

National Update: Education & Independent Schools

*By Harry Moes, Education Policy Consultant for ARPA Canada
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During the last two weeks of August I travelled to Ontario to meet with education leaders, public advocacy groups and ARPA staff. It was an intense and time-consuming orientation, and, at the same time, a very rewarding, stimulating and transparent time of sharing of challenges and baseline convictions.

Central to all visits and connections was the joyful conviction that our children, considered in Christ, are members of God's family, that their spirituality is taken seriously, and that the integrity of their faith is treated with respect. Among our school communities, there is agreement that in all of life mankind is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Matters of curriculum content and delivery continues to have the attention of school constituencies in all provinces. The ARPA Team was commended for its helpful perspective, its publications, and assistance to parents, teachers, students and boards in their public engagement concerning matters of faith and identity in Jesus Christ.

As you are likely aware from the mainstream media, we are seeing new challenges arise in BC and Alberta.

In British Columbia, Bill 27, Human Rights Code Amendment Act, 2016, was passed to include "gender identity or expression" among the protected grounds covered by the Code. The Ministry of Education asked all schools, public and independent, to be in compliance with the updated code. The Federation of Independent School Associations (FISA) continues to be in contact with the Ministry ensuring that the voice of independent faith based schools is heard, respected and honoured. ARPA staff continues to consult with school administrations and boards during this time of reflective review. The Reformed schools in British Columbia have committed to work together and draft a united response.

In Alberta, Bill 10, which allows students to create gay-straight alliances in any school, remains a matter of deep concern. The Minister of Education has established an inquiry into the matter of the Edmonton Independent Baptist Christian Education Society's (operating Harvest Baptist Academy and Meadows Baptist Academy) refusal to be in compliance. ARPA is closely monitoring this development and is in regular contact with schools and stakeholders throughout the province.

Also in Alberta, school administrations and boards, understand the crisis of our times, and like the Babylonian exiles of the past, continue to ask the question “How then shall we live?” There is an understanding that we need to be a people that remain faithful to God’s revealed word and a people that publicly communicates truth with grace in the public arena.

Who knows more about the marvelous works of God than His own people do? If we remain silent, how can we expect our neighbours to see what He has done? We should never be ashamed to glorify God, by telling what we know and feel He has done. Men and women should be delighted at having opportunities to share from their own experiences. Those that honour God, God will honour in turn; if we are willing to talk of His marvelous deeds, God will give us enough to talk about. *“Stars without light render no praise, and Christians without light rob the Lord of His glory. However small our beam, we must not hide it: if we cannot be sun or moon, we must aim to be one of the stars of light, and our every twinkling must be to the honour of our Lord”* (Spurgeon).

As we educate, equip, and encourage Reformed Christians, may we be “like men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”

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Harry Moes started as ARPA’s Education Policy Consultant in September. This is a part-time, contract position. He is responsible for keeping the Reformed community informed about political and policy developments in provincial education systems, specifically in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario. He is also responsible for building relationships with these provincial governments in order to advocate for parental authority and responsibility, freedom of religion and association, and parental choice in education, among other things.

Harry is well equipped to take on this role, with decades of experience as a teacher and principal, with over thirty years working with the BC Ministry of Education in their school evaluations, and through serving on the board of the Federation of Independent School Association (FISA) for the past eleven years.

Harry and his wife Martha live in Langley, BC. Harry can be reached at harry@arpacanada.ca and 778-927-9770.