

## 2022-23 ACSTA Government Relations Plan

### 2023 ACSTA Government Relations Priorities:

1. Maintain non-partisan government support for publicly-funded Catholic education in its current form.
  - *Desired Outcome(s)*:
    1. Public statements of support from both parties.
    2. Regular meetings and correspondences with key targets (identified in the second section of this document, below).
    3. Establishment of a 'separate school liaison' position within the Education Ministry.
  - *Rationale*: This is a constant objective for ACSTA, and a large part of our purpose for being. We need to ensure that both parties see the value in having a publicly-funded Catholic education system in Alberta in order to ensure long-term continuation of the system. We need to therefore educate all those who are or could be in positions of power and influence in government as to our constitutionally-protected denominational school rights, but especially the value we provide to Albertan society as a whole.
  - *Source Directive(s)*: This objective is derived from ACSTA's Mission Statement and Core Purpose, Strategic Initiative 1, 2 & 3, as well as Strategic Plan § A, B, C, D & E.
  
2. Advocate for fair public funding for transportation to get students to Catholic schools; specifically, transportation funding should follow the student.
  - *Desired Outcome*: Establishment of a provincial transportation policy for education in which public funding follows the student (irrespective of division boundaries).
  - *Rationale*: Many of our divisions - especially rural - are having access problems due to the transportation funding structure for education in this province; out-of-boundary students do not receive provincial transportation funding. 'School of Choice' fees are charged by public divisions, which are paid for either by the Catholic division (which pulls money out of classrooms) or the families themselves (for some of whom this is a deterrent – especially for low-income families and/or those families with multiple children). Families who choose to send their children to public schools do not face this barrier to access their school of choice, and so the de facto result is a kind of discrimination or injustice against those Albertans who would choose Catholic education for their children. Finally, while the historic solution to this problem has always been for Catholics to form new districts, the formation process has in recent years become more contentious and political, and our community is having difficulty in successfully completing the process (i.e. Minister not approving 6 divisions in Edson, political interference in Athabasca, unformed majority Catholic areas, etc). There is, at the same time, momentum building within the UCP caucus for the province to provide transportation funding to independent and charter schools via some form of 'voucher', which begs the question: why wouldn't Catholic school students outside of formed areas receive the same treatment? Furthermore, it would be desirable for us to advocate on this – alongside charter and independent schools – as a 'school of choice' issue *generally* (as opposed to simply a Catholic v. public division dispute). It is an opportune moment to

advocate for a 'funding follows the student' provincial policy, and we may not get another chance at this for years.

- *Source Directive(s)*: This objective is derived from ACSTA's Vision Statement ("That all have access to a publicly-funded Catholic education"), Strategic Imperatives I ("Single Voice") and III ("Unified Direction"), as well as § B, C & D of the Strategic Plan.

### 3. Advocate for a streamlining of the formation process to allow for more rapid school division expansion; i.e. Catholic enfranchisement:

- *Desired Outcome*: The administrative process for formations is streamlined to enfranchise all Catholics who reside in areas where children have access to Catholic education.
- *Rationale*: Catholics outside of formed areas are only allowed to vote and run in public trustee elections. Currently, the formation process is onerous and can be very contentious; there is little to no support from government for the process, and Catholic divisions are unable to assist in any way. Kevin Feehan wrote in 1999 that the 4x4 formation process was not constitutionally required, but is rather an outdated administrative procedure that may no longer be appropriate to our current context. In fact, the process is now proving to be obstructive (Edson, Athabasca, majority Catholic areas). This objective should follow from the second – unless the transportation policy change fails, advocating for a change to the formation process will simply be a case for enfranchisement of Catholics living in areas where kids already have access to Catholic schools, and so should be less contentious (if the transportation policy objective fails then it will be a more confrontational effort to gain access, possibly to the disadvantage of public divisions). If we are successful in obtaining the transportation policy, follow-up on that with formation will cement our gains should the province ever try to reverse or backtrack from the policy.
- *Source Directive(s)*: ACSTA Mission and Vision Statements. Strategic Initiative 1, 2, 3. Strategic Plan § A, B, C

### Key Targets:

- MLAs
  - Sitting MLAs
  - Nominated Candidates
- Cabinet
  - Education, Justice, Municipal Affairs, and Finance Ministers
  - Premier's Office
- Political Staffers
  - Chiefs of Staff, advisors to the Premier
  - Target Ministries: Education, Justice, Municipal Affairs, Finance.
- Civil Service (esp ADM)
  - Target Ministries: Education, Justice, Municipal Affairs, Finance.
  - Especially: bureaucrats involved in transportation, curriculum, formations, education property taxes, constitutional law, etc.

**2023 Engagement Opportunities, Agents, and Method Table:**

GR Opp	Date Responsible Agent(s)
2022 UCP Leadership Race	July 20 - October 6, 2022 The <b>ACSTA Executive</b> (supported by the <b>ACSTA Administration</b> ), met with candidates to introduce ACSTA, Catholic education in Alberta, and candidates' education priorities.
NDP/UCP Annual General Meetings	October 21-23, 2022 The <b>ACSTA Administration</b> attended both AGMs and introduced ACSTA and Catholic education in Alberta, identified key players and internal party dynamics.
MLA Candidate Nominations	Present - early Spring 2023  <b>Board Directors</b> (ideally, all <b>Catholic trustees</b> ) should monitor local constituency association nomination races. Attend local public forums, introduce themselves to nominated candidates, and forward provincial as well as local government relations priorities. Complete reporting form and return to <b>ACSTA Administration</b> (which will collate and analyze provincial data).
Lobby Day at the Legislature	TBD in conjunction with the Speaker's office  <b>ACSTA Administration</b> is to reach out to the Speaker's Office to begin planning a date and place for the event. The <b>ACSTA Executive</b> will be present and provide remarks. The <b>ACSTA Directors</b> should all be present, and ideally as many <b>Catholic Trustees</b> should be there as possible. Support from the <b>Alberta Bishops</b> (in leading prayer, Mass, speaking) as well as <b>GrACE</b> (in identifying speakers to testify to the value and distinction of Catholic education) would also be quite valuable.
Party Platforms Development	Present - early Spring 2023  <b>ACSTA Executive</b> (supported by <b>ACSTA Administration</b> ) is to engage the Education Minister, as well as related Ministers (Finance, etc) and Charter as well as Independent school

	associations to encourage the development of a 'funding follows the student' provincial transportation policy.
2023 Provincial Election Campaign	May 2023 (election date is set to be held on May 29, 2023) <b>ACSTA Administration</b> is to observe candidates carefully for comments in support of, or antagonist to, publicly-funded Catholic education in Alberta (and provide responses as required).

Cabinet Appointments	June 2023 <b>ACSTA Executive</b> (supported by <b>ACSTA Administration</b> ) is to engage the new government Premier and all Cabinet Ministers with portfolios relevant to Catholic education to establish relations and an awareness of ACSTA as well as Catholic education in Alberta more generally.
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Annual  
MLA-Board Meeting

**Board** should meet at least once per year with every MLA with a riding that falls within their division boundaries. Engagement should include ACSTA advocacy priorities (see above) *as well as* local and non-Catholic advocacy. **ACSTA Administration** is to provide a meeting template, supporting guide, and meeting report form to every school board vis-a-vis the **ACSTA Directors**. **ACSTA Directors** will complete and submit their report form back to the **ACSTA Administration**, which will then collate and analyze provincial data, reporting back to the **ACSTA Board of Directors** on an annual basis..

**Messaging**  
July-December 2023 Every **Catholic School**

1. "Maintain non-partisan government support for publicly-funded Catholic education in its

current form.”

a. Target Audience - UCP

- i. Catholic education is the only form of alternative education that is constitutionally-protected; **the separate system is therefore the backbone of school choice** in Alberta (provinces without protections for separate schools tend to have less choice in education more generally - i.e. Quebec, Newfoundland, Manitoba).
- ii. **Albertans’ taxes should support an education system that is compatible with their faith**; our publicly-funded school system provides faith-based education for a large minority of Albertans, helping to maintain our province’s pluralistic social fabric.
- iii. **Our schools recognize parents as the primary educators** of their children, in accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

b. Target Audience – NDP

- i. Catholic schools are **Safe and Caring Schools**; Catholic school divisions score relatively high in terms of how safe students report feeling at school.
- ii. The **academic quality** of Catholic schools is high. This is in accordance with the requirement of Canon Law that “instruction which is given in them is at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area” (Can. 806 § 2).
- iii. The constitutional protections on separate and francophone school boards help **ensure that public education receives sufficient funding from the province** in that, if education were systematically underfunded, separate school boards could re-assert their right to fully fund their own schools via the education property tax.
- iv. Along with indigenous and francophone rights, the constitutional protection on Catholic education belongs to a set of **minority rights in Canada which are there to protect vulnerable communities** from discrimination. All three groups are still significant minorities today, and are identified explicitly in the 1982 *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. There is significant legal precedent at the highest levels in this country supporting the rights of minorities, which constitute the foundation of our highly pluralistic society.
- v. Article 26 of the UN’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which states that “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”. Publicly-funded separate schools are one of the key ways in which Alberta can demonstrate an adherence to the **norms and expectations of the global community at the intersection between human rights and education**.

2. “Advocate for fair public funding for transportation to get students to Catholic schools; specifically, transportation funding should follow the student.”

a. Target Audience - UCP

- i. The UCP party has demonstrated continuity in support of choice in education. **School choice is a fundamental human right**, and the Catholic Church intrinsically believes that it is the right of all parents, as the primary educators of their children, to choose an education for their children which corresponds with their own convictions (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2229).
- ii. Choice in education, however, is limited insofar as physical access to the school (i.e. transportation) is limited. Notwithstanding this, some Albertan families who want their children to attend Catholic schools face **unjust barriers to access** (formation, fees, etc). The constitutional right to Catholic education should not be obstructed by bussing policy.
- iii. The Catholic Church is the largest and oldest non-governmental provider of education in the world: **we are not afraid to compete** on an even playing field with other schools of choice. In fact, it is a matter of Canon Law that a Catholic school “must be at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area” (Can. 806 § 2). So, our schools already face internal pressure to remain competitive – in fact, they *are* generally of similar to superior quality.

b. Target Audience – NDP

- i. The current transportation arrangement is resulting in separate school divisions having to use money intended for the classroom and the education of students to go towards bussing fees. This is creating **economic disparities for Catholic school educators and their students**.
- ii. Separate school divisions are seeking nothing more than fair treatment. Currently, families who choose public schools for their children do not face the same financial hurdles as those with children in separate schools. **The status quo constitutes a form of discrimination**.
- iii. Charter-protected minority rights obligate the province to provide equitable funding in education. Transportation funding regulations should not create a way for the government to bypass its **obligation to equitably fund public education**.

3. “Advocate for changes to the formation process to allow for more rapid school division expansion; i.e. Catholic enfranchisement.”

a. Target Audience - UCP

- i. The **4x4 formation process is an archaic administrative process that is** unfairly burdensome for Catholics who seek to access the separate school system; there must be an alternate process that is streamlined to better facilitate school choice for Albertans.
- ii. We have recently started encountering **obstructive political elements throughout the formation process that are aimed at restricting**

- access** to Catholic education in Alberta; this is contrary to the intent of the democratic process, and steps must be taken to secure its integrity.
- iii. Without a fair process and a level playing field, the constitutionally protected right to Catholic education could be ‘hollowed-out’, which would not only be **legally problematic, but also harmful to school choice and the overall social fabric of our province.**
- b. **Target Audience – NDP**
- i. The **4x4 formation process is an archaic administrative process that poses a discriminatory barrier** (i.e. “School of Choice” fees) to accessing publicly-funded education for Catholic Albertans as a religious minority community; the same kinds of barriers to access do not exist for non-Catholic public schools. There must be an alternate process that is streamlined that will not unfairly burden Catholic minorities.
  - ii. Those who choose a Catholic education for their children should have a say in the governance of the system. Enfranchisement, however, in terms of the election and/or candidacy of separate school trustees, is dependent upon residency within a formed area. The current 4x4 **formation process constitutes an impediment to democratic governance** of our schools.

**Government Relations Communication Tips and Examples for Catholic Trustees**

There are some common challenges we encounter in conducting government relations:

1. Diminishing or sidelining our input by labeling it as being outside our mandate.
2. A characterization of Catholic ed as (for all intents and purposes) identical to the non-Catholic public system.
3. Disinterest in Catholic education related concerns as outside the priorities of the party.

To overcome these challenges, we should strive to relate every point, suggestion, question, and response to our distinct Catholic identity and approach to education.

Permeation is a key concept for Catholic education (it is wrong for us to compartmentalize our faith) and so everything we have to say about education relates back to our faith. If at all possible, an optimal response will simultaneously appeal to the ideological leanings of the candidate.

Neutral **Catholic Lens** **Catholic Lens** & **UCP**

**Audience**

**Catholic Lens** &

**NDP Audience**

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realizing their constitutional protected right to Catholic education.”  
 bussing system is incentivizing public divisions to actively prevent Catholic families from realizing their constitutional protected right to Catholic education, which is needlessly expensive and detrimental to school choice.  
 for separate schools. The current bussing system is incurring discriminatory fees on students and their families, imposing barriers to public education, and taking money out of the classroom.

“Curriculum is a concern. There should be more consultation and it should be implemented at a slower pace.”

“Curriculum is a particular concern for Catholic schools. We would like to see more consultation, because if we cannot

“Curriculum is a particular concern for our faith-based schools. We would like to see more

“Curriculum is a particular concern for our separate schools. We would like to see more

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	with our Catholic permeate curriculum with our Catholic faith it could infringe on our constitutionally protected right to Catholic education.” protected right to Catholic education, which is the root of choice in education in this province.”	incompatible with the values of our community then it could come into conflict with the minority protections provided by the Charter.”
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<p>“Trusteeship is an important component of our education system.”</p>	<p>“Trusteeship is particularly important for Catholic education. We cannot ensure the Catholicity of our schools without the ability to govern them ourselves.”</p>	<p>“Trusteeship is particularly important for Catholic education as a separate, faith-based system. We cannot ensure the Catholicity of our schools if the province were to centralize the governance of our education system.”</p>	<p>“Trusteeship is particularly important for our community’s separate schools. We cannot ensure our minority rights are protected if Alberta were to disenfranchise us of our local democratic system.”</p>
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<p>“Publicly-funded Catholic education in its current form is a valued and integral part of the education system in the province of Alberta.”</p>	<p>“Publicly-funded Catholic education in Alberta <b>has been in existence before the province of Alberta was formed. Our current form of Catholic education delivers superior results for students in regards to safe and caring measures due to our adherence to Catholic ideals and top notch academic</b></p>	<p>“Publicly-funded Catholic education in Alberta <b>has been in existence before the province of Alberta was formed. Our current form of Catholic education delivers superior results for students in regards to safe and caring measures due to our adherence to Catholic ideals and</b></p>	<p>“Consistent with the values of our community, publicly-funded separate schools not only <b>deliver education that exceeds the provincial average, but also yield superior results for students in regards to safe and caring measures. The Charter protections</b></p>
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	<p>top-notch academic performance as well. Therefore Catholic education is a valued and integral part of the education system in the province of Alberta.”</p> <p>Catholic schools are the original and largest “school of choice” option in Alberta. Therefore Catholic education is a valued and integral part of the education system in the province of Alberta.”</p> <p>on our schools are foundational for the protection of minority rights in Alberta. Therefore, Catholic education is a valued and integral part of the pluralistic educational mosaic</p>
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	<p>system in the province of Alberta.”</p> <p>in the province of Alberta.”</p>
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“The current system of district formation complicates and may hinder the formation of new Catholic school districts.”  
**The right to choose Catholic education**

**is constitutionally protected in Alberta.** There needs to be less onerous ways of forming a separate school district than the 4x4 process. The current system of district formation complicates and

may hinder the formation of new Catholic school districts. **The right to choose Catholic education is constitutionally protected in Alberta.** There needs to be a less restrictively

**regulated way of forming a separate school district than the 4x4 process.** The current system of district formation complicates and may hinder the formation of new Catholic school districts. **This**

is in direct conflict with the UCP commitment to school of choice.

The right to choose Catholic education

is protected in Alberta by the 1982 Charter. The 4x4 formation process is outdated and, since public school

districts do not need to use this process, it is experienced as a kind of overtly systemic form of

discrimination against a minority community.

## Meeting Template for Catholic Trustees Engaging MLAs:

### 1. Personal Introductions

- Try to find personal connections through common acquaintances, concerns, etc.

### 2. Introduction to ACSTA (try to get through this in ~2-3 minutes):

- Our history...
  - 1st Catholic school in AB was at Lac St. Anne (1859, Grey Nuns)
  - ACSTA was founded in 1966.
- Who/what is ACSTA...
  - 24 school districts (including NWT, Yukon & 4 AB francophone boards)
  - Each district has 1 rep on the Board
  - Membership elects a Pres & VP every 2 years
  - More than 183,500 students in Catholic schools in AB, Yukon & NWT
  - More than 20% of Albertan students are educated in Catholic schools
- What do we do?
  - External advocacy: ACSTA is the interface between AB gov and our peer organizations at the provincial level (ASBA, ATA, Ministry of Education, etc)
  - Internal advocacy: We also engage extensively with internal partners (i.e. CCSSA & Bishops of Alberta), and conduct advocacy work internally (i.e. SPICE & Blueprints, Catholic Education Week)

### 3. Introduction to the Candidate:

- What is their background?
  - Do they have any particular interest/expertise/convictions regarding education? - They may offer to share their own faith background or lack thereof - important to note. - What is their knowledge of and relationship to Catholic education, generally? - Did they attend a Catholic school growing up?
    - Do they have any children, friends in the school system?
    - Are they familiar with the Catholic board(s) in their riding?

### 4. What is the candidate's vision for education in Alberta?

★ KEY QUESTION: Does the candidate support publicly-funded Catholic education in Alberta in its current form?

- What is their understanding of the constitutional right to Catholic education? - What kinds of education-related policies are they committed to, considering, or exploring? - ID anything that *could* relate to Catholic ed. Make notes of these for immediate follow-up should they become Premier. Explain the potential impact for Catholic education to the candidate.

### 5. Other Key Topics of Conversation

## **6. Thank the candidate for their time**

- Arrange to touch base again after the election.
- Ensure you have contact information (and staff/campaign manager contact info). - Send a thank-you letter to them after the meeting, reiterating some of the key discussion points.