sectarian public schools with minority denominational districts*, was developed in Upper Canada, which later became Ontario. Like the first regime, this regime also features public schools that are funded and indirectly controlled by a government department and generally incorporate non-sectarian Protestant practices. Now, however, separate denominational schools are permitted for Catholics but under strict supervision by a majority-controlled government department that oversees curriculum and texts, testing and inspections, and teacher training and certification. The North-West Territories gradually adopted this school system in the late nineteenth century and it was formally passed on to the new provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905 (255, 54-59).

Third, a compromise between liberalism and religious communities also produced the third type of regime, *de jure non-sectarian, de facto reserved public schools*. This regime historically emerged in the three Maritime Provinces when they officially forbade sectarian practices such as “teaching denominational doctrine and using denominational prayers and books.” Only non-sectarian Protestantism was permitted in the public schools. In practice, however, compromises were worked out with religious minorities in which some schools were reserved for Roman Catholics. They were permitted to engage in sectarian practices, e.g. employing members of religious orders, wearing religious garb, and holding Catholic religious exercises before or after regular school hours (57-59). This regime allows religious minorities a measure of control over local schools in the unique circumstances where they are significantly concentrated in isolated geographical regions.

Liberalism had little influence on the fourth regime, *concurrent endowment of confessional systems*. This regime is unique in that the state’s role is restricted to public funding while ecclesiastical authorities retain effective control of school administration and curriculum (53). Two distinct versions of this regime were developed in Canada. After 1867, Quebec developed the *dual confessional school system* in Montreal and Quebec City where the non-governmental Council of Public Instruction was divided between Catholic and Protestant Committees, each operating on an equal footing. The older department of education was dissolved and the Council was given power to make all important educational decisions. Manitoba and the North-West Territories also initially adopted this regime. A second version of this regime, the *multi-denominational school system*, was developed by Newfoundland and entrenched in the Canadian constitution when it became a province in 1949 (54). This regime left authoritative control of the major aspects of education in the hands of each church that chose to run schools, e.g. Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventists, and Pentecostal Assemblies. All schools operated on equal legal footing.⁷

All four of Manzer’s models practically ignore independent or private schools. This is probably because they were strongly discouraged up to the 1960s, as they were believed to weaken the public schools’ ability to produce the beliefs required to unify society. Private schools were gradually and grudgingly permitted to exist, partly out of liberal respect for religious freedom although some private schools were created to perpetuate class privilege rather than practice religious freedom. For all intents and purposes, however, the mainstream public or denominational separate school systems in each regime functioned like assimilation-isolation mechanisms in which minorities who reject the beliefs of mainstream schools were forced either to assimilate in these schools or else isolate in private schools that were denied public funding.

Furthermore, while the inclusion of religious diversity in the provincial school system has been

⁷ Quebec moved to a predominantly linguistic regime with a process that began in 1997, Manitoba to a non-sectarian regime in 1890, the North-West Territories to non-sectarian public schools with minority denominational districts in 1901, and Newfoundland switched to a primarily non-sectarian system with a process beginning in 1997.

significant, Alberta is not, in fact, Canada's "Bible belt." Albertans are the second most likely to say they have "no religion" on surveys and Albertans attend religious services at among the lowest rates in Canada (see Bibby, 2002; Clark, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2003). Over the past century, however, Alberta has frequently been challenged to accommodate religious diversity in schooling, through private religious high schools, Hutterite schooling, minority-run private schools, growing population diversity, etc. This study does not examine this history, but the outcome of these historic issues manifest themselves in the contours of the current Alberta system. We now turn to examine the openings that have been created in order to allow religious minorities to allow their faith to influence the schooling of their children.

I. PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS

In Alberta, public school boards are one of four types of 'school authority' that the provincial government treats as 'public sector' schools. Historically under the Northwest Territories ordinances, the first school established in a local district—whether Protestant or Catholic—was designated the public school. If members of the specified minority faith—either Catholic or Protestant—met the legal criteria, they were permitted to establish a denominational separate school in the district. The vast majority of the public schools that were opened in this early historical period were considered 'non-sectarian protestant' schools. By the 1960's, the majority of Albertans treated most protestant public schools as essentially 'secular' schools. Up to this time—and this study indicates in select public schools today—it would not be unusual to find religious practices and/or religious courses offered in most public schools.⁸ The 2001-2002 data used in this study indicates that religious practices, observances or courses are accommodated *within* public school systems under five different types of structural arrangement.

a) Religion courses in regular public schools

The first way of including religion in the public school type of system is to offer courses *about* and *in* religion. Such courses may be taught in any Alberta public school today, subject to the decision of the local school board.⁹ Alberta Learning has approved three courses about religion for teaching in any high school if permitted by the local board: Religious Ethics 20, Religious Meaning 20, and World Religions 30. These courses are designated as optional courses. Alberta Learning's Policy 1.2.2 (2003) also allows school authorities to permit religious studies courses to be locally developed for junior and senior high which reflect "particular views and belief systems." These courses may teach a particular religion but at least 20% of their content must address the comparative study of world religions, thereby qualifying them as "religious studies" courses instead of "religious instruction." This option is mainly used by Catholic schools and independent schools that want their students to receive credit for religion courses, but any school authority may authorise the development of these courses.

The *School Act* (s. 50(1)) continues to allow any school board to "prescribe religious exercises for its students" with the condition that students be permitted to opt out. This has led to divergent practices across the province, for example, Calgary Public adopted a policy officially banning prayer while Edmonton Public leaves this choice up to the individual schools.

b) Catholic public schools

The second structural arrangement for allowing faith-based public schooling is the Catholic public school district. This option is practically impossible today since it legally requires that there be

⁸ On religious instruction in public schools, see Chorny, Bawden, and Hodgson (1949, p. 75). From 1931 to 1970, the *School Act* required schools to open with scripture reading and the Lord's Prayer.

⁹ The *School Act* section 50(1) gives school boards the right to prescribe religious instruction to be offered in schools.

no existing school in a geographic district. The only remaining Catholic ‘public school’ board in Alberta today is the Greater St. Albert Catholic Regional Division. It was formed January 1, 1995 by amalgamating the existing Catholic school districts of St. Albert, Morinville and Legal, all historically founded as public school districts by Catholic communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With 7,701 students, the Greater St. Albert Regional Division is one the province’s largest Catholic systems. The district’s 16 schools and one high school are ‘typically’ Catholic schools, similar to those run under the separate board category. Therefore, these features will be discussed further under that category.

c) *De facto reserved public schools for geographically concentrated faith groups*

A third structural arrangement for enabling faith-based schooling in public school systems is for a public board to make an informal, ad hoc arrangement with a geographically concentrated religious minority group for the provision of faith-based schooling. Ronald Manzer calls this arrangement a “de facto reserved public school.”

A longstanding example of this approach in Alberta is the Neerlandia Christian School. Founded in 1917 by a predominately Calvinist Dutch farming community, this explicitly Christian school still operates as a public school today.¹⁰ Neerlandia Christian School has 203 students. Although in 1996 it signed a letter with Pembina Hills Regional Division shifting its status to an alternative school [see below], as enabled by the revised School Act [1988], this School maintains its “de facto reserved public school” characteristics.

Recently, several other faith-based “de facto reserved public schools” have been created in the province. Three public school districts now operate Christian programs in areas with high geographic concentrations of Mennonites. The Peace River School Division operates the “Menno Simons Community School” with 118 students, in the small farming community of Cleardale, Alberta. The name of the school is indicative of the centrality of the Mennonite faith to this community. “Since the majority of the students are of Mennonite background, a list of guiding principles and special language programs have been developed to assist the staff in providing a public school program which is sensitive to the differing cultural/religious values and English as a Second Language environments” (Carlstad, 2004). Prairie Rose Regional Division offers the “Burdett Mennonite English as a Second Language (ESL) Program.” Serving “students whose parents are German Speaking and come from Mexico,” this program involves instruction in a separate classroom for Mennonite students over the age of 10. In 2001-2002, the program offered German and Religious Studies to 31 students, and utilised a German teacher assistant (Prairie Rose School Division, n.d.). Finally, St. Paul Education Regional Division #1, an amalgamation of formerly public and Catholic boards in the Counties of St. Paul and Two Hills, operates the Two Hills Mennonite School with 98 students.

In total, 450 students receive some form of faith-based schooling in “de facto reserved public schools” within these four geographically concentrated religious communities.

d) *De facto reserved public schools for Hutterites*

Alberta’s Hutterite Colony Schools constitute a special form of “de facto reserved public schools” and for practical purposes have become a distinct structural type. Developed specifically to

¹⁰ The Calvinist immigrants in Neerlandia initially wanted to start an *independent* Christian school in 1915, as had their predecessor in the Netherlands. Due to the severe shortage of finances in the pioneer community, however, they decided instead to form a public school district. Government approval was received on June 27, 1917 (Navis and Siebring-Wierenga, 1985, 714). They sought to hire Christian teachers. In 1939, the public school district in Neerlandia was included in the larger Pembina School Division #37. Under this district, they had the power to nominate a Christian teacher, but not to hire. This process gave them many good teachers, although they were not always pleased with the teachers they received. To this day, “Neerlandia school provides Christian education under the auspices of the public system” (739).

serve the students of Alberta's Hutterite colonies, remarkably this type of school is currently run by 24 of Alberta's 42 public school districts.

The Hutterites are followers of the European Anabaptist reformer, Jakob Hutter, who started a form of communal Christian living in 1528. Over the next 400 years, the Hutterites moved about within Europe to avoid government intervention and military service. They settled for extended periods in Moravia, Slovakia, Transylvania, Romania, Ukraine, and Russia. After facing difficulty in the United States during WWI—because they spoke German and refused military service—the Hutterites moved to Canada in 1918 (Janzen, 1990, 9). Hutterites are Christian pacifists who reject most contemporary fashions, reject private property by living on communal farms where they hold all things in common, and believe in the full separation of church and state (Janzen, 1990; see Hostetler, 1974).

The first Hutterite colony school opened in Alberta in 1918. The provincial government historically resisted direct legislative involvement with Hutterite schools. Instead, they left it up to each particular school district to accommodate the Hutterites through local detailed agreements (Janzen, 1990, 148). Remarkably, the arrangements for Hutterite schooling in Alberta are very similar to those developed in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Generally, public boards operate one school on each colony and unofficially reserve it exclusively for Hutterite students. Consequently, Hutterite schools in Alberta are very small, ranging from 4 to 49 students and averaging only 20.3 students per school. The Westwind Public School Division has the largest concentration of Hutterite schools and students, with 19 Hutterite schools (58% of its schools) that enrol a total of 367 students (8.5% of the district's students). Hutterite Colony schools are taught in English by regular certified public school teachers who are most often not themselves Hutterite.¹¹ Thus, Hutterite schools are faith-based primarily in the sense that they exclusively serve a single faith community, do so in accord with that group's views of separation from secular society, and include before- and after- school classes in religion and German (Janzen, 1990). Male colony leaders instruct these classes, and only outside the regular daily school program. "The materials used for [German language] instruction are stories with strong moral messages, biblical scriptures, and Hutterite martyr ballads and other hymns dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries" (Hofer, 1998, 27).

Hutterite children generally receive schooling only up to eighth or ninth grade because Hutterite convictions often lead parents to withdraw them from school soon after turning 16. Forty-five percent of the colony schools have no students beyond grade eight, 45% have students in grade nine but none beyond, and 10% of the Hutterite schools have one or more students in grades ten, eleven or twelve. Less than 2% of Hutterite students are enrolled in grades 10-12.¹²

A total of 153 colony public schools educate 3109 Hutterite students.¹³

e) Alternative faith-based programs within public systems

¹¹ This arrangement in which government provides teaching to Hutterites on colonies dates back to 1918 (Janzen, 1990, 145). There are three large groups of Hutterite colonies: Lehereleut, Dariusleut, and the more progressive Schmiedeleut. In Manitoba, some Schmeideleut colonies now allow students to complete high school, and have recently been sending colony members to a Brandon University program that trains Hutterite teachers (see the program's website at www.brandonu.ca/Academic/Education/buhep/buhep-about.asp). There are no Schmeideleut colonies in Alberta, however, only the more conservative Dariusleut and Lehrerleut. These two groups generally take their children out of school as soon as legally allowed (see Hofer, 1998).

¹² A Private Member's bill, adopted by the Legislature in April 2003, amended the School Act to extend mandatory school attendance to age 17 rather than 16. It eliminated Section 13 (Subsection 5.e) that allowed exceptions to mandatory attendance policy, a provision previously used to allow Hutterites to leave school before the age required by law. The enforceability of this amendment is still unclear (see Thomas, 2003; Thorne, 2003b) and as of July 5, 2004, the bill had not yet been proclaimed.

¹³ Menno Simons School in the Peace River Division operates a Hutterite school. The numbers for that colony school are included with the numbers of the Menno Simons School.

The newest structural arrangement for allowing faith-based schooling in public systems is the alternative program, pioneered in the early 1980s. In addition to the *de facto form* of reserving a public school for faith-based groups, alternative schools have become a *de jure* method of reserving schools for faith-based groups even if they are dispersed across a city. Alternative programs are a weaker legal form reserving schools for faith-based minorities than constitutional protection, which is given to Alberta's denominational separate schools [next section]. In the early 1970s, when the larger public school districts in Alberta experimented with a variety of non-religious alternative programs, there was no explicit provincial policy allowing or prohibiting the establishment of faith-based alternatives.

Although most Albertans were still Christian in the 1960s, a secularising trend within mainstream Alberta encouraged many Protestants to accept the Enlightenment idea that religion must be privatised in order to tolerate minority groups. In 1969, a Calgary Board of Education (CBE) report, *Religion in Education*, "recommended discontinuing the non-compulsory half hour of religious education [within CBE schools] and instead, integrating a variety of religious, moral, and spiritual topics in a non-proselytising way where they became relevant in the curriculum" (Taylor, 2001, p.21). This and other developments spurred a group of Calgarians to work for specifically faith-based alternative schools. Beginning in 1978, CBE's alternative school policy was used to introduce or adopt 2 Jewish and 2 Logos Christian alternative schools in the Calgary Public system. By 1983, however, the majority in the newly elected School Board opposed religious alternative schools and terminated the contracts with the Jewish and Logos Christian Schools.¹⁴ The Plains Indian Cultural Survival School, which mixed aboriginal spirituality with its curriculum, was retained by the Board as a 'special case' (Wagner, 1995).

The Edmonton Model: The blossoming of Alternative schools

A special case of the alternative school as a structural arrangement for faith-based schooling within public systems emerged in Edmonton Public Schools. Policy reforms placing choice, accountability and achievement at the centre of the system led *Time Magazine* to call Edmonton Public "the most imitated and admired public system in North America" (Catto, 2003). By spring 2001, "Edmonton Public Schools offered a comprehensive array of 31 program choices. Of the district's 209 schools, more than 80 have adopted at least one of these specialities" ("Edmonton's wide array," 2001; see also Editors, 2001b). In the late 1990s, in addition to linguistic, academic, sports, single-sex, and arts programs, Edmonton Public also began to offer faith-based programs.

The so-called "Edmonton Model" [footnote] grew out of a number of interrelated policy developments, including the elimination of school boundaries which limit student movement between schools, the introduction of site-based management, and opening up options for parental choice of programming. Other historical factors also encouraging the development of this model were unique district leadership, an amendment to the School Act that overtly allowed religious alternatives, and the introduction of Alberta's Charter school legislation in 1994. Together, these developments and pressures encouraged the public board to seriously examine various types of alternative schools, including faith-based alternatives.

Initially, Edmonton was not particularly hospitable to faith-based alternative schools and programs. In October 1975, Edmonton Public Schools adopted its first faith-based alternative school when the Talmud Torah school—a Jewish day school that had been operating as a private/independent school since 1912—entered the system. This school had been started by Russian Jews who had fled persecution and were, therefore, deeply committed to transmitting "the values, traditions and beliefs of their religion" to their children (Sweet 1997, 68-71). Although the Talmud Torah School was

¹⁴ See Wagner's (1995) discussion of the "Save Public Education" campaign against faith-based schools in Calgary. "Save Public Education" re-emerged to oppose the Calgary Board of Education's reconsideration of banning faith-based alternative programs (see Derworiz, 2001).

considered an alternative “language school,” Lois Sweet describes it as “a Hebrew language school with a religious component” (241). She cites principal Weinlos Issacs:

The whole program has a Hebrew component which students can't opt out of.... But they can opt out of the non-comparable component. It isn't a lot of time—an extra 140 minutes a week—which is a couple of hours spread over a week. That's when we're allowed to teach prayer or to teach something to do with religion. And we have a junior congregation on Saturday mornings in the cafeteria. (70)

In subsequent years, Edmonton Public added a variety of non-religious schools, including a fine arts program (1977), the Alpha School (1977), a school for Cree Indian Children (1977), and a Waldorf school (1979) (see Hop, 1982, 169). Applications from two Christian alternative programs in 1981, however, sparked lively debate over the place of religion in Edmonton's public schools. This occurred in the midst of the widely publicised struggle over religious alternatives in Calgary. In April 1982, the Edmonton Public School Board rejected the applications of the two religious schools. In a 7-2 decision, the Board adopted a policy explicitly excluding faith-based alternative schools. The Board reasoned that “our system of universal public education can only be weakened by fragmentation on the basis of religious belief” (*Calgary Herald*, May 15, cited in Hop, 1982, 170).

The Alberta government apparently believed otherwise. In 1988, it amended the School Act by adding Section 16 (1a), specifically allowing local boards to establish alternative religious schools and programs where numbers warrant. By 1993, only one board had picked up this explicit invitation to create faith-based alternative schools. When the Alberta government introduced new Charter school legislation—which ironically overtly excludes religious charter schools—public boards took a renewed interest in creating general alternative schools. The possibility of new competition from charter schools spurred several public boards to examine a wide variety of alternative school options. Faith-based alternative schools were included in this new enthusiasm for alternatives.

In 1995, Edmonton Public Schools, under the leadership of Superintendent Emery Dosedall,¹⁵ committed itself to including as many students within the public system as possible by using alternative schools. Dosedall became the “hands on champion for choice” (Unland, 2000) and pushed the concept of alternative schools to dramatic new heights. In 1996, Edmonton Public introduced the Logos Christian program¹⁶ with an 8 to 1 vote (Wagner, 1998, p.200). Over the next eight years, 8 Logos Christian programs were opened and 2 long-established, formerly independent, Christian schools were adopted into the system (see Dosedall, 2001).¹⁷

Today, Edmonton Public is Alberta's most advanced system of both alternative schools, and alternative faith-based programs (Martin and Hiemstra, 2002). Of the alternatives offered by Edmonton Public in 2001-2002,¹⁸ several are overtly faith-based, such as, Logos (1297 students), Edmonton Christian School (1009 students), Millwoods Christian School (613 students),¹⁹ and Christian-based programming for home education. Some cultural and language alternative programs also have a religious or spiritual dimension—e.g. Talmud Torah School and aboriginal programs running in a

¹⁵ Dosedall eventually left Edmonton to take a key administrative position in the Department of Education in British Columbia (see Holubitsky, 2001a).

¹⁶ For a description of the Logos program and their detailed statement of belief, see <http://www.logos-society.edmonton.ab.ca>.

¹⁷ Larry Booi, who soon after became head of the ATA, argued that approval of the Logos Christian program is “probably the single biggest mistake made by an Alberta school board in the last two decades” (“Teachers irate,” 1996).

¹⁸ Edmonton Public requires that alternative programs can be created in one of four areas: 1) language and culture, 2) Subject Matter, 3) Teaching Philosophy, 4) and Religion. See Edmonton Public Schools, 2001b.

¹⁹ Since 2001, the Logos program is now offered at 9 schools and another independent school, Meadowlark Christian School, joined Edmonton Public in 2002.

variety of schools aimed at different age groups.²⁰ Amiskwaciy Academy, an alternative high school offering an aboriginal-based program, “ensures spirituality is a vital part of every day. Each day begins with a smudge and morning prayer.” There are regular sweat lodge ceremonies and other spiritual ceremonies throughout the year (Amiskwaciy Academy, n.d.). Even some of the many types of bilingual language programs teach their second language in a “way that children can be introduced to another country's culture.” This includes 16 French, 4 Arabic,²¹ 11 Chinese (Mandarin), 5 German, 1 Hebrew, 1 Spanish, 4 Ukrainian programs (Edmonton Public Schools, 2001a). Killarney Junior High, for example, offers an Islamic Studies Course (see Holubitsky, 2001b).

Faith-based alternatives in public schools across the province

While the ‘Edmonton Model’ is the most developed and celebrated case of this new structural arrangement for faith-based schooling, it was neither the first nor is it the only public school system to move in this direction. Today, most school boards in Alberta offer some sort of alternative programs and 10 of the 42 public boards offer at least one faith-based program.

In 1993, Drayton Christian School in the foothills town of Drayton Valley became a publicly-funded alternate program of the Wild Rose School Division No.66 (Sweet, 242). Elk Island Public Schools Regional Division offers numerous faith-based options that are utilised by 1,349 of its 16,244 students. It offers the Logos Christian program on four campuses to 420 students. Elk Island Public has also partnered with two formerly independent Christian Schools, the 775 student Strathcona Christian Academy and the 154 student Fort Saskatchewan Christian School. The Lethbridge School District and Red Deer School District have also ‘adopted’ formerly independent Christian schools, respectively, the Lethbridge Christian School (Boschman, 2001) and Red Deer Christian School. The Parkland School Division offers a Maranatha Alternative [Christian] Program to 127 students, which like the Logos programs in Edmonton and Elk Island, was adopted by the school division in response to parental demand. The Maranatha Program aims to teach students “in a non-denominational Christian, spiritually nurturing, intellectually challenging, and disciplined environment” (Parkland School Division, 2003). St. Albert Protestant Separate School Division, an otherwise largely secularised system, operates a Logos Christian program in two schools.

Meanwhile, Calgary Board of Education (CBE), the school district with the most students in the province, no longer officially runs any faith-based alternatives. The Plains Indian Cultural Survival School, the only program with a faith-based component, ended up closing down in 2002. Even so, a school run by a faith-based organization continues to operate under CBE’s administrative umbrella. The Salvation Army Children’s Village, a school for children with “emotional and behavioural difficulties” is officially a CBE school.²² This school, “motivated by Christian values and beliefs, is committed to providing excellence in therapeutic and educational services to children and families” (Salvation Army, Alberta and Northern Territories Division, n.d.). Recently, the CBE initiated a process to reconsider its policy on religion and schooling. In March 2004, the Board adopted eight recommendations put forward by its Committee on the Role of Religion in the CBE. These

²⁰ Students in aboriginal programming “have the opportunity to pursue academic excellence while exploring the unique customs, traditions, spirituality, languages and traditional teachings inherent to the aboriginal culture” (Edmonton Public Schools, 2001, p.4).

²¹ The Killarney Junior High “Arabic Program,” for example, links language with culture and indirectly with religion. The brochure entitled “Arabic Program” (n.d.) states under the heading “Learn Arabic through Culture,” “Students also have the opportunity to participate in Killarney’s Muslim Club activities and events such as Friday Jummah prayer, weekly lunch hour religious lessons, luncheons and more. Muslim Club activities are geared toward raising awareness about Islam within the school and community.”

²² The Salvation Army Children’s Village lists as stakeholders: the “Salvation Army, Alberta Learning, Calgary Board of Education, Calgary Catholic School Board, Child and Family Services Authority Region 3 and private and corporate contributors. The school is governed by the Salvation Army through its Executive Director, a Salvation Army Officer. See Salvation Army Children’s Village, 2004; also see Calgary Board of Education, 2003.

recommendations introduce “curriculum related to world religion” in high schools and commit the Board to study introducing world religions in early grades, but recommended the Board “not offer religious based alternative programs” (Calgary Board of Education, n.d.).

During the 2001-2002 school year, 450 students receive a form of faith-based schooling in “de facto reserved public schools.” Hutterite colony public schools educated 3109 students. Another 5886 students attended faith-based alternative programs in public schools. Thus, a total of 9445 students received some form of faith-based schooling in otherwise ‘secular’ public districts in Alberta. This total excludes the 7,701 students attending faith-based schools in St. Albert’s public Catholic division and any students who took religion courses in ‘regular’ public schools.

II. SEPARATE DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS

The second type of ‘school authority’ that the province treats as a ‘public sector’ school is the separate denominational board. The vast majority of separate denominational schools that opened in the original Northwest Territories, and later Alberta, were Roman Catholic. This form of faith-based schooling was constitutionally protected in the Alberta Act, 1905.

a) Roman Catholic separate districts

Seventeen of Alberta’s current 18 separate denominational systems are Roman Catholic.²³ The second school authority established in a particular district tended to be Catholic because they were minorities across most of Alberta. Occasionally Protestants were the minorities and the separate denominational school became protestant. Alberta law requires that separate schools must have a denominational character, including offering formal religious education.²⁴

While practices vary from district to district and school to school, several common themes and emphases appear in Catholic separate schools. The Alberta Catholic School Trustee Association (ACSTA) says that in Catholic schools “the teachers focus on integrating the faith dimension into every subject area.” Further, ACSTA notes, “there is in fact no delineation between religious and non-religious learning in a Catholic school” (1996, 1). ACSTA refers to the Vatican II [1965] document *Gravissimum Educationis*: “What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love” (ACSTA 1996, 1). Everything from human relationships to sciences and career classes are to be taught in an integrally Catholic way (ACSTA 2-3). Furthermore, and very importantly, Catholic schools offer religious education (ACSTA 3-4). Even on the administrative level, ACSTA argues, schools and boards are meant to be Catholic.²⁵ How Catholic schooling actually works out in practice varies, depending on trustees, principals, teachers and parents.²⁶

²³ Besides these 17 Catholic Separate Boards, the Greater St. Albert Public School Board is also Catholic and educates 7,701 students. The largely secular St. Albert Separate System educates 6,494 students and is addressed under public schools.

²⁴ Kevin Feehan (2004) argues that the courts found that “School Act, Part 8, Division 2, ss. 212-221 requires that a new separate school district “must have some degree of denominational character,” “cannot simply operate a public school by another name” and should offer “formal religious education (as a) . . . means of promoting or preserving Roman Catholic beliefs and values...” (Jacobi v. Newell No. 4 (County), (1994) 16 Alta. L.R. (3d) 373 at 395). If that rationale extends to the new system of expansion of separate school districts or regional divisions within Separate School Regions (School Act, Part 8, Division 2.1, ss.221.1 and 221.2) the expanding separate school district or regional division will be required by law to provide a fully permeated Catholic Education.” See Kevin Feehan, “Public meetings, public questions, public answers” Catholic Dimension, Spring 2004.

²⁵ On what it means what it means for a board to be Catholic administratively, see Ksiazek (1995), and ACSTA (1996a 4-5 and 1996b).

²⁶ See Karen Unland, “The cross in the classroom: Separate schools attract non-Catholics in search of a warm, caring, Christian environment.” *Calgary Herald*, Oct 21, 2000, O.10. Also see Clement Dery, Karen Doyle, Doena Mackie, *Catholic Schools: An Edmonton Perspective*, Newman Theological College, Unpublished Thesis for Master of Religious

Many Catholics argue that their faith so permeates education that even school buildings need to be distinct. In late 2002, a public debate erupted in Alberta over whether Catholic and public schools should share facilities for the sake of economic efficiency, although this was eventually rejected in this case. Catholic school Board member, Ron Zapisocki, argued that in order for Catholic schools to be effective, they must be distinct “throughout every minute of the school day, throughout the entire building, so that we do not encumber others who are different from our faith, nor are we encumbered from practising our faith. Our schools are an extension of our parishes of the Catholic Church.” (quoted in Howell and Olsen, 2002).²⁷ The Alberta Conference of Catholic Bishops (2002, 2) supported this position saying, “the sharing of facilities creates grave problems for Catholic education.”

Catholic separate systems are governed in many of the same ways as are public school boards. There are few differences, however. In 2000, the Supreme Court of Canada reaffirmed separate school boards’ authority “to requisition money directly from their ratepayers” (Public School Boards’ Association of Alberta v. Alberta, 2000).²⁸ The decision recognised constitutional special provisions given to separate school boards that are not available to public school boards (see Gonzalez, 2000). Catholic boards also retain the right to exclusively hire Catholic teachers and to demand that teachers conduct themselves in ways consistent with Catholic doctrine and moral teachings. This was confirmed in a number of court cases regarding teachers’ claims of wrongful dismissal.²⁹ In the *Caldwell* decision [Use Casagrande for Alta?], for example, the judges conclude that in order to “carry out the purposes of the [denominational] school, full effect must be given to [the religious] aspect of its nature and teachers are required to observe and comply with the religious stands and to be examples in the manner of their behaviour in the school so that students see in practice the application of the principles of the Church on a daily basis and thereby receive what is called a Catholic education” (Glenn and de Groof, 2002, 173). Questions concerning a Catholic school’s ability to conduct itself in ways consistent with church teachings when it comes to requirements made of students, recently came to the fore in the Ontario case of *Hall v. Powers* case (2002).³⁰

b) Catholic alternative schools

Some Catholic separate school systems run alternative programs. Schools have been developed to offer programs only based on forms of plurality that crosscut, but do not compete with, the Catholic faith. Edmonton Catholic School District, for example, offers sports academies, fine art schools and International Baccalaureate programs. It runs several second-language programs including Cree, French, German, Polish, Spanish and Ukrainian bilingual programs, and an aboriginal program at Ben Calf Robe school. Edmonton Catholic will also open an all-girl’s school, Jean Forest Junior High Leadership Academy, in the 2005-2006 school year.

Calgary Catholic also runs alternative programs such as fine arts programs and language programs (French Immersion and Spanish Bilingual) as well as an aboriginal student support program. This Catholic system is unique, however, in that it comes closest to offering a non-Catholic faith-based

Education, 1994, and M. Ellen Heustis, *The Role of Parents in Enhancing Catholic Schools: Fostering Gospel Values and Christ-centred Community*, Newman Theological College, Unpublished Master of Religious Education Thesis, 2001.

²⁷ In Olsen (2002), Dale Ripley, Superintendent of the Catholic Board argues that even the icons and symbols on the walls have an importance to the Catholic nature of the school, and can’t be compromised. Also see Lord (2002a and 2002b) and Simons (2002b). The Alberta Catholic School Trustees’ Association subsequently discussed whether to give local bishops an official say in the approval or disapproval of school sharing and similar proposals (see Johnsrude, 2003).

²⁸ The Supreme court dismissed PSBAA’s appeal of the Alberta Court of Appeal’s overturning of a lower court’s decision that 1994 revisions to Alberta’s education legislation was unconstitutional because it violated the principle of “mirror equality” rights for separate and public schools (see Anderson, n.d.).

²⁹ *Re Caldwell v. Stuart et al.* (1984), *Daly v. Ontario* (1999), and *Casagrande v. Hinton* (1987) discuss employment practices of denominational schools.

³⁰ Also see University of Toronto professor David Novak’s comments in Todd (2002), as well as Cauchi (2003, July/August and 2003, September). The 2002 ruling was a temporary injunction. The case will be heard beginning October 2004.

alternative school. After the Calgary Board of Education (public) refused to renew the contracts of the 2 Jewish and 2 Logos Christian schools in 1983, the Calgary Separate Catholic Board was able and willing to partner with the two Jewish schools. It could do so because the Jewish faith is not included under law in the Alberta Act's constitutional categories of 'Catholic' and 'Protestant.' Since the Logos schools were Protestant, however, it was widely believed that they couldn't partner with a Catholic Board.

c) Protestant Separate boards

Only one Protestant separate school board survives in Alberta today. The St. Albert Protestant School District is a separate board but it largely offers 'secular' education. Its two Logos Christian Education Programs, however, educated 180 students. While following the Alberta Program of Studies, these Logos programs offer "Teaching of knowledge, skills and attitudes is done within a Christian context. A Christian viewpoint to issues and topics from all curriculum areas is provided and links are made between the concepts being taught and the Bible teachings on that concept" (St. Albert Protestant Schools, 2002).

In the 2001-2002 school year, Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District educated 44,269 students. Edmonton Catholic Separate School District schooled 30,951. The smallest district was Lloydminster Roman Catholic Separate with 921 students. A total of 120,483 students were enrolled in Alberta's Catholic Separate schools. Although 6494 students attend the nominally Protestant separate district of St. Albert, 180 of those students received faith-based schooling in Logos Christian programs. Thus a total of 120,663 students receive faith-based schooling in separate denominational districts in Alberta.

III. BLENDED PUBLIC-SEPARATE SCHOOL AUTHORITIES

A third type of 'school authority' recognised by the government, but is neither strictly speaking separate nor public, is the 'blended public-separate school authority.' Although not explicitly mentioned in the School Act, this unique blended public-separate system began to be developed in 1995 in the St. Paul area when the government initiated a process aimed at significantly reducing the number of school districts in the province. In response to this pressure, the St. Paul public and separate districts decided against amalgamating with equivalent boards in far-flung geographic communities. Instead, they took the unique step of amalgamating the public and separate authorities into the St. Paul Education Regional Division.

This blended public-separate board now runs Catholic, secular, Hutterite, Mennonite and Protestant schools (see Feehan, 2003). Since 2000, the Alberta Catholic Schools Trustee Association (ACSTA) has questioned the current arrangement, asking whether it appropriately protects the constitutional rights of the involved parties (Feehan, 2003). A subcommittee of ACSTA and the St. Paul board drafted a ten-point proposal that allows preferential hiring, designation of schools as Catholic or non-Catholic, and sets out guidelines for supervising each type of school (Feehan, 2003, points 7 and 5).

In 2001-2002, 975 students attended St. Paul's three Catholic schools, 510 attended the Protestant separate school, 35 attended the two Hutterite schools, 98 a Mennonite School, and another 1972 students were schooled in 'secular' public schools. The St. Paul Regional High School received its 434 students from all of these elementary schools. Catholic students make up 55-60% of the high school's population and can access specially tailored Catholic programs (J. Champagne, personal communication, July 2003). Thus, a total of 1618 elementary students and about 250 high school students received faith-based schooling in this blended public-separate district.

IV. CHARTER SCHOOLS AUTHORITIES AND ‘SPIRITUALITY’

Charter Schools constitute the third type of ‘school authority’ that the provincial government treats as ‘public sector’ schools. Created by an amendment of the School Act in 1994, a charter school is defined as “a public school that provides a basic education in a different or enhanced way to improve student learning” (Alberta Learning, 2002a, 1). The government’s initial idea for charter schools was that they would remain a small select group of schools, stress a unique aspect of pedagogy, curriculum, or another focus, and thereby stimulate improvements in mainstream public and separate schools. Critics have argued, however, that charter schools are part of a government plan to marketise and privatise education.³¹ Structurally, however, charter boards must be independently audited and must be non-profit (3). They are eligible for the same per pupil funding from the province as other public schools and may not charge tuition fees (1-2). Charter schools cannot deny access to any student. Charter schools must be operated by boards which are “responsible for ensuring that the charter school complies with charter board policies and the terms of the charter, as well as provincial legislation, regulation and policies” (3).

Strikingly, the School Act explicitly prohibits this type of school from being “religious in nature.” Alberta Learning states: “Charter schools are not private religious schools, nor are they intended to replace the services offered by private religious schools” (2002, 2). Most charter schools have an academic, pedagogical, or arts focus. Charter schools are included in this study for two reasons. First, they are the only category of school that is legally prohibited from including religious practices in schooling. Second, since their inception, several charter schools have demonstrated that it is difficult to exclude religion from schools that directly celebrate a distinct culture.

Two charter schools illustrate these two difficulties. The Mother Earth’s Children’s Charter School, opened in September of 2003, serves “those who want traditional aboriginal education.” Although the school website explicitly denies its vision is ‘religious,’ its mission statements nevertheless include having students “discover the gifts given to them by the Creator and to foster a balance of their Spiritual, Intellectual, Physical, and Emotional selves” (Mother Earth’s Children’s Charter School, n.d.b). The website further states, “Smudge and prayer will take place in each classroom each morning to being the day with positive energy” (Mother Earth’s Children’s Charter School, n.d.a; also see Holubitsky, 2003). This case illustrates the wholism of the aboriginal worldview and how it conflicts with the Western demand that certain areas of life (politics, education) must be free from religion.³² The Almadina Charter School, established in Calgary in 1996, also raises similar questions about the privatisation of religious practices. Chartered as an ‘English as a Second Language’ (ESL) school, Almadina serves a predominately Arab and Muslim new-immigrant community (Angus, 2000).³³ While a study of the school by Angus acknowledges that many parents see the school as Muslim, he clearly believes this is a mistaken belief and that ESL is the real basis of the school (85).

Ten charter schools educated 2870 students in 2001-2002. Three additional charter schools were founded in 2003-2004 for a total of 13 schools. Officially, no charter schools offer faith-based schooling.

V. FRANCOPHONE SCHOOL AUTHORITIES AND FAITH

A fourth ‘school authority’ recognised by the province as a ‘public sector’ school system is the regional francophone school authority. Notably, francophone school authorities are functionally and structurally quite different than the French immersion programs offered by other school authorities. In 2002-2003, for example, at least 174 public, separate and independent schools in Alberta offered

³¹ See Kachur (1999), and Robertson, Soucek, Pannu, and Schugurensky (1995). Also see Taylor and Benton-Evans (2002) who view the rise of alternative schools as a triumph of market thinking.

³² See Vandeveld (2000) helpful discussion of this issue.

³³ Angus says that, for his interviewees, “The fact that Almadina serves a predominately Arabic or Muslim population was without question” (99).

French immersion programs.³⁴ In contrast, francophone school authorities were created in response to the Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Mahe v. Alberta* (1990). The historical interaction of francophone Albertans with public and separate school authorities has been complex. The central issue for many francophone parents was to secure French language education for their children, which was more than simply French language schooling for English students and over which French parents were able to maintain control. Although the issue of faith and schools was important, it was secondary to this issue. The Supreme Court ordered Alberta to provide francophone communities with parent-controlled French schooling, where numbers warrant.³⁵

The School Act was amended in 1993 to create the regional francophone authority structure now in place in Alberta. The mandate of francophone education, according Alberta Learning, is to: (1) “provide a schooling experience built around francophone language, culture and community,” and (2) “to help correct the linguistic and cultural erosion suffered by students and the community (2001, 11).

Governance and administration of francophone schools is similar to other Alberta schools and are set out in the School Act (Alberta Learning, 2001, 35). Regional francophone authorities have been given the same functions as public and separate boards, except for the ability to levy taxes that separate schools still maintain (36). Responsibility for funding francophone school authorities rests on the province, although additional federal funding is available. The small size and unique needs of francophone boards and schools has meant they have received significantly more funding per student than either public or separate schools (Alberta Learning, 2003b).

Significantly, francophone authorities are legally permitted to determine the denomination of the schools they govern, and are allowed to govern both denominational and non-denominational institutions (p. 36; also see Alberta, 2000, s.199). Consequently, a number of students in francophone authorities receive some form of faith-based schooling.

Of the five school divisions that now offer francophone education in Alberta, three overtly refer to their system’s Catholic character.³⁶ The Greater North Central Francophone Education Region, for example, states: “The promotion of Catholic education, by its orientation and its programs of religious instruction in the schools, remains an integral part of our mission.”³⁷ Not all of the individual schools within the Catholic francophone divisions explicitly mention a commitment to Catholicism in their mission and vision statements.³⁸

All of the Catholic francophone schools, knowing other options may not exist for Francophone students in some regions, clearly welcome students of other faiths. The North-Central division, for example, ends its Mission document “L’orientation catholique” by stating: “We ensure respect for the pupils of various religious or philosophical traditions and their full belonging to the school” (Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord, n.d.). The École des Beaux-Lacs (in the East Central division) allows students to

³⁴ See http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/french/m_12/immersion/systeme/immersion.pdf.

³⁵ For important decisions and dates in the history of francophone schools in Alberta, see Alberta Learning (2001, 6-8). For a list of who in Alberta is covered by the Section 23 right to minority language education, see Alberta Learning (2001, 14-15).

³⁶ These regional divisions have explicit mention of Catholic identity in their vision and mission statements on their websites. See Conseil scolaire catholique et francophone du Sud du l’Alberta (n.d.), Conseil Scolaire Centre-Est (n.d.), and Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord (n.d.).

³⁷ “La promotion de l’éducation catholique, par son orientation et ses programmes d’instruction religieuse dans les écoles, demeure une partie intégrante de notre mission.”

³⁸ Greater North Central Regional Authority has ten schools, of which four specifically claim Catholicity. Two others within the division, both with Catholic based names, Ecole La Mission, and Ecole Ste-Jeanne-d’ Arc, make minor references to generic Christian values and Christianity within their websites (see Ecole La Mission, n.d., and Ecole Ste-Jeanne-d’ Arc, n.d.). While in 2001/2002 East Central had two Catholic schools and two non-Catholic schools within its jurisdiction, in early 2003 the two non-Catholic schools, and l’École Voyageur, voted to become Catholic schools (see “L’École Beauséjour” 2003, and “L’École Voyageur,” 2003).

be exempted from the 80 to 120 minute-per-week Catholic religion course (École des Beaux-Lacs, n.d.).³⁹

In 2001-2002, within Alberta's five Francophone divisions, seven of the sixteen schools, representing 1,656 of 3,279 students, individually mention Catholicism in their mission or vision statements. In addition, six schools that do not individually make this claim operate within school divisions that do. These numbers have increased since 2001-2002 after two schools in East-Central district recently redesignated themselves as francophone Catholic. Thus, at least 1,656 students in Alberta receive some form of faith-based francophone schooling.

VI. INDEPENDENT OR PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND FAITH

In addition to the four types of public authority that the Alberta government officially recognises and fully funds, the government also recognises the category of independent or private school authority. There are over two hundred private school authorities in the province, the vast majority of which operate only one school. In *Jones v. The Queen* (1986), the Supreme Court of Canada held that the freedom of parents to educate according to convictions is protected by the constitution, but it also found it acceptable for governments to regulate to ensure "efficient instruction."⁴⁰ The percentage of students in Alberta attending independent (or private) schools has remained fairly consistent since 1919, at around 2%.⁴¹ With the introduction of alternative schools in the 1990s, more than 3000 independent school students have followed their schools into public systems.

Most independent schools are accredited and funded which involves employing teachers with Alberta Professional Teaching Certificates, a measure requiring a Bachelor of Education or equivalent degree. The percentage of teachers holding academic qualifications in each category, from B.Ed. to Doctorate, in 2001-2002, was nearly identical in independent and public schools.⁴²

Since 1967, independent schools in Alberta have been eligible for public funding. In 1998, on recommendation of the "Private Schools Task Force", independent schools can receive 60% of the per-pupil Basic Instruction grant. They are also eligible for various percentages of other government grants, although in most cases this is zero percent. In total, most independent schools receive only 38% of the per-pupil funding given by government to other types of school authority. However, the Alberta government funds 'special needs' and 'Early Childhood Services' (kindergarten) students in independent schools at 100% of the grant given to equivalent students in public or separate schools. Since independent schools receive a fraction of the total funding available to other school authorities, most find it necessary to charge tuition.⁴³ In 2003, the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA) reported that 24% of independent schools charged tuition of less than

³⁹ The North-Central Division's document "Confessionnalité Des Écoles" contains "Directives Générales", of which numbers 4 and 5 lay out how Catholic students in the division's non-Catholic schools, as well as non-Catholic students in the division's Catholic schools, are to be treated (Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord, 2003). The individual Catholic schools have similar guidelines (see, for example, École Maurice Lavallée, n.d., and École La-Prairie, n.d.).

⁴⁰ In *Adler v. Ontario* (1996), the courts affirmed the right of independent schools to exist and decided that while Ontario government funding was constitutionally permitted, it was not required. In *Richard B. v. Children's Aid Society* (1995) the courts reaffirmed the right of parents to educate their children according to their religious beliefs, and further connected this claim with section 2(a) of the *Charter*, which guarantees freedom of religion. In a non-binding decision in 1996, the United Nations ruled that Canada's requirement that Roman Catholic and not other religious schools be funded was discriminatory (*Arieh Waldman v. Canada*, 1999).

⁴¹ Bergen has private school enrolment (excluding schools for the handicapped and language schools) fluctuating between 1.3% and 2.3% from 1919-1982 (1982, p. 323). Since then it has increased slightly to around 3%.

⁴² Statistics from Alberta Learning Professional Development and Certification Branch, cited in AISCA, 2002, 67.

⁴³ Other significant sources of income for independent schools include private donations and fund-raising events.

\$2000, 36% charged between \$2000 and \$4000, and 40% charged more than \$4000 (AISCA, n.d.).⁴⁴ Although this certainly makes independent schooling expensive,⁴⁵ Kachur notes, “Alberta’s private schools are readily accessible to middle income groups and are not the domain of the rich and famous, as is usually the stereotype” (1999, 10).⁴⁶

The independent schools that are not faith-based are either ECS schools, special needs schools (e.g. Heartland Agency and Renfrew Educational Services Society), philosophical schools (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, and the Progressive Academy based on L. Ron Hubbard’s writings), or academic schools (e.g. Rundle College consortium, Tempo School, and West Island College). Various independent schools are aimed at aboriginal students, particularly young adults wanting to complete high school.⁴⁷

Among the faith-based schools, diverse traditions understand the role of faith in schooling in different ways—ranging from religious observances, morality, religion courses, to permutation and the integration of faith and schooling. Of the 107 faith-based independent schools, 14 belong to the Calvinist-oriented Prairie Association of Christian Schools (PACS)⁴⁸ and served 3150 students in 2001-2002. The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), an evangelical grouping, lists 22 schools with a total of 5845 students.⁴⁹ Three schools, with combined enrolment of 1218, were members of both PACS and ACSI. The Alberta Provincial Accelerated Christian Education Association (APACEA), has seven member schools with 1157 students. APACEA schools use the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum, a conservative Christian program of studies designed in the United States.⁵⁰ There are eleven Seventh Day Adventist Schools with 776 students, five Lutheran schools with 641 students, six schools associated with non-CSI Reformed traditions with 1237 students, two Mennonite schools with 214 students, and nine other Protestant schools with 1164 students. Interestingly, there are seven independent Catholic schools with 423 students.⁵¹ There are also three independent Jewish Schools (451 students), two Islamic Schools (1002 students), and a Punjabi Cultural school (Sikh) (34 students). All of these schools are accredited and partially publicly funded.

Independent schools that are neither funded nor accredited are classified as “registered” independent schools. They must allow monitoring by the Minister (for details see Alberta Learning, 2002b, 3-5). Ten “registered” faith-based schools, mostly Mennonite, educate 367 students.

Finally, since ECS (kindergarten) in Alberta may also be run independent of existing schools, a number of ECS programs are operated as free-standing faith-based schools. In addition to ECS programs run by other faith-based independent schools, therefore, another 233 students (of the total

⁴⁴ The Private School Task Force of 1998, found that 25% charged less than \$2000, 52% between \$2000 and \$4000, and 23% more than \$4000.

⁴⁵ Some independent schools, however, offer special tuition assistance and reduced rates for low-income families.

⁴⁶ Also see “Private schools not just for rich” (2001), and “Private schools belie stereotype” (2001).

⁴⁷ The Blue Quills First Nations College, Chief Shot Both Sides School, Maskwachees Cultural College, Red Crow Community College, and Old Sun Community College are categorised by Alberta Learning as independent schools. Most First Nations Schools on reserves are categorised as Federal Schools while most community colleges are seen as Provincial schools.

⁴⁸ For PACS see <http://www.paocs.ca>. PACS is a member of Christian Schools International (CSI) see <http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=2831>.

⁴⁹ For ACSI see <http://www.acsi.org>.

⁵⁰ For ACE schools, see <http://www.aceministries.com>.

⁵¹ The Bosco Homes Society for Children and Adolescence, which runs four small schools for students “who struggle with emotional, psychiatric, behavioural and learning difficulties”, is counted here as Catholic. It is often referred to as a Catholic organization (see, for example, Catholic Canada, n.d.; also see Gonzales, 1999).

2827 students in free-standing ECS programs) are schooled in 10 free-standing faith-based schools, including Mennonite, Salvation Army, and Khalsa (Sikh) ECS schools.⁵²

In 2001-2002, one hundred and seven of Alberta's 327 independent schools are faith-based.⁵³ Thus, 17,908 of the 28,851 independent school students received a faith-based schooling.

VII. HOME EDUCATION, DISTANCE LEARNING, AND FAITH

The Alberta government also officially recognises and partially funds home education as part of the Alberta school system. In 1988, the government amended the School Act to allow homeschooling and to enable parents to choose to affiliate with either a local school board or an authority outside their home district. The Government began offering per pupil grants for home education in 1983 [date?]. Generally, these grants are split between the family and the affiliated school board (Wagner, 1998, 219). In 2001-2002, 13,076 students in Alberta received home education (Alberta Learning 2003c).⁵⁴

The majority of parents choose home education for, in part, religious reasons. A recent study of home education in Canada (Van Pelt, 2003) reveals that about 85% of parents gave "Ability to teach child particular beliefs and values" as one of their initial reasons for homeschooling. About 73% of parents gave "More directly influence moral environment" as one of their reasons, and about 59% identified "Ability to teach from a particular worldview" (The remaining reasons were supported by less parents) (49).

Gerald Hiebert, president of the Alberta Home Education Association, noted in 2000 that "Parents practising fundamental and evangelical religions are by far the largest group to opt for home schooling" ("Number of Alberta's," 2000). He states, "Parents want to raise their children with Judeo-Christian values that they feel are not being upheld in the public school system." Van Pelt's study confirms this observation, showing that just over 83% of homeschooling parents in Canada chose "Protestant Christian" as their religious preference. An additional 9.5% were Roman Catholic while a smaller percentage preferred Buddhist, Jew, Latter-Day Saint, Muslim, and New Age (2003, 40). In comparison, the 2001 Census reports only 29.2% of the Canadian population identified themselves as Protestant while 43.2% selected Catholic (Statistics Canada, 2001, 8).

The major provincial association for home-schooling parents, the Alberta Home Education Association, is a Christian group. Many home education students are registered with faith-based schools e.g. Trinity Christian School in Grand Centre had registered well over a thousand home education students.

Remarkably, a number of public boards also register, and offer resources for, faith-based home education. Edmonton Public Schools' "Argyll Centre," for example, offers faith-based home education programs on the internet as does the Pembina School District's "Alberta Distance Learning Centre."⁵⁵ Over 2000 home educators choose to link to "Christian based Programming" provided by Edmonton Public's Argyll Centre (Unland, 2000). This programming "adheres to a traditional home-schooling approach with advice and supervision by district teachers. The reference materials and resources used are recognised by the Christian community as acceptable resources" ("Edmonton's wide array," 2001). Recently, Edmonton Public added the "Christian LearnNet" to its regular on-line LearnNet. It

⁵² As with all independent schools, these differ in what the religious affiliation means in the classroom. The ECS school run by the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, for example, is not to promote the Catholic faith, but to provide English as a second language skills to new immigrants.

⁵³ Schools are counted as faith-based if they are religiously identified or are under the auspices of a religiously identified group. Most are the former, where the schools' *raison d'être* has to do with a particular faith tradition. An example of the latter is Concordia High School's high school completion program as it is under the auspices of the Lutheran Church – Canada.

⁵⁴ Ralph Hathaway (2001) reports 12,349 students registered with various home programs in 2000-2001. For Alberta Virtual School Links, see <http://www.quasar.ualberta.ca/edit489/edpy489Links.html>.

⁵⁵ "The focus of ADLC's Christian program is to train students in the ways of God. The Bible forms the manual for this program and for life" (Alberta Distance Learning Centre, n.d.).

advertises that “Argyll teachers sensitive to Christian perspectives and values are responsible for 100% of the child’s educational program” (Edmonton Public Schools, 2001-2002b, 5).⁵⁶ Pembina School District’s “Alberta Distance Learning Centre” runs a nondenominational Christian Alternative Program since 2001. Teachers in this program “promote a Bible based Christian view in all subject areas.” Furthermore, the website promises, “Teacher’s notes, comments and grading will be based on a Christian foundation” and “all instruction will meet the Alberta Program of Studies” (Alberta Distance Learning Centre, n.d.).

Catholic home schoolers can also turn for services to “St. Gabriel Cyber school” which is a joint initiative of St. Albert, Red Deer and Medicine Hat Catholic Boards. This cyber school, with 184 students, “is founded on a faith-based philosophy and endeavours to share the Christian faith with its students and families” (St. Gabriel Cyber School, n.d.). The East Central Catholic Board runs another Catholic distance program, the “School of Hope,” which serves 1792 students.

In 2001-2002, 13,076 students in Alberta received home education (Alberta Learning 2003c). Home education students, must register with a school authority, and are counted with the school authorities with which they have registered. This may have the effect of under estimating the number of students receiving faith-based schooling, because parents may not register with a faith-based school authority but still intend to home school for faith-based reasons. Since the majority of studies of home education find that parents select this option for religious reasons, it is reasonable to assume a high percentage of these home schooled students received faith-based schooling.⁵⁷

VIII. ABORIGINAL ON-RESERVE SCHOOLS AND FAITH

Schooling of aboriginal students in Canada has a complex and often sad history. In particular, the damage done by residential schools, often run by Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, or Presbyterian churches and religious orders, has been well documented.⁵⁸ There are 44 First Nations, in three treaty areas, in Alberta. They are divided among 124 reserves across the province (“First Nations,” 2001). In 2001-2002, there were 48 federally funded schools for aboriginal students on reserves in Alberta that educated over 8,500 students. The local First Nation band council operates the schools on reserves, under the legal auspices of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (Krasaukas 2004).

In 1867, the *Constitution Act*, Section 91 (24) gave the federal government exclusive right to legislate for Indians. The *Indian Act* sets out a number of provisions for the schooling of aboriginal peoples. Adopted in 1876, the *Indian Act* allowed for Protestant and Roman Catholic schools on reserves (s. 118, 120, 121) and offered limited freedom of choice for parents. The majority of a band could “determine the religious denomination of teachers in the reserve school, but the religious minority may establish a separate school if the minister approves.” Today, most reserve schools are “Nondenominational” (Bezeau, 2002, chap.5; see Chalmers 1972).

A recent government document says that 40% of First Nations students in the provinces attend schools under provincial jurisdiction, and nearly all First Nations students in the territories attend territorial schools (Minister’s National Working Group on Education, 2002, 37). The number of aboriginal students in 2001-2002 that received off-reserve schooling offered by provincial school authorities are included in the above categories. The Edmonton Public School Board, for example, estimated in 2002 that between eight and ten thousand aboriginal students attended its schools (Simons, 2002a). Some attend Edmonton Public Schools’ alternative programs geared towards aboriginal students, such as, the Amiskwacy and Awasis programs [which both have some faith-based elements

⁵⁶ Also see the High School registration guide (Edmonton Public Schools, 2001-2002a), which includes the course ED 2000, a “Bible centred program which uses Christian materials...” (13).

⁵⁷ We do not estimate this number, however, to avoid double counting some of these students.

⁵⁸ For a detailed history of residential schools in Canada, see Miller (1999). A longer treatment of the same themes is in Miller (1996).

in their programs]. Thousands of aboriginal students also attend non-specific public school programs including faith-based programs.⁵⁹ Edmonton Catholic Schools also runs a number of schools and programs such as Ben Calf Robe school (see Hryciuk, 2001). A significant number of aboriginal students also attend private/independent schools, including high school completion programs at community colleges (classified by Alberta Learning as Private/Independent schools). Provincial schools, which cover the category of community colleges, also serve numerous aboriginal students.

In the 2001-2002 school year, Alberta Learning reported that 8,556 aboriginal students attended on-reserve First Nations schools funded by the federal government. Although most of these schools are now nondenominational, a number offer elements of faith-based schooling according to traditional aboriginal as well as various Christian views.⁶⁰

Conclusion

The seven categories of school authority examined above suggest that by 2001-2002, Alberta's school system had evolved far beyond its initial 1905 model of a single uniform *non-sectarian public school system*, possibly flanked by a *minority denominational district*. Alberta's school system allowed and/or enabled some forms of faith-based schooling to occur in all but the charter school type of authority. Furthermore, Alberta's system allowed a variety of faiths—versions of Protestant, Catholic, aboriginal, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and other faiths and philosophies—to offer distinctive approaches to schooling to Albertan students.

As a province of just over 3 million people in 2001-2002, Alberta had 551,156 students attending the four public authorities that are funded by the provincial government, including 418,030 students studying with public school boards, 126,977 with separate denominational school boards, 3,279 in Francophone schools, and 2,870 students enrolled in charter schools. About 20,842 students attend independent schools that qualify for partial government funding. Another 13,076 students receive home education. Finally, 8,556 aboriginal students attended federally funded, First Nations schools on reserves across Alberta.

In total, 159,206 Alberta students were receiving some form of faith-based education in 2001-2002. Of these students, 131,488 were in Catholic programs.⁶¹ The percentage of Alberta students in Catholic schools has increased from 17.2% of the student population in 1980-1981 to 22% in [?] 2001-2002.⁶² A further 27,718 students attended non-Catholic faith-based schools and programs.⁶³

This article further concludes that the Alberta school system/regime on the question of religion and schooling has evolved, that these changes are significant, and furthermore that the current system no longer corresponds to any existing or historical Canadian model of relating faith and schooling. Therefore, we conclude that Alberta's system should be reclassified as a new type of regime not previously seen in Canada. While the backbone of the structure of Alberta's school system remains *non-sectarian public schools with minority denominational districts*, the wide variety of forms of

⁵⁹ For example __ % in St. Paul district, with its variety of faith based schooling, are aboriginal. Also see, Northlands school district __% are aboriginal, and a number of schools seem to include faith practices.

⁶⁰ We have not yet found studies that report the number of students receiving faith-based schooling in on reserve schools.

⁶¹ This number includes the 7,701 students studying in the Greater St. Albert Regional Division's Catholic public system, the 120,483 students enrolled in separate Catholic school districts, the Catholic students studying in the blended public-separate system in St. Paul (975 elementary and approximately 250 secondary students), 1,656 students studying in Francophone schools that identify themselves as Catholic in their mission or vision statements, as well as the 423 students studying in Catholic independent schools.

⁶² According to Bergen (1982, 323), Separate school districts enrolled 17.2 percent of the student population in 1980-1981.

⁶³ This number includes the 450 students studying in de facto reserved public schools for geographically concentrated faith groups, the 3,109 students studying in de facto reserved Hutterite schools, the 5,886 students studying in faith-based alternative schools in "secular" public districts, 180 students studying in the Logos alternative schools of St. Albert's Protestant separate school district, the 510 Protestant and 98 Mennonite students studying in the blended public-separate system in St. Paul, as well as the 17,485 students studying in non-Catholic independent schools.

schooling within the overall Alberta system, as well as the variety of religious, ideological, and philosophical approaches found within provincial schools, suggest the advent of a new school model. Although this model has evolved pragmatically and contains much inconsistency, the Alberta school system can best be classified today as *pragmatic public pluriformity in schooling*. The overall public face of the system has become pluriform, both by including many structural types and by including many confessional and philosophical approaches. The model Alberta has de facto developed into a *pragmatic public pluriformity in schooling*. The challenge facing Alberta is to reshape its system into a consistent, principle-based system, that is, to recognize that freedom, participation, tolerance, justice, equity and mutual respect for all are the best foundations for a *principled public pluriformity in schooling*.

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