



January 12, 2016

**Re: ReThink Charter Academy's Application for Charter Status**

Hello Mark,

Knowing me as long and as well as you have, you will both understand and appreciate my deep disappointment in the Department's decision to "decline" the application for ReThink Charter Academy, a Grade 3-9 charter school for students with learning disabilities, to be located here, in Calgary. As we move forward to communicate this decision to our many committed stakeholders, I wonder if you could help me better answer the anticipated avalanche of questions that will arise from our parents, community and university partners.

ReThink's philosophy is based on the intersection of attachment theory, ecological theory and mind-brain science, with a significant wrap-around service for families. As the Minister's letter indicates that such a program already exists, could you please tell me the location/name of the existing program so that we can better direct parents?

As well, the second aspect of the ReThink Charter was that of a professional learning centre for pre- and in/service teachers to build capacity for supporting the diverse population of learners that currently exist within classrooms. In working with our university and other school partners, we wonder where we might direct them in order to access this professional learning? It would seem from the letter that the Department has knowledge of this professional learning service already being in place.

Thirdly, in respect of the notion of charter schools fulfilling their role as centres of research and innovation, ReThink had proposed to do exactly that by implementing the TriOptimal Learning Model. The letter from Education Minister Eggen is correct - there is no body of research on this approach to teaching students with learning disabilities. There is, however, significant research (cited in the final application) to support attachment theory, ecological theory and mind-brain science as effective approaches in and of themselves for supporting student learning and development. The research and innovation in ReThink lies in connecting evidence-based practice in these three areas to provide a holistic learning experience for students and families. As this approach is not currently available in any school, it seemed "innovative" to us. In addition, to align with Alberta Education's mandate to be research-based and innovative, ReThink has established a research partnership to implement a longitudinal study on the efficacy of the TriOptimal Learning Model to track students for 10 years and also build the efficacy of the model. Could you help us explain to our research partners what Alberta Education's expectations / definitions are for "research and innovation"?

The ReThink team wants to be respectful, truthful and helpful to stakeholders as we bring this discouraging news to them and I hope that you are able to help us manage the anger, despair

and disappointment at our program not being offered within the public realm. Our families do not have the wherewithal to pay exorbitant tuitions and a public charter school was a "dream come true" for them.

At a time when statistics indicate a dire need for programs such as the one ReThink proposed, we are at a complete loss to believe that our government would not act in support of some of this province's most vulnerable learners.

I am available to meet with you at your convenience. Thank you in advance for your assistance, and look forward to any insights or advice that you can offer.

Sincerely,

Judy Gray  
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