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## David Eggen's homeschool closure unfair to parents

If a public school appeared to have mismanaged some of its money, but was providing a good education for its students, would Alberta Education Minister David Eggen shut the school down? Without warning? In the middle of the semester? Not likely.

Even if the school had only 300 students, or fewer, Minister Eggen would not inconvenience those parents, students and teachers.

Yet this is exactly what Minister Eggen has done to Trinity Christian School, which has over 3,500 students. Without warning, in the middle of the semester, Minister Eggen informed Trinity on October 25th that its accreditation and funding were withdrawn, effective immediately. The parents of these 3,500 Trinity kids are suddenly without a school for their children.

Trinity is not a regular public school. Rather, Trinity supervises home schooling for over 3,500 students across Alberta, through the Wisdom Home Schooling Society. This non-profit Society has been providing resources to parents for over 20 years, with the full knowledge and approval of Alberta Education. There is no secrecy here. The Society serves parents who educate their children at home, at a fraction of what it costs taxpayers for Alberta's public schools. Public schools in Alberta cost taxpayers about \$10,000 per student per year, in contrast to a home-schooling grant of less than \$1,700 per student per year. The Minister claims to shut down Trinity "out of respect for taxpayers." This is rather laughable: if these 3,500 students go to public schools, it will cost taxpayers an extra \$29 million per year.

Money aside, home schooling is a good option for many parents and children, for many different reasons. Alberta and other provinces have generally respected the freedom of parents to choose home schooling as the kind of education that they think is best for their own children. This accords with both the International Declaration of Human Rights and Canada's legal obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Alberta Education accuses Trinity of not meeting accountability standards, including financial accountability. In the absence of problems with kids learning what they are

supposed to learn, why address financial accountability issues by shutting down the school entirely? Why not put Trinity and the Society on probation? Why not appoint an auditor as interim manager for the remainder of the school year, so 3,500 children can continue learning without interruption?

Since the government's October 25 announcement, parents are quickly discovering that other boards are not able to take on new students. Budgets were set, teachers were hired, and decisions were made, in August and September. Yet Alberta Education now states that it "feels" that other school authorities "should" be able to absorb all 3,500 home-educated students.

This past summer, Alberta Education was fully aware of the fact that the Society was providing the home-schooling services to parents, rather than Trinity doing this itself. If this was truly a problem (as is now claimed), the government could have shut down Trinity and the Society in July. Instead, the government told Trinity to continue with business as usual. Shutting down a school in late October, based on reasons of which the government was aware in July, is a shocking abuse of power.

David Eggen loves to trumpet his commitment to a "welcoming, caring, respectful and safe" learning environment. But closing Trinity's doors is not welcoming. Abruptly terminating students' education is not caring. Imposing an extreme measure when reasonable alternatives are available is not respectful. And sending 3,500 students to look for placements which don't exist isn't safe.

Unless this decision to shut down Trinity is actually a stealth attack on home-schooling, it makes no sense for Minister Eggen to proceed further with this aggressive and unnecessary decision. He has the power to reverse it, and should do so.

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