The Impact and Capacity of Alberta Charter Schools in Changing Contexts – 16 Years On

A Draft Research Proposal Submitted for Review by:

The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools

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Faculty of Education
University of Calgary
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1.0 The Impact of Alberta Charter Schools in Changing Contexts - 15 years on

In 1996, the first Alberta Charter Schools were established in Alberta. Since the opening of eleven charter schools throughout the province in that initial year, the charter schools have remained a small, but sustainable movement within the broader school choice initiatives offered in Alberta. As of spring 2012, thirteen charter schools provide various educational mandates alongside other alternative educational provisions within the public school districts, with the majority located in the two major urban centers of Edmonton and Calgary.

An initial study conducted by Bosetti et al. (2000) looked at the opportunities and challenges of creating charter schools in Alberta with a particular emphasis on the micro-perspectives of parents and teachers within each of the charter schools. A subsequent study in 2002 considered charter schools (Da Costa, Peters and Violato, 2002). Further numerous studies have been conducted within individual charter schools over the last fifteen years, but with a clear emphasis at the micro-level within each of the particular charter schools. Little subsequent research has been conducted at the macro-level considering the organization in a holistic and complex manner in which it is situated against the larger Alberta educational landscape.

While much charter school research has been conducted in the United States, the development and implementation of Alberta charter schools suggest different contextual opportunities, issues and barriers that may not parallel some of the American charter school research (Weil, 2009). Despite numerous studies conducted over the past twenty years in the United States, and the initial studies conducted on Alberta charter schools (Bosetti, 2000; Da Costa et. al. 2002), a need exists in 2012 to consider the impact and capacities of the constellation of Alberta Charter Schools. This is especially important in light of proposed legislation to increase the expansion and purview of charter schools within the broader alternative provision of education choice throughout the province. At the cusp of change, this proposal offers the Alberta Charter School Association a strong foundation of evidence about the context and qualities of their system as a solid foundation for building capacity in a changing environment.

2.0 Purpose of Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the impact that Alberta charter schools make as a set of schools or as a system of schools in Alberta today. Specifically, three central questions frame the research:

1 The number of current charters is thirteen, although some charters have multiple campuses, multi-grades, which together comprise of twenty charter schools.
2 For a complete list of the internal research projects that have been conducted in Alberta’s charter schools, please see: http://www.taapcs.ca/
1) What are the current impacts of the Alberta Charter School system, in terms of:
   a. the capacity and autonomy of its collaborative networks spanning individual, school and school community networks
      i. the potentials and capacities of the system to innovate and to adapt?

2) What impacts have charter schools created in the broader public education systems in Alberta?

3) What strengths and opportunities for change exist at all levels in this school system?

Embedded within these three overarching questions, we consider the strategies, priorities, activities and mandates that give rise to the extent to which charter schools have influenced education both internal within their particular institutions, but more broadly, the ways in which charter schools have connected and created networks of learning/educational opportunities with other major educational stakeholders in the province. This study explores the people and their network of relations to build a knowledge base for understanding what their capabilities are today and what their potentials are to change with time.

3.0 Literature and Conceptual Framework

The Context of School and School System Change: The contexts of our Alberta Charter Schools are changing. Since the first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992, the charter school movement has grown in the USA to more than 5,277 schools operating nationwide in 2010 – 2011, serving 1.7 million students (NCSRC, 2012). Over a 1.3 children attend Cyber Charter Schools (online) in the USA, growing 30% each year (Kowch, 2009). Since the first charter school in Alberta opened in 1994, 13 schools exist today with an enrolment of 8,100 students and a “long waiting list” an “extreme demand” (Gray, 2012) for access to the Charter School System (Lukaszuk, 2012; Alberta Education, 2012).

The education policy environment is shifting in Alberta. With legislation changes currently on the table, this has significant implications on the number and size of Charter Schools in the province, Alberta could see its Charter School expansion rise as significantly as it in other countries. If we understand the contexts of our complex organizations first, we can next define their qualities from a whole-system perspective to build on their capabilities (Cilliers, 2000; Reigeluth & Duffy, 2008). Knowing the contexts and qualities of any changing complex organization environment allows us to interpret and to define critical potentials and capacities for change via these charter school stakeholders and their networks of collaborations (Goldstein et al., 2010). This proposal is to define the contexts and qualities of Alberta Charter Schools, specifically identifying their capacity to organize as relatively autonomous entities with specific potentials impacting their likelihood for adaptation in a changing world.

3.1 Minding Simultaneous Micro, Meso and Macro Level Change in Education Systems

Our concept of education change and the capabilities of education systems to change are changing rapidly (Davis & Sumara, 2008). In the fast-changing world of education today leaders need the evidence and the means for conceptualizing and enacting change by using well understood, well contextualized whole-system ways of thinking. Recently, systemic change and complexity thinking has emerged
promising more than “piecemeal” change thinking in education systems that otherwise continue struggle because “whole systems views” were just “too complex” (Reigeluth & Duffy, 2008).

Charter Schools leaders know well that changes that leaders make in one part of the education system impact the entire system (Kowch, 2009) - so a whole-system view of education organizations a new and critical mindset everyone must develop (Levin, 2010). At a micro level, change forces impact individuals in our education systems (demographics, students, parents, teachers, family). At a meso level, these forces directly impact our school institutions (schools, school associations and school networks) along with policy and regulation frameworks. At a macro level, different forces shape plans and issues we consider for change (legislation, history, economics, demographic, social conscience, governance). At a macro level, Charter Schools are changes in a part of the broader education system. In 1998, Bosetti found, “Charter Schools have become a wedge to leverage change in the public education system, rather than a dynamic alternative in the education system” (Little Hoover Commission, 1996; p.6). This is a call to systemic change, and a call to see how integrated Charter school people, partners, community and relationships are, and in what ways they are strong or need improvement.

From a good knowledge base of an organization’s capabilities, people and relationships, we can study change efforts and measure the gains made from them in the future.

3.2 A Shift in School Leadership Thinking –Conceptualizing Adaptable Education People & Collaboration

When we review the trajectory of education leadership, we must consider that our schools will be characterized by a mixture of constant change, relationships in learning, capacities to organize and lead learning will be within the context of our overall capacity to collaborate and to innovate in more flexible, holistic ways within the ecosystem that holds all stakeholders (Kowch, 2009; Fullan, 2011). Today our schools exist with a mixture of (essential) ideologies, cultures, beliefs and people found along the shifting continua of conflict and necessary tensions. Leaders need to have evidence of, and to understand those elements and dynamics in all their complexity that include a knowledge base about: the people; relationships and capacities in our schools to see how they get learning done; how they achieve community goals, and; how they transform and innovate education for the knowledge era. Complexity or whole-system thinking allows us to take a ‘snapshot’ of the people and the relational work they do in schools and among them over time and to understand how our ecosystem actually exists in various education projects (Figure 1), not only how we hope it works, how regulations say it works, or how old hierarchical mindsets (Figure 2) prescribe it to work (McLellan, 2010; Levin, 2010). This thinking has emerged from 100 years of education leadership and policy learning where we evolved our thinking about school systems based primarily as a series of reactions to a shortfall of leadership thinking that preceded each new framework (Kowch, 2009). We have changed from a focus on behavior to social systems sensibilities and from that to value-based wider community models for education organizations. Finding that the community models often fell short while they did consider people, values and organization structure, scholars suggested transformation theory based on systems thinking and
then distributed leadership to include more of our entire context (ecosystem) in education settings. They use convenient metaphors of networking, collaboration and shared leadership, but these are not providing sufficient tactical, specific and strategic descriptions or advice for school leaders on the processes and shifting patterns of relations (organization) we know exist in our more partnered, changing schools (Gronn, 2002). The authors of this proposal have used the methods shown here to map relational networks, show their capability to organize and to get work done, and to interpret their dynamic capabilities to handle change and to adapt as complex entities, not as ‘flow charts’ of expected relationships.

All education systems are complex entities that are engaged in constant change, often at the edge of chaos” (Doll et al., 2005), so we need flexible structure models that involve both the important people and the collaborations they do to understand how organizations develop (emerge), transform and get things done. Mitchell & Sackney suggest going beyond community frames to describe, benchmark and to consider organizations and leader capacity building as part of an ecosystem of “more flexible structures”(2011).

This shift to thinking in toto about organizations, work, partnering and people in education who are engaged via technology within a more organic and nonlinear way of knowing uncertainty and unpredictability (Goldstein, 2010; Schlechty, 2009; Marion & Uhl-Bein, 2001, Davis, 2004). Today, we can use complexity thinking to map and interpret the people, their various kinds of links to one another and the work they do across school systems at the micro, meso and macro levels (Kowch, 2003) all at once to provide a robust, new form of organization description, analysis and capacity-for-change interpretation (Kowch, 2009; Kowch, 2007; Kowch, 2012 in press). In concert with traditional lenses for interpreting administration, instruction and curriculum, finance and governance contexts, we can interpret those findings in a new knowledge base to offer suggestions and answers to questions that arise.

Not long ago it was simply too difficult to describe and interpret the many attributes of people and of peoples’ changing relationships in complex systems/organizations all at once. Powerful new computing allows us to study the patterns of seemingly incredibly complicated (but actually complex) influence relations, organizing issues and other features that can tell us much more about the context and dynamics of whole-system changes beyond micro (personal) and meso (institutional) frames than social models alone (2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Cilliers, 2000). Understanding these complex relations is
possible, but it takes a new set of ideas. For example, Figure 2 indicates how people *actually shared influence to get work done* in a $1.2M shared service innovation across southern Alberta (Kowch, 2007b).

Ironically, these particular leaders didn’t know many of the influential (other) participants and *all* of the leaders thought they organized themselves according to the structuralist flow-chart model they designed (Figure 1) when in truth, the work was done as in Figure 2. The result was a less flexible, bureaucratic network where teachers and vendors stood apart from the central administration clusters. This is because the network organized itself (with complete freedom to do otherwise) as classical bureaucratic hierarchy (Figure 2).

Relative to its size, the Alberta Charter school system could experience more change in the next decade than it has seen in its history - and far more change than any other education system in the province. Alternative school systems have the potential to realize the kinds of nimble change in learning that most systems only dream about – but knowing their contexts and their capability for change is the most important first step in that transformation (Kowch, 2009). If we can describe well who we are as people, schools and school systems/communities, we know who we are, and who we depend upon, and how we interplay ideas and work (collaborate), we are on more solid ground for building capacity for any future no matter how uncertain (Cilliers, 2000). Change is certain.

First, we must understand the people, their relationships and their patterns of collaboration within, perhaps among and beyond the traditional ‘school’ institutional boundaries (Cilliers, 2000; Kowch, 2007). We describe what actually happens, not what is thought to happen.

### 3.3 Identifying a System’s Capacity to Organize Itself

If we see organization as an interconnected web of people working on something that brings them together (an attractor), we have tools by which we can interpret the aggregate abilities of these people to get work done (to organize their interests, to make decisions) (Kowch, 2007). Getting work done
together in a complex organization (that learns) means also having the capacity to make decisions or to organize interests not as a hierarchical structures per se, rather as relational networks.

Only a handful of education leadership scholars closely examine complex organization relational “networks” beyond the use of such a “convenient” metaphor, as we have said. But empirical studies are emerging to describe and analyze the ability, type and potential of relational (leader networks) (Kowch, 2003; 2005, 2007; 2009). By adding the dimension of interest organization capacity for our working networks, (Figure 1) we can characterize emergent learning system potentials for emergence (system wide change) to get work done.

Kowch (2003) demonstrated that the complex emergence of ideas and policy networks across large institutions and political ecologies across entire states could be defined, interpreted and predicted using network and policy theory to identify six characteristics of high capacity networks (Kowch, 2005; 2007; 2009):

1. a clear concept of role in collective work
2. a supporting value system.
3. a unique, professional ethos in the field.
4. a capability to generate information internally
5. a capability to maintain cohesion
6. a capability to organize and manage complex tasks, leading toward the creation of a response
7. a capability to rise above self interest

Complex school organization analysis, using powerful new computer software will allow the attributes of the people in the Charter School networks to be interpreted along with the attributes of their relationships (ties), letting us analyze for personal or relationship characteristics anywhere in the collaborations that we find. The ability of a distributed or decentralized school system to work collectively or independently depends on the organization’s autonomy or relative “freedom” to create and act as a high capacity network as well (Atkinson & Coleman, 1996), and we account for that in this description and analysis technique (Kowch, 2003; 2007; 2012).

An important feature in collaborative work is the motivation or attractor that brings people together to get things done (Cilliers, 2000). To describe and create a knowledge base for the Charter Schools in Alberta as grounds for leading future change, we must first understand what attractors (assumptions, values, actions) the capacity of these schools to organize interests, we must understand first their autonomy to get work done (Atkinson & Coleman, 1996; Goldstein, 2010). We will find the attractors that keep the school and community (and system) networks ‘connected’ on the important issues/work of the day that we find. In this way, we have critical information about who works with whom, why they work with one another, and we collect a lot of relational data as well on the ties between people such to identify how they work together: (1) type of relationship (bureaucratic, technical, friendship, influence, respect, knowledge sharing); (2) the resonance of the relationship (strengths), (3) the reciprocity of the link (is it reflexive or one-way) and many other features (Kowch, 2007; Wasserman,
Using advanced social and policy network analysis with network analysis software (Sentinel Virtualizer), we can understand the contexts and dynamics of Charter School collaborations integrating people and their emergent structures. From this, we can interpret features of: organization, readiness for change, collaboration constraints and enablers (both personal and structural/relational) and more.

In sum, it is important to understand who works with whom and why, what those relationships are like, and how the micro, meso and macro level systems organize key interests across and among Charter Schools in Alberta. The aggregate description we can achieve, through the use of complex systems thinking models generated by University of Calgary scholars, will provide a strong foundation for analyses of the contexts and qualities of the Charter School System. Specifically, the impacts of the Charter School system will be examined.

### 3.4 Identifying A school or School System’s Aggregate Potential to Innovate and Adapt

The structure of an organization depicted as a complex network of interconnections can be analyzed by powerful computer software in concert with advanced data visualization software. The discovery of certain features among the people (particularly the leaders) and their relationships helps us understand if the system is changing, and what level of change it’s in.

By taking a close look at diversity across the networks (ideologies, shared values, leadership approaches, shared abilities, instruction approaches) in concert with recording how well people can share specialized work (like teaching or leading), we can establish the stage of emergence of the organization of networked individuals (Goldstein, 2012, Kowch, 2012 in press). This gives us a direct knowledge base about the state of the organization in terms of the arc of 4 transformation stage. Goldstein, Hazy & Lichtenstein (2010) offer ground breaking research showing the four sequential stages of emergence exhibited by complex organizations: (1) disequilibrium; (2) amplification; (3) recombination and (4) stabilizing feedback. In the disequilibrium stage people have uncertain information and expectations that don’t match the context of the organization. An example would be when teachers know a new curriculum is coming this year but the district buys the old textbooks. In this stage, things start to ‘shake’, and opportunity tensions arises as people struggle with the difference between the information they have about the organization to imagine what is necessary for the organization to survive.

In the amplification stage, stresses turn to (necessary) conflict among system participants and the degree of specialization (diversity and redundancy) creates the seeds for experiments and novelty creations “at the cusp of change” as people try to fix the organization’s problems (Kowch, 2012, in press). Using the previous example, the creation of a district wide support network for school psychologists involving teachers, parents and learners in the previous case would be the result of such innovation. This can be a loosely connected, effective process focused where the needs are (this is how emergency response teams are organized). If innovations do not happen, the system can become chaotic and simply disintegrate.

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If we find a system in one stage or another, we know what stage is next, or what a fall-back change scenario (previous step) would look like. In Phase I of this study, we propose to clearly describe the stage of development of Alberta Charter Schools and the network dynamics of these schools in aggregate – to form a baseline from which future change at any level (micro, meso, macro) can affect the network – and how. If we study the innovations in the system, we can also determine another element in the “readiness for transformation” measurements – indicating what to do to move the system “to the next level”. This model is a knowledge baseline for predicting / planning future change in the Alberta Charter Schools System.

3.5 A Suggested Conceptual Framework for the Proposed Study

This proposal is to measure, define, analyze and report a clear snapshot of the people and organizing found among complex school, school system and school communities among the Charter Schools of Alberta. It will give clear, baseline descriptions of the people, their collaborative networks, their capacity to get things done, key issues, system change characteristics and strengths and the strengths and weaknesses in traditional school systems: Planning, Administration, Governance, Finance and Curriculum / Instruction following a deep scan/interpretation of all schools’ 2012 Evaluation reports (Levin, 2010).

This is Phase I in an overall research design where in Phase II we suggest looking more deeply into the critical issues that emerge in Phase I as they interest the leaders in the Alberta Charter Schools. With the baseline information about people and the organization in Phase I, we are building a basis for studying the impact of changes to any part(s) of the Alberta Charter School system, and for predicting impacts of micro (personnel), meso (school and community level) and macro (policy, regulation, economic, political) change factors. Phase II, building on Phase I, allows us to interpret and assist in the design of specific changes to one part (or all parts) of the system and to predict outcomes to a degree.

The following conceptual framework summarizes the literature review, and indicates what we will do for the Charter Schools of Alberta in Phase I of the study (this proposal).

For the environmental scan (Research Question 3), we will thematically sort findings from each school (using the 2012 Evaluation or the newest Evaluation) into the five major categories for school leadership outlined by Levin (2010) (1) administration, (2) governance, (3) Economics and Finance, (4) Curriculum and instruction and (5) planning. We will then do a content analysis and use axial coding to identify emergent themes across all the schools (cases) and by coding to scan for key issues or attractors in the system that we will also check for in the interviews: (1) organizing perspectives; (2) autonomy; (3) innovation; (4) finance and economics; (5) policy and politics; (6) accountability; (7) access; (8) equity and (9) innovations. These features will be necessary to design the semi structured interview questions for research questions 1 (capacity) and 2(potential for change, innovation).
## Conceptual Framework for the Proposed Charter Schools Study (Phase I)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What We Are Doing For You</th>
<th>Related Research Question</th>
<th>Features of interest</th>
<th>Theorist/Grounds</th>
<th>Impact/Results</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create a knowledge base of the Dynamics of Alberta Charter Schools/Systems to collaborate and organize as networks. These are design parameters for your near and long term organization /structural development and planning. This question addresses: In what ways are the parts and the whole system ready to organize future change/innovation?</td>
<td>1. (a) What is the capacity and autonomy of the schools/system to organize its core interests?</td>
<td>• School and school system autonomy, people, organizational entities, attractors (common pressing issues and goals), their patterns of relationships, the characteristics of their relationships vis a vis the autonomy they have in their contexts.</td>
<td>Scott, 2000; Kowch, 2003; Cleeg et al., 2011; Wasserman, 2005; Granovetter, 2003; Atkinson &amp; Coleman, 1996; Gereluk, 2006; Bosetti &amp; Gereluk, 2012</td>
<td>Identification of the entities (ie: Governments, School Districts, ATA) and their connections, values, people and issues drawing people together to collaborate in and across Alberta Charter Schools. This will offer an initial description and analysis of the impacts of these dynamic networks of people and their relationships (organization) across Charter Schools within their stakeholder environment (today).</td>
<td>Critical Baseline Information for system planning: Knowing how school(s)/system would likely organize plans/ actions for future change in or across the Alberta Charter Schools/system.</td>
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<td>Provide a description and analysis of the likelihood of schools/systems to change the way they organize. A discovery of how significant innovations occur in schools/across the system. These are design parameters for near term planning, particularly for strategic innovations. This question addresses: In what ways are the parts and the whole system most capable to organize change/innovation?</td>
<td>1. (a)(i). What are the potentials of these schools/systems to innovate and to adapt?</td>
<td>• Professional specializations, diversity (ideologies, values, leadership approaches, shared abilities, instruction).</td>
<td>Cillers, 2000; Kowch, 2012; Kowch, 2012 in press; Goldstein et al., 2010; Davis &amp; Sumara, 2006; Hallinger, 2002; McKinsey, 2010</td>
<td>Identification of the relative potential of schools/systems to transform/change.</td>
<td>Present the likelihood and type of school(s)/system engagement in future planning/actions of specific kinds. Critical baseline information about individual schools and about the collective system: knowing the likelihood of parts or the whole system to engage in systemic change, knowing the likelihood of specific (school/system) innovations (to succeed).</td>
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<td>Describe and analyze the political, social and accountability issues felt by those “out there” in the Charter Schools. This question addresses: At the macro level, where do Charter Schools and their communities/networks have significant leverage, and why?</td>
<td>2. What impacts have charter schools created in the broader public systems in Alberta?</td>
<td>Socio-political themes&lt;br&gt;• Student and family access to education&lt;br&gt;• Equity&lt;br&gt;• Accountability&lt;br&gt;• Socio-political impacts&lt;br&gt;Pedagogic implications&lt;br&gt;• Innovation&lt;br&gt;• Dissemination of good practice&lt;br&gt;Presence of charter schools in public sphere: public media&lt;br&gt;• Key educational associations (ATA, CASS, ASBA...)</td>
<td>Atkinson &amp; Coleman, 1996&lt;br&gt;Bosetti 2000&lt;br&gt;Taylor, 2001&lt;br&gt;DaCosta et al 2002&lt;br&gt;Levin, 2001&lt;br&gt;Bosetti &amp; Gereluk, 2012</td>
<td>In comparison to previous studies (Bosetti, 1998; others found), general and significant changes to these features will be identified.</td>
<td>In Phase I, collect data from key stakeholders within and beyond the Alberta Charter School movement and in the broader education community to identify emergent themes, key issues and challenges found within and across systems.</td>
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<td>Scan and review of recent Charter School Evaluations and Research done on each school in the system. Snapshot/Analysis. Thematic content analysis of the major themes, issues, interests and concerns/plans reported across the system in 7 categories – to be triangulated against the interview findings. This question addresses: What system issues and strengths exist overall?</td>
<td>3. What strengths and opportunities for change exist at all levels (micro, meso, macro) in this school system?</td>
<td>1. Compliance: Provincial Requirements (met?)&lt;br&gt;2. Compliance: Terms &amp; Conditions of Charter&lt;br&gt;3. Engagement and Effectiveness Assessment by: Parents, teachers, community.&lt;br&gt;4. Financial viability&lt;br&gt;5. Innovation: Shared effective student learning practices&lt;br&gt;6. Governance: Effective?&lt;br&gt;7. Administration: Effective?</td>
<td>Levin, 2010; Hargreaves et al., 2011; Alberta Education, 2011; Schlechty, 2009; Hargreaves &amp; Fink, 2006; Hallinger, 2002; Hargreaves &amp; Shirley, 2009; OECD, 2001; McKinsey, 2010</td>
<td>A thematic content analysis of the Charter School evaluation reports will yield important system attractors (common issues of deep interest by people across the system) for use in designing the instruments to create the system capacity and potentials study (Question 1).&lt;br&gt;As well, an aggregate analysis of the strengths and weaknesses, per these 7 features, across the Alberta Charter School System will create a baseline of these (assessment) information parameters for use in the next study (Phase II), focusing on change issues and innovation issues found and identified here or by Charter School Leadership.</td>
<td>An aggregate knowledge base from school assessment features (per Evaluation reports), indicating areas for improvement or celebration.</td>
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<td>Critical for the design of instruments for Phase I study (Questions 1 and 2). Findings from this aggregate scan offer the key themes, issues or attractors/goals facing Charter Schools. We will analyze how all7 features shape the actual or desired impacts (Question 2) held by the people in this school system. This information will be important as a background for Phase II study, which will &quot;zoom in&quot; on specific innovations or change responses that School or Leadership may consider for system direction-setting.</td>
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**4.0 Methodology**

The proposed study will be framed by a complexity systems theory perspective focusing on both the relationships and collaborations existing among the people and organizations engaged in dynamic, adaptive Charter School system education. Using experience with past complex education systems studies and education innovation studies in Alberta, we suggest a comparative instrumental multiple case study for Phase I. This allows deep and multidimensional description of individual (micro), school (meso) and system (macro) phenomenon or contexts, along with the dynamics of those networks, so that they can be aggregated in different ways, should these items overlap or interconnect, at any or all of these levels (Kowch, 2007; Stake, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2001). The final system analysis will aggregate all data from all case for a system level view of capabilities and potentials.

Phase II would involve a new design to probe deeply into specific organization and personnel responses to change, or to investigate key challenges and opportunities found from the deep description of the Alberta Charter Schools Phase I study.

**5.0 Methods**

A need for a common knowledge base about Charter schools in Alberta has been found by our cursory environmental scan of existing research and published documents on the TAAPCS site. The proposed study will develop strong baseline information and organization models at the school and aggregate (all schools) level. Baseline data will also (research question 3) include aggregate thematic analysis of the most recent Charter School evaluation reports that have been conducted in order for school charters to be renewed. As well, we will review all recent research findings from research conducted in the schools in question 3. As such, a baseline knowledge base of issues and ‘state of the union’ research results will provide a platform from which to interpret the impact of the charter schools in areas of strength and opportunity, based on individual, school and aggregate Charter School network community knowledge. Based on the Charter Schools Regulation, comparative analysis of the cases will be conducted among the schools to identify common areas of strength and improvement.

After seeking consent by each school, we will use a case approach to explore the capabilities and features of each Charter School and the people working on a common issue of importance, as it is found from an initial conversation with the Principal.
The following research method protocol outlines the timeline for the major methods used in this proposed study.

- **July 1, 2012.** Ethics Application submitted to CFREB.
- **August 1st.** AERA proposal to present initial findings of the study.
- **August 30th.** CFREB (University of Calgary) Ethics approval attained.
- **September 15th.** Informed consent sent to Schools and TAAPSCS, back by Oct 15th.
- **September 1st.** Instruments developed for the Environmental Scan of 13 Charter School recent Evaluation reports and any TAAPSCS research completed.
- **Sept 1st.** Graduate student hired and trained to collect and code Enviro Scan documents.
- **Oct 15th.** Environmental Scan coding done. Purchase 4 iPods for digital interviewing.
- **Oct 15th.** Purchase of Sentinel Visualizer Network Analysis software, training of 2nd graduate student begins. Purchase (2) high-speed laptops, 2 HD disks for data and analysis.
- **Nov 1st.** Analysis of Environmental Scan complete, semi structured interview questions for 13 schools and TAAPSCS in design using Enviro Scan parameters.
- **Dec 15th.** Semi structured interviews designed.
- **Feb 15th:** Field interviews begin in the following manner using referential sampling technique (Gall, Borg & Gall, 2004): (1) school principal is asked to identify and rank 3 others who are important to her/him in work addressing the main issue the school is focusing on right now (self-defined). 1.5 hour semi structured interview is recorded with interview field notes. Interview the top referent in each case, expect 7-10 per school. Sampling ends when the network is saturated (no new referent names). Add TAAPSCS interviews (Exec Director) if not yet referred. Train grad students to use Sentinel Visualizer relational database.
- **April 1st.** All interviews complete (13 schools x 10 per school = 130 interviews). Transcription (verbatim) of digitally recorded interviews is ongoing since Feb 20th. Train grad students for coding exercise. Sent to participants for verification. Returned by April 30th.
- **April 15th.** Co-Present Project Design and Conceptual Framework at AERA, San Francisco.
- **May 15th.** All transcripts completed, coding under way.
- **June 15th.** All coding done, loading data for people and relationships into network analysis relational database.
- **July 15th.** All data loaded, analysis begins.
- **Sept 1st.** Analysis complete. Reporting begins.
- **October 1.** Propose results dissemination to CSSE in May, 2014.
- **Nov 1st.** Report complete. Presentation to sponsors at a venue of their choice.
- **Jan 1, 2014.** Two peer reviewed articles will be submitted for consideration: Canadian Journal of Education, Journal of School Choice
- **May, 2014.** Dissemination of results at major national conference, CSSE, Toronto. Include one sponsor from TAAPSCS
### 6.0 Proposed Budget:

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<tr>
<th>Expense Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Justification and Detail</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Student Salary</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>36480</td>
<td>19 mths 12hr/wk @ $40/hr** incl benefits, coding, instrument design, enviroscan coding reporting, analyses.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interview Transcription</strong></td>
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<td>3900</td>
<td>130 intvws @ 60 min. x 1.5 hrs per xcript @ $20/hr</td>
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<td><strong>Travel to Charter Schools</strong></td>
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<td>4485</td>
<td>Drive to 130 interviews Avg 75km ret.@0.46/km</td>
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<td>per diem</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>15 days at $45 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dissemination</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AERA Ann. Confce.</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>3 or 4 ppl to San Francisco 3 days : D Gereluk, E Kowch and (2) TAAPCS sponsor(s) + 2 Papers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office Supplies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mail</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>contents/verifying interview transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>Current research on broader charter school research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies other</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>Sundries (paper, printer ink, stamps, binders, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equipment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3600 for data load and analysis 1 for gradst 1 for profs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>backup discs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>300 Safety / security for clients / data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2499 Sentinel Visualizer Network Analysis software 1 site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ipod recorders</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>597 for interview recording (est. 130 interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>57908</td>
<td>Say 58,000 this is very reasonable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* To minimize cost, we propose one Sentinel Visualizer software license. Only one edition of this advanced network analysis/knowledge base software can exist on one machine, and that machine must be very fast-faster than existing U of C faculty or research machines. These researchers propose to share these laptops with the graduate student for this (very large) data-load and system analysis work.

** in keeping with the University and Graduate Student Association (GSA) and U of C Senate Agreement, 2012
7.0 References


