



The Alberta  
Teachers' Association

# Position Papers

# Administration of Schools

[1985, revised 1994, 1996, 2004, 2016]

No administrative function can succeed without a sense of purpose. While the school has been and continues to be subject to competing demands, its primary purpose is to provide educational benefits to students. This rationale forms the basis for administrative activity, for the organization of the structures, roles and processes required to realize the potential of every child within the various educational settings of Alberta's public education system.

## The Profession's Vision

The teaching profession has been consistent in its historic espousal of a model of school administration wherein decisions related to the learning needs of students are formulated on a collegial basis. This emphasis on teamwork, on cooperation between professionals, on the free flow of information among all those concerned with the welfare of children is derived from both the experience of the profession and the vision of the school where the unique needs of each child can be best met by informed practitioners.

## The Role of the School Administrator

School administrative structures and processes are the product of a complex interplay of legislative, regulatory and policy dictates on the one hand, and social, community and interpersonal forces on the other. This mix of the formal and informal is ongoing and virtually guarantees that no single administrative style will satisfy constant change. It is for this precise reason that all administrative decisions require a sophisticated knowledge of the mandatory and the permissive with the ability to build consensus around the best approach to educational need. In that the focus of our society's expectations for education is placed on the school, and that provincial responsibility for education expresses itself most clearly by defining the role of that institution, the administrative function therein takes up considerable prominence within the legislative framework. The teaching profession recognizes this fact and enunciates a role for the school administrator: the principal and others most directly involved in working with students and teachers. These role descriptors, expressed through policy, are the product of consultation, deliberation and debate within the profession. Key to the function of the school administrator is the facilitation of teaching and learning through the performance of several roles. These include educational leadership or the capacity to bring about shared vision; collaborative decision making ability; managerial skill; advocacy capability; and intraprofessional collegiality.

The educational leadership role, grounded on beliefs and values, expresses itself in the articulation of a direction for the school through staff and community involvement. It is the role that helps staff and students prepare for the future. It is in this role that instructional leadership is most prominent through the assurance of quality teaching, the development of a climate conducive to student learning and the fostering of staff development. The collaborative decision-making role, wherein the school administrator encourages and develops shared leadership and shared responsibility, requires a number of skills in the areas of facilitating, team building, problem solving, leadership development and the empowerment of others. The management of resources, both human and capital, is a role demanding time and skill that can often be best devoted to other administrative functions. It is in this role that bureaucratic procedures can become excessive and distort genuine efforts to improve situations. The keys to this role are balance and efficiency. Advocacy for the school and public education in the community suggests the abilities to communicate, mediate and resolve conflict. In this role school administrators must be sensitive to political, economic, social and cultural issues which may motivate demands on the school.

## Preparation for the Role of the School Leader

The Alberta Teachers' Association has a responsibility, in collaboration with others, to determine appropriate preparation and ongoing professional development programs for school administrators. The Alberta Teachers' Association believes that mentorship programs that assist teachers and school administrators new to their role should exhibit the following characteristics:

- Are designed for professional growth.
- Are ongoing rather than short term.
- Are appropriately funded to provide participant release time.
- Are based on current research and best practices.
- Are allowed to constitute the participants' professional growth plan.
- Are voluntary rather than compulsory.
- Are sponsored in collaboration with the Association.

The Association role in preparation and ongoing professional development programs for school administration is essential to ensure that the professional perspective of teachers continues to be a foundation for school leadership and the collegial nature of the role permeates the work of school leaders.

## The Collegial Role

Collaboration is the theme of the collegial role, that in which school administrators and teachers work together to provide an educational culture conducive to student learning and teacher professional growth. Among the characteristics of a collegial environment is the recognition by administrators that all professional educators have rights and responsibilities and that administrative tasks are an inherent feature of all professional roles in a school, that the degree of shared responsibility is considerable. Decisions about a school's educational philosophy and objectives and the deployment of staff and resources to realize those objectives are of fundamental importance to the success of schools and must be established by an inclusive process in which the collective voice of all professionals is valued. This mode of decision making also encompasses those major features of a school's operation, such as its program offerings, instructional modes, resource allocations, technology use, student policy and evaluation systems for program, staff and students. Teachers can reasonably expect that a collegial approach will guide any decision having to do with their personal professional responsibilities in a school as well as those of their colleagues. It is within the collegial role in a unified profession that the Association can best take action to protect the role of the administrator as an educational leader who facilitates teaching and learning.

## **School and Community**

School administration increasingly involves responsibilities beyond the student body and professional staff. School councils, health and social agencies, and police and other authorities also have mandates with respect to the educational and other needs of students. Volunteers also provide important services. These and other interactions between school and community take place at numerous points and in various ways. It is imperative, therefore, that school administrators have the authority to speak on behalf of their schools on matters of policy and the right to be included in all district decision making having to do with community liaison. The intensity of their responsibilities requires that principals, in particular, focus their attention on a single school building rather than on multiple structures dispersed throughout various communities.

## **Governance and School Administration**

Historically, governance of the public education system has been acknowledged as a provincial responsibility wherein local need was met through jurisdictional structures. Debates over centralization and decentralization generally involved provincial and school board roles and responsibilities, the assumption being that any devolution of senior government power to local authorities remained strictly within the decision-making authority of the latter. Bureaucratic models dominated resource allocation with little flexibility to meet the needs of individual schools. Within this framework, school-based professionals were incapable of making substantive resource allocation decisions. Much has changed. The consolidation of most Alberta school boards, the centralization of property tax distribution, the policy driven encouragement of school-based resource allocation, the limitation on jurisdiction level administrative growth, the legislated broadening of the principal's role and the expansion of the role of school councils have shifted the focus of public attention to schools. There is, as well, a heightened expectation of performance driven by a provincial government emphasis on accountability. None of these changes, however, diminish the province's responsibility to provide proper funding and to assure that school boards have the capacity to support the program needs of their schools. Administrative processes are not a substitute for adequacy but a means of realizing valid social objectives in a well-resourced education system.

# Curriculum and Student Assessment

[1967, revised 1968, 1970, 1976, 1981, 1988, 1998, 2008, 2018]

Curriculum exists for students. It is concerned with both content knowledge and process. Content refers to what Albertans want students to learn while process refers to how the content is managed in concert with the conceptual knowledge that is built over time from students' prior knowledge and experiences. Curriculum must be characterized by a balance of knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes. It must be organized in a logical and sequential manner while making provision for special interest development. It must encourage critical and creative thinking and provide the student with opportunities to develop the ability to make reasoned judgments. To accomplish this, curriculum in Alberta classrooms should have common subjects and at the same time provide for varying abilities and interests of students through complementary courses and/or optional units within the core subjects.

Student assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process and, as such, must be thoughtfully integrated into the planning and implementation of curriculum as lived experience. Students require timely, constructive feedback to support their learning and development. The teacher is best positioned and most responsible for monitoring and assessing student learning as well as reporting this learning to parents or guardians.

## Role of the Teacher

The Code of Professional Conduct and the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers identify members of the teaching profession as major advocates for the educational welfare of students. Because it is teachers who must translate curriculum into specific learning experiences, teachers must be central figures in curriculum decision making. Decisions concerning objectives, content, interaction and student assessment must be made by sources as close to the students as possible. Classroom teachers are also in the best position to develop assessment strategies that align with the curriculum and address the individual learning needs of students.

It is a teacher's role to facilitate learning experiences of students. Efficient expedition of this role requires the provision by school jurisdictions of adequate time and resources to translate the aims and objectives of curriculum into learning activities that will meet the needs, motivation and capabilities of students. Professional education and teaching experience prepare teachers well for having a major voice at all levels of curriculum decision making.

## Role of Society

Society's primary responsibility is to ensure provision of educational programs and services appropriate to the educational needs of all students. The government of the province, as an agent of society, sets broad aims of education and provides resources to translate these aims into specific objectives; defines the skills, knowledge and attitudes that reflect these aims; and designates those objectives to be included in a common education for all in a democratic society. The government should also provide curriculum guides to assist the teacher in interpreting and meeting the prescribed objectives and provide consultant services and teacher inservice related to new and revised courses of study.

As benefit to the student and society is the primary purpose of education, the government must establish a provincial program, curriculum, and student assessment planning and decisionmaking process that is transparent, continual, orderly and sequential and that provides for the participation of the profession and the public, including a ministerial advisory body on program, curriculum and student assessment. Because of their professional experience and education, teachers must comprise a significant membership on committees and boards dealing with program, curriculum and student assessment matters.

## Relationship Between Curriculum and Student Assessment

Student assessment is an integral part of curriculum development and implementation. Teachers understand the complexity of curriculum, which in Alberta is expressed in the form of learning outcomes. They further recognize that many learning outcomes cannot be assessed using the traditional pencil-and-paper techniques. As such, students must be assessed on the curriculum they have been taught. Classroom teachers design student assessment based on the curriculum that students have been taught. It is unfair and unethical for teachers to assess students on material they have not had the opportunity to learn.

## Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is an integral part of curriculum development and of the total education process and must take into consideration the goals of education, available resources, interaction among curriculum components and contributions of the total program to societal goals and student achievement. Program evaluation should be continual and carried out at all levels of the educational system in the light of accepted educational policy and research and take into account unique characteristics of the school and community served.

Major purposes of program evaluation should be to render school programs more relevant and responsive to changing needs and to examine the adequacy of essential education support services that meets the needs of all students.

## Student Assessment

Information about student learning is gathered for a number of different purposes, using a variety of assessment strategies depending on the purpose. The primary purposes of student assessment are to facilitate the teaching/learning process (formative assessment), diagnose areas of a student's learning strengths and weaknesses, and make decisions about a student's progress (summative assessment). The determination of student progress occurs when a teacher uses the results of assessment and other relevant information to make a decision about the quality, value or worth of a student's response during the learning process or a student's overall performance for placement and reporting purposes.

Large-scale assessment of groups of students is conducted to determine curriculum or program effectiveness, research new ideas and enhance public assurance. Judgments made on the basis of the information gathered and reported in these areas are assessments too, but the assessments are in reference to the performance of the group, not individual students.

In most instances, the assessment of a student or a group of students should be on the basis of the objectives of the curriculum and the student or students' opportunity to learn. The teacher is the professional who understands the factors in the assessment of learning and has a thorough mastery

of subject matter to be assessed. The teacher translates the learning goals into course objectives and selects assessment procedures to reflect the curriculum designed to achieve those goals and objectives. The teacher uses a variety of strategies to recognize differences in teaching methods and in students' abilities, needs and learning styles. These procedures are fair, just and equitable; motivate students; instill confidence in students' abilities to learn and succeed; test a variety of skills; and are consistent with the *Principles of Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada*.

The assessment of student progress is the responsibility of the teacher providing instruction. The role of the provincial government is to facilitate teachers in carrying out their professional responsibility.

## **Standardized Testing and Large-Scale Assessments**

Teachers are opposed to standardized testing, including achievement testing and the growing use of large-scale assessments, when the test is not appropriate to the educational needs of the student and when the results are misused. Standardized tests are developed by people or organizations outside the classroom and administered to a large number of students under standardized conditions. Standardized tests and large-scale assessments generally stand alone and are administered as single assessments. Examples of standardized tests are the provincial achievement tests, commercial tests and the growing number of international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment. The use of standardized tests and international assessments should be limited to the purposes for which these tests have been designed. Typically, standardized-test results should not be combined with results from curriculum assessments because each is designed to understand different aspects of student achievement. As well, the results from a single standardized test should not be used to determine a student's final grade or program placement.

Standardized tests and large-scale assessments become high-stakes tests when the results are used to assess students, teachers and schools or to determine educational funding. When the results of standardized and achievement tests are used in these ways, valuable classroom instructional time may be spent teaching to the test and training students to read multiple-choice tests and complete computer answer sheets. These activities intrude on the instructional process and often distract policy makers from the system-level obstacles to student learning.

## **Curricular Content**

The goals of education reflect perceived needs and expectations of society. Curriculum decisions are made within the context of these goals. It is important that goals determine content. Allowances must be made for variations in curriculum content to reflect the unique needs of communities in general and of students in particular. Thus, a close association among those who set goals, create content and implement curriculum is essential.

Goals for education include possession of respect for self and others; a sense of social responsibility; feelings of selfworth and integrity; and the knowledge, skills (including ethical and living skills) and attitudes required in a democratic society.

The fundamentals in education are those learning experiences that assist students in acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes that contribute to continued learning, social awareness, cognizance of a changing society, responsible citizenship and personal wellbeing.

## **Curriculum Support**

Even with optimal curriculum content and processes in place, attention needs to be given to mechanisms that will support curriculum implementation and optimal teaching and learning. Without adequate funding and resources, the best curriculum becomes difficult to implement. Implementation of a new curriculum requires that draft program and resources are evaluated through a field test, approved programs and resources are available at least eight months prior to implementation and sufficient funding is available for teacher inservice and purchase of approved resources. An important support mechanism for bringing curriculum into students' learning experiences is the provision of library services via libraries and qualified teacher-librarians; these services can bolster all levels of instruction.

In meeting needs of students, considerable attention must be given to those students with exceptionalities. While this may be done through specialized supports and programs, there is an obligation for society to provide the education system with the resources to identify students with diverse needs and, where required, provide professional and other supports required.

## **Conclusion**

Curriculum must be forward thinking and address the growing diversity and complexity of classroom and school communities. It must provide students with those learning experiences that enable them to become knowledgeable, selfdirected, responsible individuals able to adapt to and cope with a complex and rapidly changing society. Its design should ensure development of human relationships, social values, a pride in cultural and Canadian heritage, a sense of ethics, a desire for continued learning and a positive selfimage. A broad range of content knowledge balanced with an opportunity for in-depth learning and considerable resources, personnel and organization are necessary if these objectives are to be met.

Teachers are committed professionals who use assessment to improve learning opportunities for students. They use multiple sources of information to provide for the ongoing assessment and reporting of student progress. As a final word on assessment, the profession maintains that teachers are ultimately responsible, both legally and professionally, for assessing and reporting student progress; that the current emphasis on standardized testing programs does little to address the individual needs of students and diverts precious resources away from the classroom; and that relying on standardized testing programs and international benchmarking to determine school and school-system performance misrepresents the work of teachers and schools.

# Diversity, Equity and Human Rights

[2003, revised 2013]

## Principles, Definitions and Fundamental Elements

A primary role of public education in a democratic society is to foster equity, human rights, social responsibility and justice. The Alberta Teachers' Association is committed to eliminating barriers that prevent people from participating fully in education and society and to fostering understanding, empathy and compassion.

The Association is committed to the principles of respecting diversity, equity and human rights. The Association understands "respect for diversity" to mean adhering to beliefs and practices that demonstrate tolerance; accepting and respecting differences in people and their unique circumstances; recognizing differences as positive attributes around which to build educational experiences; and recognizing the complex and changing nature of individual identities. Rather than something to be managed, diversity is, in the Association's view, an asset that can help create an abundant and productive democracy. The Association understands "equity" to mean treating all people fairly and justly in light of their unique circumstances; ensuring that all people have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential; and ensuring that oppressed and marginalized individuals and groups are included in society and treated fairly. The Association understands "human rights" to mean the equal and inalienable right of all persons to live in a free, just and peaceful society without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socioeconomic background or linguistic background. Supporting human rights also entails recognizing and protecting the inherent dignity of all people at the individual, organizational and public policy levels.

The Association's work in the area of diversity, equity and human rights has four broad goals: (1) to foster the development of a safe and caring, inclusive school culture that provides students with a broad range of educational experiences that reflect the diversity of the community; (2) to ensure that student learning is based on giving all students an equal opportunity to meet high standards, using a curriculum and assessment methods that reflect the diverse nature of knowledge and that draws on differences among people to enrich learning and engaging students as active citizens; (3) to ensure that professional development for teachers encourages them to engage in reflective practice and research, helps them to accommodate diversity in the classroom and helps them understand how social class and power relationships contribute to sexism, racism and other forms of marginalization; and (4) to advocate for a form of educational governance and administration that provide adequate and equitable funding to schools, regards educational funding as an investment in the broader community, uses a broad range of accountability measures that reflect the complex nature of learning and supports research that sheds light on the complex relationships among poverty, racism and all forms of marginalization. These goals recognize the importance of adapting a multifaceted and research-based approach to promoting equity, human rights and respect for diversity.

## Inclusive Learning Communities

The Association believes that schools should be inclusive learning communities. As inclusive learning communities, schools should demonstrate the following characteristics: a respect for diversity, equity and human rights; support for the intellectual, social, physical, emotional and spiritual development of each child; respect for the values of cooperation, trust, caring, sharing, respect and responsibility; a commitment to racial harmony and gender equity; support for Indigenous First Nations, Métis and Inuit education; support for initiatives that address the effect of poverty on children; a commitment to peace, global education and the prevention of violence, support for the development of systemic and sustainable school/family/community partnerships; and provide ongoing professional development and resources that support inclusive learning communities. Schools that have these characteristics are places of empathy and safety in which differences are valued.

The Association fosters the development of schools as inclusive learning communities by supporting teaching practices that promote respect for diversity, equity and human rights; by supporting initiatives that schools, locals, specialist councils and other subgroups take to transform schools into inclusive learning communities; and by building partnerships with organizations that share our commitment to fostering inclusion.

Diversity, equity and human rights efforts can be sustained only through collaboration and principled partnerships. Cooperation among stakeholders and the willingness of government and nongovernmental agencies to share resources are critical.

The Association's Code of Professional Conduct admonishes teachers to respect the dignity and rights of all persons. Prospective teachers should be thoroughly prepared to cope with the increasingly diverse makeup of today's classrooms. Therefore, faculties of education should include and support the principles of diversity, equity and human rights in teacher preparation programs and practices.

The Association supports inclusive learning communities through the establishment of gay-straight alliance groups to create awareness and action that promote the creation of safe learning environments for all students in Alberta high schools.

## Discrimination

The Association opposes any injurious discrimination on the basis of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socioeconomic background or linguistic background. Furthermore, the Association opposes the distribution of material that promotes racial or ethnic intolerance. Local and provincial programs should be developed to help teachers counteract and eliminate stereotyping and injurious discrimination by promoting intercultural respect, understanding and appreciation.

The Association respects single-parent, same-sex, biracial, bicultural, blended, extended, foster and traditional nuclear family units and believes that members of all such families have the right to be free from harassment, discrimination and violence; be treated fairly, equitably and with dignity; have their confidentiality respected; and be valued and affirmed as human beings. The Association also believe that everyone has the right to self-identification and freedom of expression.

The Association opposes all efforts by the Government of Alberta to opt out of any part of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In addition the Association vigorously protests hiring practices by school boards that violate the *Alberta Human Rights Act* or the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Association believes that the Government of Alberta should take stronger action to prevent discrimination. For example, the Government of Alberta should amend the *Alberta Human Rights Act* to include gender identity as an area of protection. The Government of Alberta should also pass legislation that prevents school boards from discriminating against teachers who take part in politics or who are elected to the Legislative Assembly, the House of Commons or any other governing body. Such legislation should also include permission for leaves of absence for campaigning purposes.

## **Respect for Diversity**

### ***Multiculturalism***

The Government of Canada officially adopted a multiculturalism policy in 1971. This policy, which strives to preserve and enhance the cultural diversity of Canadians while working toward equality for all, requires the support of all levels of government and institutions. The Government of Alberta should recognize that all citizens have the right to participate in all aspects of Canadian society. The Government of Alberta should also encourage the development of Alberta's linguistic diversity and multicultural heritage and promote intercultural awareness by developing policies that increase mutual knowledge and understanding of different cultures. Furthermore, the Government of Alberta should develop and prescribe for local approval multicultural education programs that promote intercultural respect, understanding and appreciation. For their part, school boards should ensure that schools are sensitive, in all elements of school culture, to the racial, religious and cultural makeup of their communities.

## **Equity**

### ***Social Justice***

All people should have equal opportunities to benefit socially and economically in society. All students, regardless of their linguistic and cultural background, should have an equal opportunity to achieve their educational potential. Likewise, socioeconomic status should not determine educational opportunities. The Association supports actions intended to improve the economic status of families living in poverty. For example, the Association endorses the concept of a legislated minimum wage.

### ***Gender Equity***

Educators can promote gender equity by encouraging students to participate in educational programs regardless of their gender; by ensuring that responsibilities in school are not assigned on the basis of gender-role stereotypes; by adopting instructional materials and practices that discourage gender-role stereotyping; by using inclusive language in educational materials and in school communications; and by ensuring that career counselling does not promote gender-role stereotyping.

The Association endorses the increased representation of women in educational administration in situations in which underrepresentation has been identified.

### ***Employment Equity***

The Association believes that employment equity is a positive process leading to equal opportunities in education and employment. Accordingly, it endorses the concept of equity in employment for all people without discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, place of residence, age, mental or physical disability, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, employment status of spouse or socioeconomic background. Furthermore, the Association supports employment programs designed to (1) improve conditions for anyone disadvantaged because of discrimination and to (2) promote educational opportunities, professional development and career advancement for underrepresented groups.

## **Human Rights**

The Association believes that human rights education should be integrated into the curriculum.

### ***Rights of the Official Language Minority***

The public and separate school systems are publicly funded and have historical and constitutional legitimacy. The Government of Alberta should support Alberta parents' right to have their children educated in the official language of origin and to have equal opportunity to become fluent in the other official language. The Association endorses the right of the official language minority to manage its own schools within the publicly funded system and believes that the Department of Education should ensure the Association the right, as an equal partner among the stakeholder groups, to participate in defining legislation and regulations governing the management and control of French minority language education by francophones.

### ***Protection of Rights***

A successful education system protects the rights of teachers, students and parents. All education partners share a responsibility for ensuring these rights. The Association attempts to ensure natural justice for its members. Because false accusations against teachers can destroy careers, the Association believes that the Criminal Code should be amended to protect the rights of the accused from publicity resulting from charges of child abuse and/or sexual assault until such time as the court finds the accused guilty.

## **Conclusion**

The Association believes that the tensions that are an integral part of a democratic and inclusive society can—and must—be managed peacefully. Accordingly, the Association endorses the principle of worldwide nuclear disarmament. On a more local level, the Association works collaboratively through its policies and programs to build a culture of peace and nonviolence not only within the profession but also within the public education system and society generally. In doing so, it endorses the following guiding principles from the *United Nations Manifesto 2000 for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence*: (1) respect for the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice; (2) rejection of violence in all forms, whether physical, sexual, psychological, economic or social, especially in relation to the most deprived and vulnerable elements of society, such as children and adolescents; (3) sharing of time and material resources in an effort to end exclusion, injustice and political and economic oppression; (4) defending the right of people to express themselves freely but in a way that involves discussion and listening and that avoids fanaticism, defamation and rejection of others; (5) promoting responsible consumer behaviour and development practices that respect all forms of life and preserve the balance of nature on the planet; and (6) contributing to the development of communities that respect democratic principles and in which women participate fully.

# Early Childhood Education

[1974, revised 1995, 2005, 2015]

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the term frequently applied to the education of young children from birth through age 8. A child's susceptibility and responsiveness to positive and enriching environmental influences during the first eight years of life has been well documented in educational, psychological and medical research. Provision of adequate opportunities for the full development of young children should be one of the top priorities of society. To this end, the education and care of young children is a joint responsibility of the home, school and society, and it is important that all work together to provide the best possible education for young children.

Society is concerned about the impact of the environment on the child from birth to adulthood. The period of early childhood begins at about three years, when the average child has acquired both speech and mobility and continues to about eight years when, normally, the child has acquired the capability of concrete thought. The physical, social, emotional and intellectual well-being and development of the child are interdependent and public education is the vehicle best suited to provide integrated, comprehensive and universal services to all children.

## Nature and Function of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education needs to provide students with purposeful educational experiences that are child-centred and will promote the development of the whole child. Early childhood education experiences should take place in a learning environment with multiple learning spaces or centres stimulated by interaction with other children, adults and manipulative materials. Hands-on experiences create authentic experiences in which children begin to feel a sense of mastery over their world.

Early childhood education should be experiential in nature and include a variety of approaches, such as inquiry- and project-based learning, that encourage self-selection and self-direction. Individual learning rates and styles must be accommodated because not all children learn, grow and mature at the same rate. In the classroom, teachers identify what intrigues their children and then allow the students to solve problems together. Activities that are based on children's interests provide motivation for learning. This fosters a love of learning, curiosity, attention and self-direction.

The primary function of early childhood education programs is the development of the whole child. Accordingly, programs need to be designed to meet particular learning interests, needs and abilities and should avoid a one-size-fits-all model or philosophy. All children must have the opportunity to participate in early childhood programs suited to developing the fullest potential of the individual. Kindergarten programs provide young children with vital and essential opportunities for early childhood development and early interventions and hence are an essential component of the total public education system.

## Provision of and Support for Early Childhood Education

The Government of Alberta is responsible for providing, funding and coordinating a universally available early childhood education program through school boards to all Alberta children. Optimally, government funding needs to be adequate to establish a maximum class size of 15 for junior kindergarten and 17 for senior kindergarten and 15 for combined junior and senior kindergarten classes, all with at least one certificated teacher and one educational assistant or aide in each class. This lead responsibility, however, does not relieve other levels of government or other social agencies or individuals from their responsibilities to our young children. Early childhood education is a partnership between parents, teachers and society.

The school board is, at the community level, the appropriate agency to provide and coordinate early childhood education programs and to employ all teachers engaged in the provision of early childhood education services. Planning, implementation and evaluation of early childhood education programs are the responsibilities of certificated teachers who, in cooperation with aides and parent volunteers, can offer young children a range of educational experiences suited to their individual needs. The role of the educational assistant or aide and the parent volunteer is to support the certificated teacher in the delivery of early childhood education programs.

High-quality early childhood education programs for children from birth to age eight can have long-lasting, positive consequences for children's success in school and later in life.



# Education Finance

[1967, revised 1973, 1979, 1989, 1996, 2016]

## Public Education—An Investment

Public education is a commitment by the people of Alberta to the children of the province. Its funding, from Kindergarten to Grade 12, is an investment in the future well being of the individual and of the society. The investment is justified by: our concern for individual development, our desire to maintain and to foster a democratic state, an informed public and a spirit of free inquiry and, our need to provide Albertans with the requisite knowledge and the skills to cope with an increasingly complex environment.

Investment in the future requires social and governmental commitment to a financing scheme designed to withstand short term economic dislocations. The attainment of education goals and, by extension, individual, social and economic objectives must be seen as related to investment in education. Therefore, education investment cannot be tied solely to economic variables. The qualitative aspects of education that lead to the development of an intelligent and sophisticated citizenry require funding that is not restricted to the immediacy of current income.

## Role of Government

The provision of public education is a provincial responsibility. The obligation of the provincial government to its populace should be constitutionally guaranteed, organizationally elaborated through governance structures and financially secured through the use of a funding program based on the widest possible access to revenue sources. All political parties should make public policy on education a matter of the highest priority and should translate such policy into a finance program capable of realizing public objectives.

The role of the federal government in matters related to education should be (a) to assure provincial access to equalization revenues so as to reduce educational disparity among provinces, (b) to provide research funding for the study of national issues related to education and (c) to assume the major portion of higher education funding in order to discharge adequately its responsibilities in several areas, among which are human resource planning, labour mobility, regional expansion and science and technology.

While, school financing should be structured so that the major part of expenditure on early childhood to Grade 12 education is borne by the Government of Alberta and implemented through a comprehensive education finance plan, the role of local and community authorities in the financing of public education should be determined by the requirements of local need and those groups should be empowered to make such decisions..

## Revenues for Education

The criteria to determine the amount of financial support for education by each level of government must include (a) actual program costs, including consideration for all needed resources and supports, while taking into account forecasts of future requirements based on present trends and needed improvements, (b) all staffing costs, (c) a concern for the equitability of educational opportunity, and (d) assessments of the responsibilities of respective levels of government.

At the provincial level, the criteria can best be met within a financing system consisting of a provincially guaranteed level of support designed to provide school systems with predictable and necessary resources to accomplish their educational responsibilities. The general principle that ought to apply in seeking revenue to support a provincial education program is that such revenue should be provided by a variety of tax sources, in order to assure financial equity and revenue stability. In general, monies for education at the provincial level should be raised by taxation from a diversified economy and from productivity and income based taxes.

## Distribution of Funds

Public funding must serve public needs. Those needs cannot be unilaterally determined by any single agency involved in the educational process, but must be the subject of intense study and consultation among all interested parties. Their common objectives should be the maintenance of a high standard of education for all children and the improvement of those aspects of the education system wherein a better quality of service can be provided. The distribution of public funds to private schools cannot be supported, since such public funding takes away from the common good of public education.

Grant systems must be concerned with resources, innovation and equity. Grant structures should be designed so as to foster consistent upgrading of facilities, equipment, programs and personnel. The objective of quality improvement must be realized, in part, through provincial experimental funding available at both the local system and the school levels. Both equitability and equalization should be an inherent part of any distribution plan for basic education.

The nature of the education program and its success in meeting the needs of children is best determined at the local level. Those responsibilities cannot be met in a finance plan that prescribes the education program. Professionals at all levels of a school system and the profession must actively participate in the establishment of priorities and related expenditures for education.

# Educational Accountability for Public Assurance

[2006, revised 2018]

Educational accountability is defined as the process through which the partners in the education system each take responsibility for their actions and report to those who are entitled to the information. Educational accountability for public assurance includes an obligation to improve the capacity and performance of all those responsible for achieving the broad goals of education. This process is ultimately focused on supporting the role and responsibilities of the teacher to diagnose and respond to the learning needs of the student. An effective educational accountability system is guided by seven broad principles:

## Principle 1

Education partners have a shared understanding of and commitment to fairness, openness, respect for diversity and stewardship, key values underlying a commitment to equity.

The education system operates within the context of a democratic society. It is purposeful in serving the education needs of children and youth and of society in general. The system operates effectively because the education partners who contribute in specific and unique ways hold similar values. In order for the education partners to trust each other and respond wholeheartedly to the issue of accountability, it is important that they reconfirm with each other a shared understanding of and commitment to the values. By working from this base of shared values, education partners become comfortable in going beyond mere compliance with imposed requirements to commitment to fulfilling their respective roles and responsibilities.

## Principle 2

The primary purpose of accountability in education is to support the broad goals of education and the diverse learning needs of children and youth.

In order to enjoy continued support from those it serves, the education partners need to show students, parents and the public that the education system is achieving the goals set for it. At the same time, the education partners must recognize and advance the differing gifts, talents and potential that children and youth possess and the different rates of learning. The education partners should be sensitive to the fact that accountability processes provide powerful feedback mechanisms that affect the perceptions and behaviours of those internal and external to the education system. More importantly, accountability should provide information to the education partners for improving the contexts, inputs, processes and outcomes of education, enabling the system to achieve the goals set for it.

The goals of education are broad and long-term, and reflect the diversity of society. This means that information gathered and reported through the accountability system must also be broadly based and include results on a full range of performance measures, not only academic achievement. Assessments should reflect the diversity of student aptitudes and rates of learning. Students identified with a special education need should be respected by increasing expectations for them while recognizing the individualized nature of their learning ability.

As some of the goals are long-term and realized over time, and children and youth develop at different rates, meaningful achievement may not be immediately apparent. Some means of capturing long-term results are used as well.

## Principle 3

Information for accountability purposes is gathered in various data infrastructures from all relevant sources, and reported and used in ways that respect the limitations of the data.

Through the accountability system, education partners gather and report timely and useful information that goes far beyond provincial testing. Multiple measures provide information on contexts, inputs, processes and results, and the information is clear and easy to understand. Information-gathering processes are transparent. Measures that assess student learning allow for the diversity of student interest, aptitude and rate of development.

Information that is gathered from education partners is relevant to their roles and responsibilities and ultimately helpful in improving the system's capacity to achieve the goals of education. As information gathering and reporting can be expensive and time-consuming and the information needs of each of the partners and the public vary, the education partners should make decisions together about priority areas for data collection and reporting, and the tools and processes needed.

Mechanisms for gathering and reporting information are selected in terms of the purpose for which they are intended. Care is taken to ensure that the information gathered and reported is accurate and valid, and that any inferences or conclusions about the education system in whole or in part are discussed by the partners prior to reporting.

## Principle 4

Sound educational research and practice guide the design and implementation of data infrastructures.

Accountability in education requires a complex system of many processes and interdependent variables that, when designed and implemented well, enhance the system's opportunities to achieve the goals of education. Opportunities are built into the system to review practices in light of new research. The teaching profession works with education partners in the effective use of the research, because pedagogy, rather than political ideology, should have a stronger influence on interpreting and applying research in education.

## Principle 5

Responsibility for public assurance in education enhances the capacity of education partners to fulfil their respective roles and leads to sustained improvement of the system.

Through accountability processes, education partners plan, gather and report information that shows how well they have fulfilled their respective roles and responsibilities. By reflecting on the processes used and the results each has achieved, and by engaging each other in the review, education partners are able to support each other in maximizing the effectiveness of their roles and to make continuous improvements to the education system as a whole.

Education partners can be accountable only if they have the capacity to cause a mandated result. This principle means that each partner is challenged to become fully aware of and enhance its knowledge and skills, the technical and financial resources, the autonomy to act, and the know-how to integrate all the resources needed to bring about the result.

## **Principle 6**

Each education partner is responsible for those areas of the system within its authority and expertise.

Legislation defines specific roles and responsibilities for many of the education partners. It is important, however, that the partners' roles and responsibilities are developed together and understandings are shared.

While each partner contributes to creating opportunity and building capacity in the system, it is not held accountable for those areas that exceed its area of responsibility or its capacity to effect change. Education partners should be viewing accountability as much more than monitoring, focusing instead on helping schools build capacity for improvement within the context of the local communities they serve. An effective accountability system recognizes that leadership is needed at all levels in education.

Political responsibility flows from the legislature to the minister, and then on to school boards. The ministry is also accountable beyond elections for its fiscal and policy decisions and for its involvement of the education partners during the decision-making process.

## **Principle 7**

The system of accountability in education is evaluated on an ongoing basis focused on the goal of providing public assurance.

The education partners participate in a review of the various aspects of the accountability system and reflect on its processes, the guiding principles and any opportunities for improving the system on an ongoing basis. A formal review is conducted every five years.

# Educational Assistants

[1973, revised 1985, 1993, 2003, 2013]

## Growth of Noncertificated School Staff

By 1970 a number of circumstances had combined to put pressure on boards to increase the number of educational assistants and extend their functions in the schools.

Financial pressures encouraged boards to provide clerical and special services in a manner thought to reduce inefficiencies. Why pay higher-salaried teachers to take attendance, keep records of book rentals and issue audiovisual equipment? These duties could be assigned to other, less costly personnel.

The new financial avenue of federal Local Initiatives Program grants and the general public attitude toward education expenses also reflected a political force. Boards became concerned about threats to sources of funding such as the growing resistance of taxpayers to increases in property taxes. If parents could be encouraged to become more involved in the schools through voluntary and other money-saving programs, then the chances of boards for re-election and budget approval would improve. The hue and cry for accountability in education could be answered at least partially by a proliferation of volunteer projects, which would also give parents a task to do. This reinforces the view of the classroom as a worksite and helps the parent appreciate the overall complexity of the teaching process. Involved parents usually will be supportive of the school program.

There was also a social pressure for increased use of educational assistants. In a time of increasing leisure, volunteer tasks become significant as a means of releasing energy and achieving self-fulfillment. At precisely the time when the general population is becoming better educated, the number of satisfying jobs being developed is not keeping pace with the demand. Many citizens feel the need to give help in socially acceptable projects; volunteer social projects are a means for an individual's participation in society.

These economic, political and social forces combined to encourage boards to extend the possibilities for using noncertificated volunteer and paid personnel in the schools. Boards hired not only secretaries but media technicians, business managers, library technicians, coaches and tutors. Volunteer tutors and supervisors were also added to the list in increasing numbers. Although staffing the school with more adults was intended to alleviate problems, the resulting push in educational assistants staffing brought with it its own host of complex problems.

## What Kind of Assistants Do Teachers Want?

We should not misinterpret the fact that teachers themselves have asked for the provision of special services (technical, clerical, supervisory) that teachers find themselves unable to perform in the available time without sacrificing the teaching role. Teachers did not seek to have their teaching duties taken over by "junior instructors." Teachers believe that every student is entitled to instruction from a highly qualified teacher.

While economic, political and social pressures and the desire of teachers to render better service in the teaching of students combined to produce an extensive and desirable use of educational assistants, some boards have used assistants in ways beyond those that teachers intended or can ethically accept. For instance, teachers did not expect assistants to interfere in teacher-student interchanges nor to act as another adult standing between the teacher and the student.

In at least two significant areas, assistants are undertaking work that should be performed by teachers: library and remedial services. When the situation called for teacher-librarians, some boards responded by supplying library technicians. In many cases, boards replaced teacher-librarians with library technicians. It was argued that, in the absence of financial provision for a teacher-librarian, a library technician was preferable to no library resource person at all. We must remember, though, that the library technician is not qualified to perform the same functions and cannot assume the responsibility of the teacher-librarian.

In the case of remedial services, when teachers requested the help of specialists to provide help for students who need highly skilled assistance with special learning difficulties, some boards responded by assigning educational assistants. This did not resolve the problem: the child did not receive the needed services and, because the teacher cannot allow an unqualified person to perform professional tasks, the teacher experienced no reduction in workload. In some circumstances, teachers have experienced an increase in work responsibilities because the teacher coordinates the work of assistants with students in the teacher's care.

## Defining Teaching Tasks

Part of the complexity of the educational assistants issue involves the nature of the teaching task. Before the advent of so many noncertificated adults in the schools, it was fairly easy to define teaching tasks as ". . . All those professional tasks encountered by teachers in the course of their activities concerned with the instruction of pupils. Included would be the actual conducting of classes and presenting of lessons, the preparation of lessons, requisitioning of audiovisual and other materials and equipment, evaluation of student progress and maintenance of such classroom order as is necessary to promote a healthy learning climate. Implied, as well, is a teacher's duty to carry out such general pupil supervision as is required by law, by regulation or by agreement, to assist to a reasonable extent with the extracurricular or cocurricular program agreed to by the staff, to cooperate with other teachers in the best interests of students and, generally, to act as an enthusiastic member of the school's educational team." (Source: *Teachers' Rights, Responsibilities and Legal Liabilities*, ATA 1978, 11)

Educational assistants make it possible to transfer the execution of some of these duties from the teacher and, although the responsibility may be retained, the teacher does not in all cases perform the tasks; instead, an assistant responsible to the teacher performs them. The fact that some duties have been taken over by educational assistants has contributed to role confusion in the mind of the public and, even among assistants and some teachers, many wonder what the duties of the teacher are and how the teacher is really different from the volunteer or paid assistant.

## What a teacher does

Teachers are hired to perform professional service in certain areas regarded as teaching areas, with teaching defined as in Association policy and by statute. Most teaching activities involve the pupil directly with the teacher whether through lecture, leadership of classroom activity, direction of small groups or one-to-one contact. In addition there is much pre- and postclass activity on curriculum development and adaptation, evaluation and teaching strategies.

## **Core of the professional task**

Without denying such aspects as motivating students, supervision, curriculum development and management of classroom resources, four aspects of the teaching function should be stressed: diagnosis of students' learning needs, prescription for those needs, implementing educational program, and evaluation of student, program and self. These four areas are the core of the professional task. The teacher is not only totally responsible for these activities but also, in large measure, must execute them. These tasks are defined by statute.

In order to acquire the information for making decisions about a student's educational well-being, a teacher must interact extensively with the student so that in no case could a teacher allow extensive instruction to be done by others such as assistants or even other teachers and still retain an ethical authority for making decisions about the student's well-being. Counsellors do not recommend for clients whom they do not interview; doctors do not prescribe for patients whom they have not examined. Neither can a teacher passively accept responsibility for students the teacher has not taught.

The intent of any modification in staff utilization must be the ultimate improvement of the educational program to the benefit of the student. The focal value of formal education is based on the quality of the direct interaction of teacher and students. Any innovation that serves to remove the teacher further from this direct interaction with the students inevitably leads to the debasement of the quality of education.

## **Delegating Tasks to Assistants**

At all times the teacher is responsible for the educational program and must perform the professional duties associated with that program. Nonprofessional tasks may be delegated to assistants and an assistant might at times perform a demonstration role, comment on slides or talk to students about some topic in which the assistant has special knowledge. That is, the assistant might at times take a role in the instructional component of education. But the assistant would do so under the direction of and in conjunction with the teacher in the same way as a teacher brings in a guest speaker from the community. The assistant would not diagnose, prescribe or evaluate with regard to the students, because these are teaching tasks defined by statute. And a teacher utilizing an assistant for the instructional component must be mindful of the teacher's need for a database for diagnosis, prescription and evaluation. The teacher must, in order to achieve the interaction with students necessary for getting the data for proper educational decisions, carry out the major share of instruction in person.

Assistants may play roles in other aspects of the teaching function. Both paid and volunteer assistants can assist in motivating students. Assistants employed as instructional assistants, although capable of performing occasional instruction as described above, could find their primary duty in assisting to develop curriculum materials, especially when making learning packages for individualized instruction. Such assistants will have a specific area of expertise. There is also a role for assistants in supervision, but this role seems limited by legal liability requirements to maintain the standard of care of a certificated teacher employed as a teacher. Assistants can assist in management of classroom and school resources of all types including texts, library materials and audiovisual equipment.

In all cases the role of assistants should be to assist the quality of teacher-student interaction by removing clerical, technical and supervisory barriers to this interaction. If assistants fulfill this role, the teacher is released for more contact with colleagues, parents and students (individually and in small groups), thereby improving the amount and quality of teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-parent and teacher-to-student interaction.

# Educational Research and Development

[1969, revised 1986, 1995, 2005, 2015]

Research and development activities that will assist teachers in meeting the educational needs of students and society are fundamental. Although some educational innovations result from intuition, optimal school improvement strategies are derived from the thoughtful application of research to teaching and learning processes. The challenge is to develop ways of using the findings of research to improve educational practice and policies in order to enhance student learning. This is increasingly true in the context of the growing complexities and global forces impacting education, schools and communities.

## The Contextual Basis of Decision Making

Schools are complex environments in which multiple variables determine the applicability of particular research findings. As professionals, teachers recognize that research provides a rational basis for making evidence-informed educational decisions from the classroom to system level. Research activities that support the study of curriculum change, education finance and the overall structure and organization of education are essential to improving learning opportunities for students. Examining relationships among the various parts of the educational system and school communities can help identify gaps and overlaps in educational services and improve the capacity to respond to the learning needs of all students. Future educational needs can be determined from studies of social and economic change and demographic trends that provide the broader context for teaching and learning. For example, the needs of the teaching profession can be assessed from studies that focus on the effects of teacher education and on teacher supply, mobility, utilization, recruitment and retention.

Systematic and continuous planning in education is critical to educational decision making. Research studies improve planning by establishing benchmarks and making future projections. The teaching profession must be involved in this process and in determining the priorities and directions of research and development in general.

The Alberta Teachers' Association identifies and promotes the study of issues that are of direct concern to the Association and the broader educational community. In particular, the Association encourages appropriate agencies and institutions to undertake educational research that will enhance student learning, including factors that will improve teaching and learning conditions. As well, the Association actively pursues a presence in the global education research community to build capacity in key areas of policy development and analysis.

## School Community Considerations

The impact of educational research and development on students and the classroom must be carefully considered. A range of legislative and regulatory frameworks guide research activity by university and school-based personnel. It is essential that educational research and development adhere to the highest principles of ethical conduct in protecting the interests of students and school communities.

As the voice of the teaching profession, the Alberta Teachers' Association has a responsibility to ensure that research and development activities do not impose undue demands on time or interfere with the primary responsibilities of teachers. Educational research and development must, whenever planned change is proposed, incorporate study of its impact on teacher workload and conditions of practice. In addition, teachers must be provided with time to plan for educational innovations before they are implemented. Teacher involvement initiated by both internal and external agencies must be carried out on a voluntary basis; provide school communities and participants with an opportunity to review the research design, methodologies and findings; and allow teachers to share in the benefits that may result from educational research activities, including peer and public recognition, curriculum development and related work in which they are directly involved.

## A Collaborative Approach to Research

The building of fundamental theory in education requires a research program implemented on a coordinated, long-term and continuing basis. A sustained and systematic approach to research requires resources that create individual and institutional capacity.

One key place for basic educational research to occur is in the professional faculties of the universities. Faculties of education need to coordinate, finance and encourage research vital to the teaching profession. Universities must accept responsibility for providing adequate finances for educational research through budgetary allocations. The faculties themselves must strive to demonstrate to all those involved in education that the research component of their work is essential to the professional education of teachers.

Through a variety of research initiatives, and national and international networks, the Association supports research as leverage for positive change. As well, classroom teachers are increasingly becoming involved in action- or inquiry-based research. More and more, teachers are being recognized for their valuable contribution to the redefinition of the knowledge base for teaching and to the alternative ways of exploring approaches to teaching practice. Many are involved in action- or inquiry-based research—an ongoing, practical, self-reflective process that critically examines teaching practices and the theories on which they are based—in order to improve both personal practice and the education of students.

The Alberta Teachers' Association believes that teachers need both time and resources to engage in professional inquiry and research activities. Financing and staffing for basic research projects remain crucial. In order to ensure sustainability, there must be an assurance of sufficient financial resources from the provincial and federal governments, with additional funds provided from private sources. This goal could be achieved through the development of a provincial framework that brings together the assets and expertise of the research community, which would assist in the planning and coordination of research activities.

## Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice

Teachers must be involved in and take on key leadership roles in the planning, implementation and evaluation of innovation of educational practice. Systematic pilot studies, action research and school improvement initiatives should be employed to assess and refine innovations before they are considered for general use or to influence policy decisions. These efforts at applied research should challenge ideas and theories to confirm or build on the findings of previous research, testing educational processes and methods that are required to implement the innovation. The change processes and methods that are required to implement an innovation on a large scale must be evaluated in terms of both their desirability and sustainability by teachers and the collective body of the profession.

Cooperation among all education partners is essential to fostering an orderly and positive approach to innovation and to the diffusion of information based on research. The teaching profession constantly strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice. As key partners in the educational research community, the profession will continue to be an authoritative voice in applying research findings to school and system contexts.

# Inclusive Education

[2012, revised 2015]

The Alberta Teachers' Association has a long history of involvement in and support for inclusive education, including Association initiatives such as the *Discussion Paper on Learning Coaches—Support for the Inclusive Classroom* (2011) and *The Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta* (2014). Inclusion in Alberta has undergone significant change in recent years. In 2007, the Department of Education commenced a review of special education across the province that resulted in the *Setting the Direction Framework* (2009). This initiative was designed to create a renewed vision, principles, policy direction and accountability measures and a new funding distribution formula. In 2009, the Setting the Direction Steering Committee presented recommendations for creating an inclusive education system and the Government of Alberta followed with a formal response accepting all of the recommendations. This provided the framework for what is now referred to as *inclusive education*.

## Definitions

The goal of inclusive education is to instill in students a sense of belonging and to help them achieve their full potential. The Association recognizes *inclusion* as a broad and complex term and therefore it is critical that collaborative planning take place at the provincial, jurisdiction and school levels to build understanding and support for the vision of inclusive education and to create short-, medium- and long-term implementation plans to guide the work.

## Necessary Conditions

The Association supports the ideals of inclusion, with the proviso that students with exceptionalities are placed in the most enabling environments, as determined by teachers in consultation with other professionals. The learning environment must meet student needs and ensure that the following conditions are in place: (a) teachers and staff are provided with information about the individual needs of each student; (b) students with exceptionalities and other students in the same class have been prepared for inclusion; (c) teachers are provided with ongoing professional development; (d) regular access to professional support services (such as consulting and health support services) is provided; (e) appropriately trained educational assistants are provided; (f) appropriate resources, including assistive technology, are provided; (g) class size is reduced to effectively meet the needs of all students; (h) regular instructional time for the teacher is reduced to allow for effective development, implementation and monitoring of documents such as individual program plans; (i) learning opportunities are provided for students who are gifted and talented, through a balance of acceleration and enrichment; and (j) school boards have policies for handling emergency situations in schools that contain appropriate, specific procedures for individual students with exceptionalities. The Department of Education should institute weighting factors (where students with exceptionalities are recognized with higher weightings as appropriate) and should require that any class be limited to a maximum of 17 weighted students in K–3 and 20 weighted students in other grades. Reasonable class sizes improve the quality of education for all students and assist in achieving the ideals of an inclusive education system. In addition, the Department of Education must recognize in its curriculum and assessment policies and practices that there are multiple ways for students to learn and demonstrate what they know. Standardized assessments required by the Department of Education must not create barriers; furthermore, it should be recognized that it is teachers that are best positioned to determine the most appropriate mode of assessing individual student learning. If a member believes that the presence of a student with exceptionalities creates an unsafe classroom or is based on unsound educational practice, he or she should protest under article 8 of the Code of Professional Conduct and register such protest with the Association and the employing board. It is critical to provide a safe, professional environment where teachers and administrators can engage in open, critical and constructive dialogue concerning the implementation of inclusion.

## Funding

Inclusion requires a wide range of resources and services to respond to student diversity. If the Government of Alberta aspires to a high-quality and fully inclusive education system, there must be adequate and consistent levels of funding and support for the following: (a) ongoing inservice for teachers; (b) appropriately trained educational assistants; (c) trained transportation and support personnel; (d) assessment and program implementation services; (e) specialized transportation equipment, and other specialized equipment and materials; (f) barrier-free buildings; (g) qualified health professionals, including medical and other professionals, to support medically fragile students; (h) smaller classes and a student-teacher ratio that takes into account the composition and complexity of each class; (i) reduction in instructional time required to collaborate with student support teams and other professionals; (j) reduction in instructional time to assist with the process of planning for and addressing student and program needs, including the development and monitoring of documents and tools such as individual program plans; (k) appropriate resources, including assistive technology; and (l) noninstructional services from government departments. It is imperative that the maintenance of such programs and services does not jeopardize the educational programs for all students and that resources provide direct support at the classroom level. The Department of Education should monitor and report on the utilization of inclusive education funding provided to school jurisdictions to determine the true cost of inclusion.

## System Supports Required

Support for teachers to work within an inclusive education system must begin during preservice teacher education programs to provide a sound working knowledge of inclusion as well as the ability to specialize in inclusive education. The Department of Education, in cooperation with other government departments, should develop and fund programs for the early identification of and intervention for children with exceptionalities based on medical, educational, psychological or other factors that may affect educational readiness. Assessments should be administered both before and after the child enters the formal education system, and programs should include appropriate, timely and practical intervention strategies. There must also be adequate funding to effectively support students including (a) Indigenous First Nations, Metis and Inuit students; (b) English language learners; (c) children living in poverty; (d) children new to Canada; (e) children from refugee backgrounds; and (f) children who are suffering from trauma. Policies should include processes and guidelines for allocating resources that support inclusive approaches, as well as a decision-making process that ensures consultation with teachers and advice from parents on the effective use of resources. It is critical that the Department of Education has clear, multilevel, consistent and transparent communication with all stakeholders with respect to current directions, policies and regulations regarding inclusive education. Ongoing research in partnership with Alberta universities should be used to inform inclusion. When effective and consistent supports are in place, all students can learn and belong.



# Indigenous Peoples' Education

[2013/16]

The public education system is a cornerstone of democracy and must be founded on a commitment to educate all students well so that each can become a productive member of our society. There is no greater challenge facing public education than to realize this promise for those who both historically and in contemporary society have been marginalized and disadvantaged. For this reason, public education and the profession have a greater duty of care when providing for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in Alberta.

While progress has been made, Indigenous peoples have not experienced the success they should expect in the public education system. Approximately 65 per cent of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in Alberta currently graduate from high school. This is significantly below the provincial rate for high school completion and represents a cost in the form of forgone opportunities for Indigenous students individually, their communities and, indeed, all Albertans. Improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students should therefore be a shared responsibility invoking shared commitment. The Association understands this and is committed to improving education for Indigenous peoples.

The Association believes that public education must foster and support the intellectual, social, physical, emotional and spiritual development of each child. This statement directly parallels the Aboriginal world view as reflected in medicine wheel teachings. The Association also believes that education for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students must be built on their Indigenous education practices, cultures and languages. Furthermore, the Association recognizes the right of Indigenous peoples to self-governance, economic and cultural survival, and the control of education in their communities.

Current Association policy affirms the view that there must be an action plan to address the educational realities of the Indigenous peoples. An action plan is in place. The policy abandons the deficit model in favour of affirming the educational potential of Indigenous students and acknowledging and respecting the contribution to be made by their communities and culture. Improving the quality of education and educational outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students is of great importance. These students are an asset and are needed to help build a productive democracy from which everyone can benefit.

In the Aboriginal community, the formation and maintenance of relationships is of primary importance. The Association believes that we need to build effective relationships to support students. Through these relationships, teachers will be able to meet the need to incorporate culturally appropriate practices and gain knowledge and perspectives that reflect the community context (for example, involving community members to share expertise and provide traditional guidance to students and other teachers as required).

## Role of the Association

The Association recognizes the importance of increasing the number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers in Alberta's education system. In its commitment to Indigenous education, the Association believes it has a necessary role to (a) promote the involvement of First Nations, Métis and Inuit educators in all areas of Association activity and create an ongoing mechanism for the Association to obtain advice and assistance on issues of Indigenous education; (b) promote and provide professional development for teachers in the area of Indigenous content and perspectives, racism, and related instructional practices; (c) encourage and support an enhanced understanding of indigenous education as it relates to other equity and diversity issues; (d) support the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers by creating a support network; and (e) advocate for social and economic justice for Indigenous peoples.

In addition, the Association encourages all members to continue to enhance their professional practices to support the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students by (a) increasing their understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories and cultures; (b) increasing their understanding of the impact of intergenerational trauma as a result of residential schools, abuse and racism; (c) bearing in mind the effects of the social impact of poverty on students; and (d) developing sensitive and culturally appropriate ways of building relationships.

In their instructional practices, teachers are encouraged to support the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students by (a) valuing the knowledge, abilities and experiences that students bring to the classroom; (b) developing and implementing appropriate instructional and evaluation strategies; (c) treating all students with compassion and understanding, viewing each child holistically and addressing individual learning needs; (d) recognizing that English and/or French may be additional languages for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students; (e) acting to eliminate racism and racial harassment in the classroom and school; and (f) being proactive in building relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents, families and communities.

## Role of the Government of Alberta

If the Government of Alberta aspires to a high quality of education programming for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, there must be adequate and consistent levels of funding and support for the following: (a) programs and initiatives that enhance student success and high school completion rates among Indigenous students; (b) holding school boards accountable for the appropriate utilization of the current funding as it is intended; (c) urging school boards to allocate increased funding for school-based programs and initiatives that enhance student success and high school completion rates among Indigenous students; (d) continuing and expanding programs that encourage individuals of First Nations, Métis or Inuit background to become certificated teachers and qualified support personnel; (e) facilitating the development of school jurisdiction plans, protocols and services, in collaboration with families and community, to support successful transitions for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, including but not limited to those from home to school, rural to urban, grade level to grade level, school to school, school jurisdiction to school jurisdiction, and school to postsecondary education and the workforce; (f) urging school boards to actively recruit and employ a sufficient number of liaison personnel of First Nations, Métis and Inuit background, available to all schools, to enhance the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and to liaise with parents, families and communities; (g) partnerships with others to develop, maintain and make accessible to teachers a collection of teaching and learning resources and locally developed curriculum for all grade levels to support the inclusion of Indigenous peoples' knowledge and perspectives throughout the curriculum; (h) the inclusion of Indigenous peoples' literature in the authorized resources list appropriate for the high school English and French programs of study; and (i) the development of school jurisdiction plans, protocols and services, in collaboration with families and community, to support successful transitions for Indigenous students.

## **Role of Postsecondary Institutions**

Support for new teachers with respect to curriculum content relating to Indigenous peoples and, particularly for those who aspire to work specifically with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students must begin during preservice teacher education programs. The Association urges Alberta postsecondary institutions with accredited teacher preparation programs to (a) work in collaboration with the Association to develop and put in place plans, programs and incentives for the recruitment, retention, support and education of First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers; (b) ensure that during teacher preparation, all students take at least one regular course on the histories, cultures and education of Indigenous peoples; and (c) recognize Aboriginal Studies 30 as satisfying the entrance requirements for a humanities (group A) course.

## **Role of School Boards**

Schools need access to Indigenous personnel/staff to support the school, to communicate with parents, families and communities, to provide advice to teachers, and to bridge the cultural divide. The Association believes it needs to urge school boards to (a) actively recruit and employ a sufficient number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit liaison personnel, available to all schools, to enhance the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and to liaise with parents, families and communities; (b) offer and promote Indigenous studies courses in Alberta high schools; and (c) offer First Nations, Métis and Inuit languages instruction, using resources that support community participation.

## **Conclusion**

The Association is well aware that many Indigenous students face challenges or barriers that can be complex and that are, too often, overwhelming. All education stakeholders must be committed to helping to meet those challenges and break those barriers. All must be willing to act to realize improvements. The ideas presented here offer suggestions and solutions for allowing the required change to happen in various contexts throughout our province. The Association understands its important role in moving forward. Change takes time and is never easy to accomplish, but change must happen and the Association wants to be a catalyst in change in Indigenous education. One of the goals of public education is economic. Increased educational attainment for Indigenous students will have a profound and positive effect on Aboriginal communities that will surely lead to much improved economic development and social conditions in their communities.

Support for Indigenous education is an investment that will benefit all Albertans. It is the right thing to do.

# Nature of Teaching and Teaching as a Profession

[2012]

## The Nature of Teaching

In its broadest sense, teaching is a process that facilitates learning. Teaching is the specialized application of knowledge, skills and attributes designed to provide unique service to meet the educational needs of the individual and of society. The choice of learning activities whereby the goals of education are realized in the school is the responsibility of the teaching profession.

In addition to providing students with learning opportunities to meet curriculum outcomes, teaching emphasizes the development of values and guides students in their social relationships. Teachers employ practices that develop positive self-concept in students. Although the work of teachers typically takes place in a classroom setting, the direct interaction between teacher and student is the single most important element in teaching.

## Teaching as a Profession

The continued professionalization of teaching is a long-standing goal of the Alberta Teachers' Association. The Association continues to work to advance teaching as a profession. Professionalism is a complex and elusive concept; it is dynamic and fluid. Six generally accepted criteria are used to define a profession. The teaching profession in Alberta fulfills those criteria in the following ways:

1. *Its members have an organized body of knowledge that separates the group from all others.* Teachers are equipped with such a body of knowledge, having an extensive background in the world and its culture and a set of teaching methods experientially derived through continuous research in all parts of the world.

2. *It serves a great social purpose.* Teachers carry responsibilities weighted with social purpose. Through a rigid and self-imposed adherence to the Code of Professional Conduct, which sets out their duties and responsibilities, teachers pass on their accumulated culture and assist each student under their care in achieving self-realization.

3. *There is cooperation achieved through a professional organization.* Cooperation plays an important role in the development of the teaching profession because it represents a banding together to achieve commonly desired purposes. The teaching profession has won its well-deserved place in the social order through continuous cooperation in research, professional preparation and strict adherence to the Code of Professional Conduct, which obligates every teacher to treat each student within a sacred trust. Teachers have control or influence over their own governance, socialization into teaching and research connected with their profession.

4. *There is a formal period of preparation and a requirement for continuous growth and development.* Teachers are required to complete a defined teacher preparation program followed by a period of induction or internship prior to being granted permanent certification. This period includes support for the formative growth of teachers and judgments about their competence. Teachers are devoted to continuous development of their ability to deliver their service.

5. *There is a degree of autonomy accorded the professional.* Teachers have opportunities to make decisions about important aspects of their work. Teachers apply reasoned judgment and professional decision making daily in diagnosing educational needs, prescribing and implementing instructional programs, and evaluating the progress of students. Teacher judgment unleashes learning and creates the basis for experience.

6. *The profession has control or influence over education standards, admissions, licensing, professional development, ethical and performance standards, and professional discipline.* As professionals, teachers are governed in their professional relationships with other members, school boards, students and the general public by rules of conduct set out in the Association's Code of Professional Conduct. The code stipulates minimum standards of professional conduct for teachers, but it is not an exhaustive list of such standards. Unless exempted by legislation, any member of the Association who is alleged to have violated the standards of the profession, including the provisions of the code, may be subject to a charge of unprofessional conduct under the Discipline Bylaws of the Association.

The competence of teachers is governed by the Practice Review Bylaws of the Association. The expectations for the professional practice of teachers related to interim and permanent certification are found in the *Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta*. The Teaching Quality Standard defines the knowledge, skills and attributes all teachers are expected to demonstrate as they complete their professional preparation, enter the profession and progress through their careers. Additionally, the Department of Education's Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy (Policy 2.1.5) supports and reinforces the Teaching Quality Standard by setting out basic expectations for teacher growth, supervision and evaluation.

## Teachers as Professionals

The certificated teacher is the essential element in the delivery of instruction to students, regardless of the mode of instruction. A teacher has professional knowledge and skills gained through formal preparation and experience. Teachers provide personal, caring service to students by diagnosing their needs and by planning, selecting and using methods and evaluation procedures designed to promote learning. The processes of teaching include understanding and adhering to legal and legislated frameworks and policies; identifying and responding to student learning needs; providing effective and responsive instruction; assessing and communicating student learning; developing and maintaining a safe, respectful environment conducive to student learning; establishing and maintaining professional relationships; and engaging in reflective professional practice. These processes must be free of discriminatory practices and should contribute to the holistic development of students who are actively engaged, responsible and contributing members of a democratic society. The educational interests of students are best served by teachers who practise under conditions that enable them to exercise professional judgment. Teachers have a right to participate in all decisions that affect them or their work, and have a corresponding responsibility to provide informed leadership in matters related to their professional practice.

## The Association's Role in the Context of Teacher Professionalism

The Alberta Teachers' Association is a self-governing body financed through membership fees established in accordance with the bylaws of the Association. The legal framework through which the Association functions is the *Teaching Profession Act*. The Association, through the democratic interaction of its members, is the collective voice of Alberta teachers. It is a unilateral organization that includes as active members certificated individuals employed in public education as classroom teachers, as well as school- and district-based administrators. The profession believes that all

professional educators should be members of the Association and strives to accomplish this through an amendment to the *Teaching Profession Act* that would include superintendents and deputy superintendents appointed by school boards.

As a professional teachers' association, the Alberta Teachers' Association performs a wide range of activities related to the enhancement of teaching as a profession, the improvement of public education and the well-being of its members. The Association furthers the professional status of teaching by policing the conduct and competence of its members through its Discipline Bylaws and Practice Review Bylaws, ensuring high levels of practice for students and public assurance in the teaching profession. The Association also has a responsibility to appraise the expectations of society and to recommend changes to Alberta's education system to meet changing needs. Thus, it maintains an active interest and a position of leadership in all areas of public education. This includes systematic long-range planning in such matters as the processes of teaching, working conditions for professional service, organization and administration of schools, teacher education and certification, curriculum, educational research and development, early childhood education, and education finance. Through its committees dealing with these topics, as well as through representation on many departmental committees and boards, the Association stays at the forefront of the most recent developments and represents the interests of its members. To accomplish this, the Association should have adequate representation on all Department of Education committees, boards and advisory bodies dealing with matters related to teaching and learning, and all members representing the profession on government advisory bodies, boards and committees should be named by the Association.

## **Professional Self-Governance**

A common criterion for measuring the degree of public acceptance achieved by a professional organization is its ability and willingness to exercise rigorous control over membership standards. This means that the professional body has control over the educational, certification, practice and competence standards to determine who enters into and remains in the profession. A long-standing goal of the profession is to have jurisdiction over teacher certification in Alberta. The Association's having such authority would parallel the established practice of other professions.

As the authoritative voice of the teaching profession in the province, the Association must play a role in making decisions related to teacher preparation, recruitment, selection, admission, institutional preparation, internship, placement and programs of support in the early years of practice. It should have direct and formal representation in the process that accredits institutions that grant degrees in education.

Finally, the Association believes that teachers require one teaching certificate and that all teachers have the same certificate. As previously mentioned, the profession, through the Association, should have full responsibility for the issuance of teaching certificates and the suspension or cancellation of certificates on grounds of incompetence or unprofessional conduct.

## **Conclusion**

Alberta is recognized for having one of the best public education systems in the world. Central to the system are caring, highly competent professional teachers who are supported by a professional association that recognizes as its core responsibilities stewardship of the profession, services to its members and commitment to public education. The continued efforts of teachers to strive to improve their professional practice, supported by the collective through the Alberta Teachers' Association, will ensure that Alberta students will continue to receive quality teaching resulting in enriched educational experiences.

# Outreach Education

[2009]

The Association supports outreach education and recognizes its importance in providing educational opportunities for students whose needs are not met through traditional school environments. Outreach education programs increase high school completion rates for students who are at high risk for dropping out of school and provide flexible educational programming for students with complex academic and personal needs. Outreach schools are very unique and as a result no outreach school is the same as other institutions.

## Program Flexibility

In order to meet outreach students' diverse needs, it is important for outreach education to maintain program flexibility. Flexibility in the pacing and completion times for courses allows students to continue their studies around work and family commitments allowing for academic success. Beyond these individual course considerations, flexibility is valued in the sense that students receive highly individualized program planning. The flexibility of any outreach program is a strength that is highly contingent upon adequate funding, and strong partnerships with the school district, social support agencies and services, and the community at large.

## Community Partnerships

Programming in outreach schools encompasses meeting the needs of the "whole student" by providing additional personal supports. Outreach teachers cannot solely focus on academic work when students are in crisis and/or their basic needs (food, shelter, health care and security) have not been met. Therefore, it is important for outreach schools to establish excellent community partnerships and protocols in order to educate and support the complex needs of individualized students. Such supports as the Police/RCMP, mental health services, healthcare, childcare, and substance abuse counselling are critical links to the success for students in outreach programs.

Outreach schools must have these supports in place as they are essential for their overall success.

## Funding

Funding for outreach schools is a critical component to the success of the program. Since outreach schools are a unique entity within the K-12 education sector, it is vital to its operation to provide and maintain appropriate funding that covers all programs, specifically addressing individualized student needs, as well as operation and maintenance costs. Therefore, the Association believes that the Department of Education should develop and implement a per capita program funding formula for all outreach schools. Funding for outreach schools needs to keep pace with increasing operation and maintenance costs reflecting the increased economic reality that schools are constantly faced with. School jurisdictions should also ensure that instructional grants are used solely for program delivery.

The current practice within many of the traditional schools is that when a student transfers to an outreach school after September 30, the funding does not follow the student. This creates financial problems for the receiving outreach school. As such, the Association believes that the Department of Education should mandate that funding and resources allocated to a student are directed, on a prorated basis, to the receiving outreach school upon transfer.

Outreach high school students have high needs and challenges and are generally low credit producers. The credit enrolment unit funding model is appropriate for use in traditional high schools, but it does not match the needs for outreach schools to provide individual specialized program needs for its students. School jurisdictions should fund their outreach schools through a centralized funding model in order to provide a better financial structure for outreach schools.

## Technology

Technology has been an ongoing and an important issue for outreach teachers as each school jurisdiction deals with technology differently. The Department of Education should ensure that all outreach students have equitable access to technology in order to maximize the delivery of electronic curriculum and effective technology to support distributed learning and online learning opportunities. Access to online services and computers are a key part of student learning in outreach education. For outreach schools that are located in areas that are not supported or have limited access to the most current technology, print-based modules would still be required in order to meet student needs.

## Onsite Administrator

In alignment with the Association's position on administration of schools, it is fundamental to ensure that there is a full-time administrator in each outreach school. The principal's presence in the outreach school has a direct and positive impact on students' behaviour and conduct. There are reasons why schools have an onsite administrator, given that the administrator is involved with the daily operation of a school. In their administrative capacity, they are involved with the supervision of the students and teachers. Due to the nature of the principal's responsibilities it is important that they focus their attention on a single school building rather than on multiple school sites.

## Staffing and Administration

Working alone is cited as an important concern among outreach educators, especially for female teachers, and in isolated locations. It is essential for the benefit of staff and student safety that school jurisdictions ensure that schools have at least two staff members onsite when open to students or the public. Staff support must be in place in order to manage a crisis and provide assistance in case of an emergency. Accordingly, it is imperative that all outreach school facilities develop an appropriate emergency plan based specifically upon each school site. Procedures need to be in place to safeguard against any adverse effects.

High staff to student ratios makes it more difficult to manage behavioural issues. Often staff do not have the training that they require to respond to students mental health needs, manage violence/aggression, and diffuse potentially harmful incidents. Due to the unique educational environment of outreach schools and the fact that outreach teachers deal with diverse needs the Association believes that school jurisdictions should educate outreach

school staff in the areas of first aid, emergency response and conflict management. Each school jurisdiction should ensure that the safety concerns of outreach school facilities are assessed and addressed.

A difficulty that administrators/teachers of outreach schools face is the concern that there are no standardized criteria for student placement in many outreach schools. As a result of no established criteria, outreach schools receive students with varying academic and emotional histories, thus affecting the student makeup of an outreach school either positively or negatively. In some cases, students and parents are self-selecting the outreach program to meet their own needs whether it is an appropriate placement or not. To avoid inappropriate placements, school jurisdictions need to have a well-developed student intake policy. In addition, problems arise when a student's cumulative information file is slow to arrive at an outreach school hence delaying proper student programming. School jurisdictions should ensure that outreach schools receive student records in a timely manner. Good communication between schools is necessary for the smooth transition of students between the traditional and outreach school and it ensures that the receiving school has information to assist with emergencies, health and safety issues. Before transferring student records, the student cumulative files should contain complete and accurate information to ensure the shared goal of a student's successful program completion.

# Pensions

[1970, revised 1972, 1976, 1979, 1990, 2009, 2020]

The major objective of a pension plan is the provision of a secure income to maintain one's standard of living during retirement. The achievement of this objective requires a stable source of revenue from a fund to which employees and employers are required to contribute. Additionally, tax measures should encourage individuals to supplement retirement savings, thus reducing overall societal obligations.

Pensions for Alberta teachers were first achieved in 1939 under the *Teachers' Retirement Fund Act*. A new act came into effect on 1948 04 01, under which pensions were calculated as a percentage of average salary earned during the highest five consecutive years. In 1939, teachers offered to defer a portion of their salaries to provide for their retirement income. This deferred salary is what government contributes to teachers' pensions. In addition to this government contribution and teachers' contributions, investment returns provide the majority of funds for teachers' pensions. Since that time, many improvements have been made, but the Alberta Teachers' Pension Plan has remained basically the same. Both the Government of Alberta, cast in the role of employer, and teachers, as employees, originally made contributions to a fund.

In 1956, the Government of Alberta ceased to make annual contributions to the Plan and, in place of this, guaranteed the pension plan and made its contribution only in support of a pension after one had been granted to a teacher. Subsequently, after the government's former contributions had been used up in payment of pensions, teachers' contributions remained as the Plan, which is invested in accordance with the *Canadian and British Insurance Companies Act*. The 2007 Memorandum of Agreement between the Government of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association states the government is responsible for the liabilities associated with the pensions for the period of service before September 1992. No assets are in the plan for that period of service. The Government of Alberta guarantees the payment of pensions related to the pre-1992 period, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund (ATRF) receives sufficient funds from the government each month to pay these pensions as they become due. In 2018/19, the government provided \$483 million to meet this obligation.

The Teachers' Pension Plan has been administered by a board appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and made up of equal representation from nominees of the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Government of Alberta. Teachers believe that this is the most appropriate way of administering the Plan. They also believe that actuarial stability of the Plan should be guaranteed through legislation and by contributions from teachers and the provincial government. Teachers deserve a fully funded, compulsory, defined benefit plan that is invested by the ATRF Board in a manner that matches the funds investment strategy and risk to the requirements to fund the liabilities of the plan without interference by government.

High on the list of desirable features of the pension plan are automatically adjusted benefits, which would allow teachers to maintain throughout retirement the standard of living enjoyed in their teaching careers. Furthermore, pension benefits calculated on the basis of the average of the highest three years of salary would be appropriate. Pension without actuarial reduction at or after age 55 or after 30 years of contributory service or with an age-plus-service index of 80 would provide optimum flexibility to teachers and should be sought. Teachers should receive a pension based on 2.5 per cent of salary per year of service.

Pensionable service should include all teaching experience, be it within or outside Canada. Teachers should be allowed to purchase as teaching service maternity, parental or adoption leaves, vocational trade experience recognized for salary purposes, strike or lockout time, military service, service with the Canadian International Development Agency or other such educational agencies, and Department of Education employment during nonteaching periods. The Association also maintains that contributions should be waived during periods of disability and that a disabled teacher's pension should be calculated on a salary indexed to that paid to active teachers. Additionally, legislation should be amended to allow teachers who received disability benefits under the Canada Pension Plan to accrue pensionable service for the period of disability.

Reciprocal agreements without time limits and without requirements of return to employment should be negotiated for teaching service with other approved plans. Refund of contributions should be available on application, as should reinstatement into the plan. The Government of Alberta should negotiate with the Association for the purpose of amending the Alberta Teachers' Pension Plan to give teachers on leave of absence the option of (1) contributing to the plan during the leave as if they were still teaching and (2) having their contributions matched by the government according to the sharing arrangement in the plan.

Some other features that teachers expect in their plan include vesting after two years of pensionable service, locking in of contributions and decking of the Canada Pension Plan with the teachers' plan. A variety of pension options should continue to be available, along with payment of pension earned to a surviving spouse or other dependent. Additionally, as a number of retired teachers return to teaching service, they have an interest in the Association negotiating with the Government of Alberta to remove the 0.6 FTE limit on work when the pensioner holds a teaching contract and is in receipt of an Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund pension.

Although teachers expect to continue to participate in a defined benefit pension plan, they also recognize that maintaining and improving their pension rights may require increased contributions. The Association is prepared to defend teachers' pension rights and to negotiate improvements to their plan. Managing such a large, diversified investment portfolio well requires a solid foundation of people, processes and systems, along with a forward-thinking view of financial markets. Alberta teachers have a keen interest in the management of their plan: these teachers expect to access a list of funds that are held in trust for the benefit of teachers by the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

# Political Engagement

[1977, revised 1993, 2003, 2009, 2013]

Political engagement as envisioned by the policy of the Alberta Teachers' Association lies within the objects of the Association as outlined in the *Teaching Profession Act*—"to arouse and increase public interest in the importance of education and public knowledge of the aims of education."

Many of the decisions that affect teachers in the classroom are political decisions. If teachers wish to involve themselves in the decision-making process, they must become both individually and collectively aware of the political process. The term *political process* can be defined as "the ways and means by which decisions are made and implemented at all levels of society by individuals, groups or levels of government." The most suitable way for the Association to influence political decisions affecting education is to do so within the political system. Working against or outside the current political system would be confrontational and subversive, which is not advantageous in seeking change from those who have the ability to make it.

Because of their elected position, politicians are subject to pressure and will receive it from a wide variety of viewpoints. Those groups that exert the greatest and most effective pressure will have the most success. Pressure can be applied both formally and informally. The formal method involves the Association's directly approaching politicians, through recognized formal channels, speaking as representatives of all Alberta teachers. The informal method involves individual teachers building ongoing and respectful relationships with politicians in an effort to promote quality public education and Association objectives. Both methods—the formal, structured one and the informal, unstructured one—involve working with politicians to achieve favourable outcomes.

In order to maintain trust, respect and openness with those in office and those who might come to office, it is imperative that the Association maintain a position of neutrality. It must avoid affiliation with any specific political party or candidate for political office. The Association as an organization must avoid alignment with any one political group or individual but, rather, should maintain contact with all major political parties to ensure relevancy and ongoing trust with whoever assumes office. The Association must work with each major party in an attempt to improve the quality of education within Alberta. Representation either solely to the government or solely to the opposition would show a high degree of political naïveté.

In maintaining effective political engagement from a position of nonpartisanship, it is important that teachers are familiar with the educational positions of all political parties. The Association should, therefore, encourage all political parties and candidates for political office to articulate their policies on education. Where these policies have financial implications, the parties and candidates should also provide plans for funding the implementation of such policies.

Consistent with a policy of nonpartisanship, the Alberta Teachers' Association and its subgroups should refrain from making financial contributions to parties or candidates for political office. While there is not and should not be legal impairment to the Association's making partisan political donations, it is not in the best interests of the Association and should be discouraged. However, grey area exists related to fundraising events, which can serve functions both as a vehicle for making donations and for building relationships. Although such fundraisers include a donation element, the participation of the Association or its subgroups should not be restricted as long as the attendance at the event is part of a larger nonpartisan program of political engagement.

Teachers, as individuals, should be encouraged to participate actively in the political process, including through partisan activity. Having teachers involved in all aspects of the political process will reap benefits for the profession as a whole. Similarly, teachers and other school employees have the democratic right as citizens to participate fully in the process and should not be restricted from running for or serving as school trustees without resigning their employment.

Political engagement as defined does not limit itself solely to the work of the provincial government. As education is affected by decision making at all levels of society, political engagement by teachers must cover all levels. The Association must encourage locals to become engaged in all aspects of the political arena in Alberta, from provincial government to school boards.

## Role of Provincial Association

One of the principal duties of the provincial Association should be to monitor the proceedings of the legislature. This monitoring should be conducted through attendance at the legislature whenever education debates are taking place and through careful study of the provincial Hansard. Such monitoring serves three main purposes: (1) it permits the correction of false and inaccurate information that sometimes can occur in debate, (2) it permits the preparation of information for members of the legislature and presentation of Association views prior to the debate taking place, and (3) it permits reading the mood of the legislature and thereby determining possible future directions for educational policy. It allows the Association to be prepared for most of the major issues well in advance. This monitoring of the legislature needs to be of a constant nature so that rebuttal can be as immediate as possible. Such work is time-consuming but essential if the Association wishes to carry out a successful program of political engagement. Equally important and part of the same process is the supplying of information to members of the legislature, both when requested and when the Association believes it would be beneficial.

A second duty involves educating teachers in the political process. Almost daily, decisions that directly affect teachers and their classroom conditions are made. Often these decisions are not the result of consultation with teachers and yet must be implemented by teachers. It is important that teachers become engaged in the decision-making process. In order to create such engagement, teachers should become aware of the political processes through which such decisions are reached. The Association must help to create this awareness through a flow of political information. Such information will enable teachers to know the decision makers, to understand the process of decision making and to become engaged. Likewise, teachers must be made aware of the educational issues and of programs, policies and recommendations so that when they talk of the politics of education, they know exactly what is involved.

A third course of action for the Association is to take a stand on issues that affect student learning. Criticism is levelled at teachers and their Association for both taking a stand and not taking a stand on social issues. Many such issues are peripheral to the learning process and should be treated as individual matters. Some issues, however, are critical in classrooms and in learning, and the Association should take a positive stand whenever it feels that an issue is of major significance. In particular, the Association should align its interests with the interests of students and act as a spokesperson on behalf of the educational interests of all children. Taking a stand in this way can develop a feeling of engagement with students and will prove beneficial to both teachers and the Association in the long term. One issue that is regularly part of political discourse is that of private encroachment on public domains. The Association believes in the importance of the public interest, including the maintenance of public institutions, services and spaces. The Association should support and advocate for this public interest.



Several other organizations in the province have an interest in education policies, and it may be necessary at some time for the Association to act jointly with these organizations. Such united action can prove politically beneficial if it is necessary to prove a specific point to the government. At the same time, the Association should monitor closely any education policy pursued by any other organization and should endeavour to provide assistance in the preparation of such policy.

## **Role of Local Association**

There is a common phrase: all politics is local. This saying appropriately suggests that the most significant influence on politicians comes from local constituents around local issues. Even larger-scale provincial or national issues become relevant for politicians only when their impacts are felt on the ground. Consequently, a program of political engagement becomes most effective through local engagement. Locals of the Association are encouraged to undertake political engagement in their local areas. Similarly, locals should be encouraged to work with the Association on their programs of engagement, because the impact of such engagement is enhanced through coordination across the province.

Decision making takes place at all levels, with local school boards and provincial government. Therefore, teachers have a responsibility to become engaged. Locals should be encouraged to become actively engaged in promoting interest in local elections. Since locals are more acutely aware of local issues and programs, the provincial Association will become engaged only on request and will supply assistance and materials as needed.

One aspect of the local program that should be stressed involves the establishment of contacts with local members of the legislature. Such contact persons could provide direct and personal input to MLAs, as well as keeping them fully aware of all educational and education-related issues. These individuals must be in touch with MLAs as often as possible, and their work is crucial to the success of the program. Politicians are much more likely to listen to their own electorate than they are to the Association as a provincial body. At this level particularly, the local and the provincial Association can work closely in supplying each other with materials.

However, it should be stressed that openly supporting certain candidates is a dangerous role to play, and it would be far more effective if locals concentrated on presenting fair and unbiased exposure to all candidates on education issues. Engagement at the local level with all candidates for political office should follow the same nonalignment concept as is pursued by the provincial Association in its political program.

The development of a political engagement program by the Association has two basic requirements: time and continuity. To be successful and influential, a program requires diligent work over many years. Time to build up a program and to create confidence is essential. The second requirement is that the program not be subjected to changes in policy resulting from whim. Once the level of engagement has been developed, it must be constantly maintained. Significant variation may well result in the program's becoming ineffective.

Political engagement for teachers is a responsibility. Exercising the democratic right of engagement in politics is an honest and open attempt to influence politicians to make decisions favourable to education. The Alberta Teachers' Association favours this engagement so that the teachers of Alberta can become a part of the decision-making process in education.

# Professional Development

[1991, revised 2001, 2011]

## Rationale and Background

Change is an undisputed part of our world, whether it is technological, societal, economic or political. The teacher is a significant change agent in the learning process and the primary force for implementing and sustaining change at the classroom level. As teachers are central to meeting the goals of education, career-long professional learning and development opportunities, supported by all stakeholders, increase the potential for Alberta teachers to meet the needs of a rapidly changing learner demographic. Initial teacher education is but a beginning; teachers require an ongoing program of professional growth to meet ever-changing demands. To prepare teachers not only to keep pace with changes in technology, curriculum, teaching techniques and social realities, but also to predict future needs of their students and the educational system, professional development must be an integral part of a teacher's professional life. Education must be part of the change if it is to fulfil its mandate of preparing young people not only to live in the world but also to direct and control the changing world. Professional development is integral to the success of any education change and must be reflected in the school and school jurisdiction improvement plan.

A program of continuous professional development, which incorporates the principles of sound research into professional practice, is a key factor in the change process for education and as such is an important part of The Alberta Teachers' Association's program of service to its members. This belief is embedded in the 1935 *Teaching Profession Act*, which states in part, "The objects of the Association are to improve the teaching profession by organizing and supporting groups which tend to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers and by meetings, publications, research and other activities designed to maintain and improve the competence of teachers." This belief is further enhanced by the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers, which states, "Teachers have the right to base diagnostic planning, methodology and evaluation on professional knowledge and skills, and have the responsibility to review constantly their own level of competence and effectiveness and to seek necessary improvements as part of a continuing process of professional development." Following from this belief, a primary objective of the Association's program of professional development is to establish and maintain high standards of professional practice. Within this objective is the obligation to provide leadership and programs that promote and develop individual teacher competence, teaching as a profession and the cause of education. The teaching profession should be responsible for determining, establishing and monitoring the standards of professional practice for its members. This is a defining characteristic of a profession and ensures that professional responsibility is overseen by expert practitioners most closely attuned to the changing knowledge, skills and attributes necessary for optimal practice.

The professional development of teachers has two distinct but at times overlapping aspects. The first is the individual self-directed responsibility for knowledge and competence. Teachers accept this commitment as they begin teaching and pursue self-identified learning goals throughout their career. The second aspect is that of collective professional needs, including system development needs. Teachers recognize this as they attempt to improve the learning situation in the school and as they strive to improve their profession. Recognizing the intersecting nature of these two aspects produces a more complete and complex professional development program.

As professional development becomes increasingly complex and essential to teachers, schools and the Association, it is critical to define clearly the concept and establish guidelines that promote effective professional development.

## Definitions

One of the major challenges in the field of professional development is understanding various terms and definitions. The literature reflects multiple terms in current usage, including *professional development*, *professional learning*, *school improvement*, *inservice education* and *staff development*. Clarifying these terms is integral to understanding the nuances of each. The term *school improvement* is often used in conjunction with one or several of the previous terms in that a professional development program may be part of a broader program of school improvement. *Professional development* and *professional learning* are terms commonly used interchangeably. They are used to refer to three general types of teacher learning. One is the individual learning teachers participate in that is the result of their self-assessment of needs in pursuit of professional growth. *Inservicing* is the process of upgrading specific skills and knowledge to remain current in curricula, teaching tools, strategies and other supports. *Staff development* initiatives are collective efforts to implement a specific initiative, often in response to school, jurisdiction or ministry goals.

## Professional Development

The Alberta Teachers' Association defines professional development as the wide range of programs, activities and services that teachers identify and undertake individually or collectively to further understand the nature of teaching and learning, enhance professional practice and contribute to the profession.

This broad definition encompasses a range of activities: an individual teacher's reading, exploring a website, or doing research or inquiry in the classroom; individuals or groups of teachers attending a conference or course focused on new teaching skills; groups of teachers collaboratively identifying a problem, and designing and implementing a solution; groups of teachers involved in action research or other forms of deliberate inquiry; groups of teachers working on a specialist council; groups of teachers participating in a curriculum implementation process; school staffs setting goals or identifying needs, and designing and implementing a program to meet the goals. As illustrated by the examples, a professional development program may vary in nature from individual reflective practices to collective collaborative projects by groups of teachers.

This range of activity suggests that the motivation for professional development is equally broad and diverse. Individual teachers are motivated by a sense of responsibility to improve teaching competence by seeking new techniques and new knowledge. Teachers seek improvement in curriculum matters, school organization and teaching methods to further their individual and collective competence and to improve the learning environment for students. Research demonstrates that effective professional development needs to be content rich, contextual, relevant and related to practice. The ultimate goal of professional development is to improve professional practice. In spite of the breadth of the definition and the range of activities that it includes, a common set of guidelines for effective professional development can be identified.

## Individual and Organizational Professional Development

Professional growth is primarily the teacher's responsibility. Teachers have a professional responsibility through continuous growth and development over the course of their careers to maintain teaching proficiency. This includes being current with changes in educational approaches and engaging in reflective practice and systematic inquiry. Further, teachers hold membership in professional organizations including specialist councils, and attend

conferences and teachers' conventions. A teacher's professional growth plan should consider school/jurisdiction and ministry priorities as they cohere with the individual teacher's learning needs. As teachers pursue their responsibilities to serve an ever-diverse and demanding array of students, their primary professional and emergent learning needs may be role specific and uniquely practical. Particularly, the career stage of the teacher or the teacher's familiarity with his or her teaching assignment would be examples of contextual considerations that would shape professional learning needs. Therefore, organizational or system initiatives must be considered separate from but related to the professional learning of the teacher, which is driven by the teacher's independently identified needs and interests. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that their professional practice meets the standards in place; therefore, they have an obligation to place this imperative at the forefront of their professional growth priorities. In an effort to honour the principles of adult learning, professional development must be planned with a commitment to honour individual determination and agency.

## **School-Based Professional Development and Communities of Practice**

Communities of practice provide enhanced opportunities for teachers to engage in professional learning. Collaboration, shared inquiry and learning from and with peers have been identified as central to professional learning. Most educational changes involve change at the classroom level. Therefore, the most likely site of change in knowledge, skills and attitudes is the school as it involves staff in collegial and collective action. Professional development that focuses on desired changes identified by teachers within a school is an important component in the change process. Ideally, school-based professional development is designed by committees that are representative of the teaching staff. This focus in professional development shifts the emphasis from individual competency to a collective collegial emphasis. Meaningful learning opportunities must be embedded in the daily work life of teachers with adequate time dedicated to support both individual and collective professional learning.

The goals of school-based professional development may be curricular, pedagogical or organizational. The Association believes that school staff development is an important form of professional development that has potential to significantly alter teaching practice. Teachers are central in any program of school improvement and, to prepare them for this role, the development of collegial professional learning structures is critical. In schools where collegiality and collaboration are the norm, teachers and administrators build a common language as they focus on the practice of teaching in a climate where everyone, individually and collectively, constantly seeks improvement.

## **Professional Development and School Improvement**

Professional development has a central role in school improvement. Proposals to reform, restructure or transform schools must incorporate supported and sustained professional development as a means to bring about the change. Professional development that has the potential to improve schools and influence student learning must be much more than the traditional program that involves only conference attendance and a few isolated, disjointed workshops. It must be thoughtfully and consciously planned and sustained, contained in the day-to-day life of the school and supported by dedicated time and other resources. The Alberta Teachers' Association advocates for a provincial professional development framework with a process for enhanced system coordination in the provision of professional development programs for teachers.

Professional development programs that place heavy emphasis on support activities and involve teachers in decision making and planning provide a sense of ownership and thus are more likely to be successful in improving teaching practice and school organization. Professional development both influences and is influenced by the organizational context in which it takes place.

In planning professional development, there is a set of essential qualities to be considered.

## **Qualities of Effective Professional Development**

To be effective, professional development should be determined by teachers, focus on enhancing professional practice and be ongoing, coherent and coordinated. Structured programs should be based on a clear statement of purpose and objectives and should include a flexible long-term plan that provides opportunities for self-reflection and evaluation and meets the needs of participants as identified within individual contexts. Professional development content and processes should incorporate the principles of sound research into professional practice. Collegiality and collaboration are essential features of effective professional development programs. Collegial and collective professional development undertakings should provide a climate of trust, peer support, open communication and collaboration. Professional development should involve participants in decision making at all stages of planning and implementation, incorporate an array of learning models and acknowledge personal experiences and professional expertise. To be coherent, professional development must be responsive to the learning needs of the professional teacher and reflect a wide range of practices such as collaborative learning, peer-assisted learning, teacher-as-researcher projects and independent learning.

Delivery of a professional development program must take many factors into account. First, the readiness of the participants must be considered and, if necessary, enhanced through experiences and activities that lead up to the particular program. The nature of the learner is another significant factor, as age, experience and background determine the nature of the program. Teachers in the beginning of their careers require different professional development than their colleagues in the middle or the end of their careers. There should be a variety of activities, including experiential learning activities, that are relevant and immediately useful. Within these activities there should be opportunities for presentation of theory, demonstration or modelling, and coaching followed by feedback.

Those planning professional development should take into consideration theories of adult learning and the change process. Professional development is change and, like any change, requires time and should be viewed as a process, not an event. Planners should recognize the resistance to change that participants will feel as they encounter different teaching techniques, new curriculum, new organization or different beliefs, and should make provision for stages of acceptance and implementation.

Teachers as adult learners often wish to integrate work, education and leisure; this should be incorporated into plans for professional development. Also, adults as self-directed learners should be involved at all stages of planning and implementation. They express strong desires that the program meet immediate needs and be practical as it integrates new ideas with old in a continuous pattern of ideas and skills. Adult learning theory stresses the importance of experience; therefore, opportunity to use the experience of the participants and time to reflect and analyze experience are critical in a professional development program.

There is a wide range of professional development opportunities and activities, including conventions, conferences, seminars, school visitations and projects. A well-designed program of professional learning integrates various activities into a long-term continuous form. The program designers should consider the organizational context of the participants. The social context or culture of the school can affect the effectiveness of the program. Attention must be paid to understanding the integration of the people in the school or department or system; there should be an attempt to decrease isolation and to provide a more integrated system with stronger collegiality.

Teachers must believe that they can make a difference through their actions. Although the ultimate goal of a professional development program is improved professional practice, the specific objectives or goals may vary widely from teacher to teacher or from school to school. Professional

development programs should be based on needs identified by the participants. Knowledge about the nature of adult learners and about change supports the conclusion that most teachers wish to be involved in deciding the direction of their professional development.

A significant factor in effective professional development is the provision for support. Adequate time for professional development programs must be embedded within the school day and the school year. Teachers spend many hours of their own time on professional development, but significant amounts of time must be made available during school time through professional development days, early closure or release time, and practice-based and embedded learning structures. Support from administration and school boards through the provision of adequate time, resources and personnel is critical. School boards must provide sufficient and dedicated funding, which may include release provisions during the school day, for self-directed teacher professional development opportunities that are responsive to the context of the teacher, equitable and not contingent on school-based or system initiatives. The cost of developing and implementing new curricula and resources, and other ministerial and jurisdictional initiatives, should be funded and resourced independently of other professional development supports.

## **Responsibilities for Professional Development**

Education stakeholders have a responsibility to provide teachers with access to professional development opportunities and support throughout their careers as follows:

School professional communities are responsible to develop and implement a long-term program of school improvement and provide an environment supportive of change.

The Association holds responsibility to enhance professional expertise and practice, facilitate career-long professional development, advocate on professional issues, build communities of practice and ensure that opportunities for professional development are available to teachers. To this end, the Association provides a variety of programs and structures, including a professional lending library, specialist councils, convention associations, local and provincial programs, courses, and workshops.

Association locals are responsible to establish a professional development committee and provide sufficient resources to support an effective professional development program. Further, they should advocate support for effective and equitable professional development for teachers, strive to enhance professional expertise and practice, and facilitate career-long professional development. Locals advocate on professional issues and build communities of practice.

School boards must provide sufficient and dedicated funding, which may include release provisions during the school day, for self-directed teacher professional development opportunities that are responsive to the context of the teacher, equitable and not contingent on school-based or system initiatives. There is a need for school boards to provide equitable and adequate support and resources, including time for all schools within their jurisdictions, to enable teachers to plan, implement, evaluate and participate in effective professional development programs and opportunities. School boards should specify objectives of professional development programs in policy statements. Support for the program can be demonstrated by a board's willingness to make professional development a significant portion of its overall operation. This can be demonstrated through provision for sabbatical leaves for professional development, individual professional development funds, and grants to support innovative practice and publication of successful professional development programs. The cost of developing and implementing jurisdictional initiatives must be funded and resourced independently of other professional development supports.

The Department of Education is responsible to provide funds for professional development programs that are based on sound principles of effective professional development. The department has additional responsibilities: to provide support and resources for curriculum inservice that is based on the principles of effective professional development; to involve teachers in meaningful roles in all phases of curriculum design and implementation; to adequately fund the implementation of curriculum change including the provision of resources, materials and technology; to allow adequate time for inservice; to allow equal access to inservice programs for all teachers; and to plan inservice that follows the principles of effective curriculum inservice. The cost of developing and implementing ministerial initiatives must be funded and resourced independently of other professional development supports. Teachers believe that the Department of Education must continue to invest in both organizational improvement efforts and teacher professional development to sustain efforts that create a more responsive and adaptable education system.

Universities have responsibilities to offer courses about emergent education issues, trends and new teaching strategies to teachers and to cooperate with teachers at the provincial, local and school levels to develop effective professional development programs, which may include collaborative research projects. Universities have as a major focus the preservice side of the professional development continuum, but they should also provide courses in emergent issues and trends for practising teachers, including appropriate graduate programs. Current examples would be digital technology integration, global and diversity education, and inclusion of special needs in the classroom. Universities can also provide resource persons for professional development programs at the district or school levels and provide assistance in teacher-designed research projects. Universities could enter into partnerships with school jurisdictions and local associations for the design and delivery of a professional development program, which might include a collaborative research component. In their primary function of teacher preparation, universities should be dedicated to excellence in teaching, learning and research and should include practical components in teacher preparation. The Association continues to embrace partnerships with the faculties of education to make decisions affecting the preparation of teachers: recruitment, selection, admission, institutional preparation, internship, placement and programs of support in the early years of practice. Universities should provide teacher education that promotes collegial, collaborative, reflective professional relationships and practice.

Professional development is an important component of education and educational change. It is critical that all those involved in the professional development enterprise fulfill their roles and responsibilities in a spirit of collegial collaboration.

## **Effectiveness of Professional Development**

A comprehensive program of professional development attempts to support individual, school and district goals. Professional development goals should be formally delineated in the policy and organizational structures of the district and/or schools.

Professional development effectiveness should be assessed through teacher efficacy, personal reflection and self-assessment. Teachers' professional development goals, plans and growth are best considered through reflective practice and self-assessment that take into consideration the depth, breadth and complexity of professional practice. Multiple sources of evidence are required to effectively evaluate the multifaceted nature of successful professional development. Continuous professional learning is essential to maintain the currency of teacher practice, but it is inappropriate to define a direct relationship between professional learning and improved student outcomes or other measures of system performance.

Teachers should be encouraged to try new techniques and skills through a planned set of experiences. There is a profound need for experimentation as teachers attempt to meet vast and changing needs in the classroom. The ability to take risks demands a trusting environment for learning. Cultures of inquiry support teachers involved in disciplined inquiry into teaching and learning. Teachers contribute to the profession by systematically undertaking research, engaging in self-reflection and disseminating promising practices.

Professional learning activities should support experimentation and risk taking, yet the risk taking, openness and cultures of inquiry inherent in professional learning communities are likely to be significantly diminished if the ultimate purpose and value of professional learning are pre-emptively determined to reside beyond teacher learning. Well-supported professional learning will result in teachers' enhanced ability to respond to diverse learner needs and a sense of self-efficacy in the context of formal standards of practice.

# Professional Growth, Supervision and Evaluation

[1980, revised 1987, 1989, 1991, 2004, 2010, 2020]

Accountability for professional competence is a shared responsibility. All teachers, including school leaders, have the responsibility to review periodically their own effectiveness and to seek improvements as part of the continuing process of their professional development. The profession has a responsibility for developing adequate programs of professional growth, supervision and evaluation. School boards have a responsibility for the provision of adequate resources to implement programs of professional growth, supervision and evaluation. Three distinct processes—professional growth, supervision and evaluation—provide the basis for procedures that facilitate professional competence. The Association supports the principle that this process is based on a standard of practice established by the profession.

## Professional Growth Plans

All teachers, including school leaders, have a responsibility for their individual and collective continuing professional growth. Professional growth plans are self-authored and growth directed and reflect an assessment of the individual's professional learning needs. Teachers, school leaders and system leaders must not be expected to adopt a school's or school system's improvement goals or format for their individual professional growth plans.

Professional growth is a career-long process which involves individual reflection and dialogue with colleagues about professional practice. In developing the written growth plan, teachers and administrators reflect on their own learning needs, focus on goals that are consistent with the applicable professional practice standard and modify their plans over the school year as they share and review them with colleagues. The professional growth plan should have clear expectations, processes, timelines and opportunities for reflection.

Professional growth plans are the responsibility and property of the individual. Although a copy may be kept in the supervising administrator's office, the plan should be returned to the author at the end of the school year. A professional growth plan may not be used for evaluation unless the author requests that it be used for this purpose. The ownership and use of the plan should be clearly established with the author.

Resources used for professional growth programs have a significant potential to improve professional practice; therefore, school boards, in allocating resources to the three processes—growth, supervision and evaluation—should ensure that the largest portion is directed to professional growth programs and that teachers have opportunities for self-directed professional development.

## Supervision

The overall goal of supervision is to promote professional learning and development. The purpose of supervision is to provide support, guidance and collaborative development opportunities; observe and receive information from qualified sources; provide direct, constructive feedback about professional practice; identify professional behaviour and practices that should be recognized as exemplars; identify professional behaviours and practices that may require an evaluation; and support school improvement and staff development. It is important that the appropriate purpose for supervision is clearly established in collaboratively developed school division policy.

The process followed during supervision for all of these purposes must be characterized by a climate of trust and support, an ongoing process and a shared responsibility. The process should be based upon a collegial, collaborative model that includes direct and differential approaches and individual input into methods and processes. Relevant information and observations should be shared on an ongoing basis that includes copies of any notes or documentation taken during supervision.

Supervision programs should be utilized for all certificated staff. Supervision of teachers is conducted by school principals; supervision of school principals and central office certificated staff is conducted by the superintendent.

## Evaluation

Evaluation is a formal process whereby information that is gathered and recorded over a specified period of time and subjected to reasoned judgment (including the consideration of context) is ultimately used to make a judgment about the teacher's employment status or certification. The results of the judgmental function may be used for making decisions for purposes of employment, such as continuing contracts, promotion, transfer or termination, or for making decisions about certification, including permanent certification, suspension of certification or decertification. Another result of the judgmental function may be to make decisions when through supervision there is reason to believe that the individual's professional practice does not meet the established standard.

Evaluation policies and procedures in a school jurisdiction should be developed by a collaborative process involving superintendents, trustees, administrators and teachers. It is important that teachers and school leaders have a clear role in the development of policy.

An evaluation may be conducted for the following purposes: (a) upon written request of the individual, (b) for the purpose of gathering information related to the employment decisions of a teacher who does not hold a continuing contract or a permanent teaching certificate or a school or school division leader who does not hold a continuing designation and (c) when there is reason to believe that an individual's professional practice does not meet the established standard.

Evaluation of teachers is the responsibility of the principal and evaluation of principals is the responsibility of the superintendent. Should it be necessary to include another member of the school or central office leadership team in the evaluation, the individual's role must be outlined in writing prior to the commencement of the evaluation. An independent evaluator may be appropriate in some instances and may be requested by the teacher or school leader to undertake the evaluation of that individual's professional practice.

Evaluations must follow a procedure that begins with the reasons for the evaluation, as well as a statement of the process, criteria and standards to be used. The procedure should be completed within reasonable timelines, include discussion of written reports that are discussed with the individual and contain the right of appeal.

An effective teacher evaluation process must, in reflecting the rules of natural justice, be based only on evidence gathered during the evaluation. The process conducted within a reasonable timeline should include pre- and post-visitation conferences and observations of the teacher's teaching and other activities related to the teacher's assignment. Further, the process should, while providing the teacher with ongoing feedback, culminate in a formal written report which the teacher has opportunity to discuss and to which a written response may be appended before it is placed in the teacher's personnel file. Access to the personnel file, which contains all the information concerning the teacher, is limited to the teacher and certificated personnel with administrative responsibilities directly related to that teacher. The evaluation procedure should also provide for an appeal

process and be conducted in accordance with the Code of Professional Conduct. Evaluations should not be based upon extracurricular activities, assessment by parents or students, the use of student achievement data or the teacher's community involvement.

An effective evaluation process for school leaders must be reasonable, based on the rules of procedural fairness and natural justice, and involve the school leader as a full participant. The process conducted within a reasonable timeline should start with providing the school leader with written notification of the evaluation and reasons for it. The evaluation must be based on identifiable data which is made available to the school leader and reflects the Leadership Quality Standard.

Quality leadership occurs when the school leader, through ongoing analysis of the school context, demonstrates professional actions, judgments and decisions that are in the best educational interests of students and supports the provision of optimum teaching and learning opportunities. The school leader must be advised when expectations for the position are not being met, be provided with appropriate assistance and time to address performance deficiencies and be informed of the possible outcomes of a failure to improve performance. In keeping with the principle that growth, supervision and evaluation should pertain to all certificated staff in a school division, teachers have a role in the evaluation of school-based and central office leaders. The Code of Professional Conduct would apply to the process as to all supervision and evaluation processes.

Evaluations that are initiated when the supervising principal or superintendent, through supervision, has reason to believe that an individual's practice does not meet the established standard must adhere to a comprehensive process. First, the supervising principal or superintendent meets with the individual to discuss concerns identified through supervision. This meeting results in a continuation of the ongoing supervision process or issuance of a notice of evaluation. Where a notice of evaluation is issued, the notice must include the reasons for and purpose of the evaluation; the process, criteria and standards to be used; reasonable timelines; and possible outcomes of the evaluation. Following the completion of the evaluation process as outlined in the notice, an evaluation report is issued, which may determine that the individual meets the established standard and continues with the ongoing supervision and growth process, or does not meet the established standard and an additional evaluation period is necessary or does not meet the established standard and a notice of remediation may be issued. Where a notice of remediation is issued, the notice outlines expectations for improvement and may remove the individual from the growth plan process. The notice contains support and assistance that is available, allows for adequate time to meet expectations and provides notice of a subsequent evaluation within 100 school days. The subsequent evaluation report may result in a range of possibilities, including return of the individual to the ongoing supervision and growth process, an additional period of remediation, a change of assignment or a recommendation that the individual's contract of employment or leadership designation be terminated. If, on completion of an evaluation, the superintendent concludes that the teacher's suitability for certification is in question, the superintendent shall report to the executive secretary to initiate a professional practice review hearing.

The professional growth, supervision and evaluation policies and procedures are three distinct processes which, carefully implemented, provide the basis for establishing, developing and maintaining a standard of professional practice.

# Public Education Facilities

[2003, revised 2013]

## Background and Rationale

Reasonable access to publicly owned and operated education facilities is an essential feature of a democratic society. Since the public school is a significant aspect of a community's identity, the closest possible cooperation between school authorities and the community is necessary when planning, constructing, modernizing, maintaining or closing a school. All planning, constructing, maintaining and modernizing of public education facilities must be undertaken in compliance with prevailing Occupational Health and Safety legislation and regulations.

## Schools—Teaching and Learning Facilities

It is vital that there be minimal disruption to instruction and student learning during any phase of school construction, modernization or closure. Therefore, consideration of the impact on teaching and learning is of primary importance in the associated decision-making processes and implementation practices.

The teacher's role during construction, modernization or school closure should be restricted to professional roles and responsibilities. If teachers are required to perform additional duties related to any of these three processes, they should be appropriately compensated.

## Planning and Design

Enrolment projections should be the primary criterion in planning and constructing school facilities. In designing and equipping school buildings, optimum physical conditions for active learning need to be in place to provide for the range of activities required for effective program delivery. In addition, the design must allow for the necessary flexibility to meet changing needs in curriculum delivery and technology. Planners should incorporate optimal standards for heating/cooling, lighting, visual aesthetics, ventilation, acoustics, ergonomic designs and other building systems in a more energy efficient manner and develop school sites that best preserve the natural environment.

## Maintenance and Modernization

Regularly scheduled ongoing maintenance programs must be implemented to ensure that all school facilities meet Occupational Health and Safety standards and to provide an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Existing schools should undergo the modernization required to bring them up to the same standards.

Portable and relocatable classrooms should be used on a temporary basis only. Temporary classrooms must be constructed, equipped and regularly inspected to be safe and healthy places for teaching and learning. Portable and relocatable classrooms must undergo comprehensive, independent, third-party Occupational Health and Safety testing, with results released to the public.

## School Closure

Schools with excess capacity should be considered for alternative use before being closed, with the first priority being student-related programs and subsequent priority given to community-based public-sector programs. If it becomes necessary to close a school, the process should include

- (a) public notice of the projected closing given as early as possible;
- (b) the opportunity for teachers, parents and community members to provide formal input; and
- (c) notice given to affected staff, students, parents and the community as soon as possible.

## Conclusion

Albertans must have reasonable access to healthy and safe publicly funded education facilities. The integral role public education facilities play in communities dictates that collaborative decision-making processes and compliance with legislated Occupational Health and Safety practices be paramount when planning, constructing, modernizing, maintaining or closing public education facilities. The overriding guiding principle for utilization of public education facilities must be to provide healthy and safe environments that are optimized for teaching and learning.



# **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

[2022]

## **Fundamental Beliefs**

The primary purpose of schools is to educate all students. In Alberta, *public education* refers to public, separate and francophone education. The public, separate and francophone school systems are publicly funded and have historical and constitutional legitimacy. Attitudes toward public education have been shaped by values related to equal access to high-quality education and resources and a respect for cultural pluralism. The Association supports publicly elected school authorities being responsible for governing education in Alberta.

## **Denominational Schools**

The Association recognizes the historical and constitutional legitimacy of Roman Catholic separate school authorities and the denominational education they provide and considers them a vital component of Alberta's public education system.

## **Alternative Public Education Programs**

Alternative schools and alternative programs within the public education system exist to meet the needs of students who have not experienced success in regular school programs. Alternative schools and alternative programs should be designed to meet learning needs and address learning differences, should demonstrate a net educational benefit to students, should be financially and administratively feasible without additional fees, should avoid privileging one segment of society and should adhere to the basic principles of public education by being publicly funded and universally accessible to all students.

## **Language Education**

### **1. Right to Education in a Minority Language**

The Association supports Alberta parents in exercising their right to have their children educated in either official language. The Association believes that all students who are entitled under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to receive French first language instruction and who require additional assistance to learn that language should be appropriately funded to do so. The Association recognizes the right of francophones to manage their own school divisions in the publicly funded system. The Association must be a partner in the development of legislation and regulations governing the management and control of French minority language education by francophones.

### **2. Second Language Instruction**

The Association believes that funding should be provided for students in Grades 4–9 to study at least one language in addition to their primary language of instruction. School authorities offering immersion or bilingual programs in languages other than English should employ, at the school and system levels, personnel fluent in the target language, including at least one teacher with a principal designation or a system leader who can provide assistance, professional development, and supervision and evaluation to teaching staff.

## **Private Schools, Charter Schools and Home Schooling**

The Association believes that education in Alberta should be delivered through public, separate and francophone school divisions. The Government of Alberta should not fund private schools, as this diverts essential funds away from public schools. To promote equity and consistency, charter schools, private schools and home-schooling should be subject to the same government requirements, regulations and accountability measures that apply to schools in the public system. For example, the Government of Alberta should ensure that charter and private schools meet the following requirements for full accreditation: use the Alberta program of studies, employ certificated teachers, ensure that students are eligible to earn credits toward an Alberta graduation diploma, adhere to the same measures and reporting standards as required of public schools and be operated by a nonprofit society. The Association opposes the establishment of publicly funded charter schools that exclude students on any basis that violates human rights legislation, threaten the survival of local public schools by diminishing their enrolments, operate under provincial regulations that are less restrictive than those applicable to public schools or recruit students by offering

financial or other incentives not generally available to students in public schools. When specific conditions are met, the Association supports the incorporation of private schools into public school authorities.

## **Conclusion**

The strength of Alberta's public education system is its ability to provide universal high-quality education to all learners, while addressing the diversity of learning needs that exist among students.

# School-Based Budgeting and Decision Making

[1990]

Most Canadian schools function within a centrally organized administrative system; that is, school boards establish policy and set budgets that are then administered by an executive branch operating out of a central office. Under this system, schools receive an allocation of staff (teaching, support and custodial), certain items of equipment and, perhaps, some building maintenance or renovation projects. The only usual exception is a fixed-dollar allocation for the acquisition of instructional materials. Apart from that, the mix of resources dispensed to the school is determined in accordance with a centrally developed budget plan.

In recent years, an alternative decentralized system of organization has emerged in various forms and under various names. Terms such as *school-based budgeting*, *site-based management*, *school-based management* and *decentralized decision making* have all been used to describe systems under which schools are expected to plan their own operations and develop their own budgets within the limits of a total dollar allocation approved by the school board.

These allocations may reflect a number of factors, but are based mainly on per-pupil amounts related to a forecast of the number and type of students who will be enrolled at the school over the budget period—usually a school year. School budgets must stay within the amount allocated, must observe the constraints of legislation, collective agreements and district policy and may have to cover some or all of the following expenditure categories: (a)/supplies and materials needed to operate the school and its programs; (b)/capital and other equipment that the school wishes to acquire; (c)/salaries, allowances, benefits and professional development costs for the school's certificated, support and custodial staff (charges to the school for staff are usually based on the jurisdiction's average costs rather than the actual salaries of individual staff members); (d)/staff replacement costs as required for short-term sick leaves and other purposes; (e)/utility service costs; and (f)/building and equipment maintenance costs.

Once drafted, school budgets are examined and approved by senior administrators and then become part of the school district's proposed budget. Ultimately, the school board is asked to approve a budget that is a compendium of the separate budgets for each school and for various centralized functions (eg, curriculum, consulting, personnel and other school support services, plus debt service and transportation expenditures for the entire district).

## Purpose

The basic purpose of school-based budgeting is to involve the individuals who are responsible for implementing decisions in actually making those decisions, in the belief that decisions are best made by those who are "closest to the action" and therefore most directly affected by the consequences of the decisions. When the process is working well, more decisions flow up through the system than down from the top. School custodians are involved in solving custodial problems; teachers are involved in solving classroom problems; principals are involved in solving schoolwide problems; and superintendents are involved in making district-wide decisions. School-based budgeting is also based on the belief that efforts at educational improvement will be more long lasting and effective if carried out by people who feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process.

Initially, at least, systems of school-based budgeting have tended to develop in larger jurisdictions where difficulties of maintaining good communications and problems of bureaucracy are most apparent. However, smaller districts have also adopted decentralized budgeting in the belief that it is a more effective way to operate.

## Structural Requirements

The movement from centralized to decentralized forms of decision making requires several changes in organizational structure.

The first of these relates to transfer of authority. If schools are to be given decision-making authority that is meaningful, that decision-making authority must be relinquished by those at the upper levels of the organizational hierarchy. It becomes even more important, for instance, that boards of trustees restrict themselves to policy matters and avoid becoming embroiled in operational concerns. The most significant change, however, must occur at the executive level. A process of deregulation is required; that is, the executive branch must give up some of its managerial prerogatives and must relinquish its power to make school-level decisions by regulation or fiat.

Having dismantled the mechanisms for centralized decision making, the central office has to replace these with mechanisms designed to advise and assist those who will now make the decisions. It must also create the structures required to monitor decisions made at the school level and to ensure that they are consistent with district policy and other constraints. In larger jurisdictions, the logistical problems associated with this monitoring function often require dividing the district into a number of smaller and more manageable administrative units.

Other requirements include the following:

1. *Ongoing District Support*—Fundamental change in the way in which school districts make decisions must be accompanied by solid support from the school board and the superintendent.
2. *Staff Development*—Where school-based management has been successful, substantial investments have been made in additional staff development. Inservice often focuses on developing planning and decision-making skills, working toward consensus, brainstorming, creative problem solving, group dynamics and team building. Principals have received additional training in leadership skills.
3. *New Budgeting Practices*—School-based budgeting means that, once an overall district budget is established, individual schools have greater latitude in determining how best to deploy the resources. The emphasis shifts from spending by formula to spending to achieve specific objectives. In turn, schools are more accountable for outcomes.
4. *Time*—School-based management is designed to involve the entire school community in establishing school objectives, developing programs to meet those objectives, implementing the programs and monitoring program success. Accordingly, it is obvious that a significant amount of additional time must be committed to the process.
5. *Access to Information*—Decisions will be only as good as the information on which they are based. An important role of central office administrators is to ensure that schools receive timely and accurate information for their decision making.
6. *Communication*—School-based budgeting is an inclusionary process. Principals, teachers, parents and community members become involved in making significant decisions about schools. Systematic communication among everyone involved must be a high priority.

## Possible Benefits

Proponents of decentralization have identified a number of benefits over centralized control.

The most frequently cited benefit relates to the requirement that schools and their communities become directly involved in the planning process. This is seen as valuable in helping schools to develop a clearer sense of purpose, to become more self-directing, and to become more responsive and committed to meeting the specific needs of students and the community. Such primary benefits, it is argued, will produce spinoff gains in terms of enhanced job satisfaction and collegiality among teachers.

Another frequently recognized benefit is the short circuiting of the red tape and bureaucracy so often associated with heavily centralized forms of organization. Schools can more easily acquire the supplies and equipment that they believe are necessary to the programs they have decided to offer. Further, having planned those programs and set priorities, schools will expend the available resources more effectively.

Finally, supporters contend that decentralization produces a more logical and responsive form of organization. Once it is clear that the authority and responsibility for operational decisions rests at the school level, the resources of central office are then seen as existing to serve the needs of schools.

Advantages that have been identified for school-based budgeting include variations of the following:

1. It formally recognizes the expertise and competence of those who work in individual schools to make decisions to improve learning.
2. It gives teachers, other staff members and the community increased input into decisions.
3. It can improve morale of teachers because staff members see they can have an immediate impact on their environment.
4. It shifts the emphasis in staff development by involving teachers more directly in determining what they need.
5. It can bring both financial and instructional resources in line with the instructional goals developed in individual schools.
6. It can result in provision of better services and programs for students.
7. It tends to encourage the emergence and development of new leaders at all levels.
8. It has the potential of improving the quality of communication, especially informal communication.
9. It can contribute to teacher empowerment by taking full advantage of the expertise of all staff and providing teachers with more autonomy and freedom to act.

However, achievement of these advantages depends in large measure on the degree to which authority for making decisions is, in fact, decentralized. Problems arise, not so much from the concept, as from the way in which it is implemented and the constraints imposed.

## Possible Problems and Dangers

Because of the variety of decentralization schemes that have been tried, it is rather more difficult to articulate the difficulties that can be encountered. Critics, however, have identified a number of possible problems and dangers.

Major difficulties can arise from the changed role of the school board in the budgeting process. In centralized systems, the process of budget development compels school boards to examine educational needs before deciding on what level of taxation is appropriate. In many decentralized systems, that process is reversed: school boards determine resources before they know enough about school needs; that is, budgeting in the schools cannot even begin until after trustees have approved the amounts to be allocated, which, of course, must be based on an assumed level of taxation.

The first danger, then, is that the school board, for lack of information, will make a wrong assumption about the appropriate level of taxation. If that happens, those responsible for developing school budgets are placed in the position of having to demonstrate how inadequate allocations can be made to "work." In that way, decentralization can be used to transfer and to cover up responsibility for bad decisions made at upper levels of organization.

A second, and related, criticism of many decentralization schemes is that they require that planning at the district level and planning at the school level occur simultaneously. Critics contend that such a requirement ignores the true nature of planning as an ongoing, linear and sequential process. Overall planning at the district level should precede detailed planning at the school level. The initial stages of planning are rather general in nature because they must be based on predictions whose accuracy is directly proportional to the size of the population one is trying to predict. Decisions related to how the school will be organized for instructional purposes have to await specific information on enrolment, much of which does not become available until close to school opening. This may help to explain why school-based budgeting may not have generated the expected degree of staff or community interest and involvement in the planning process.

Another frequently criticized aspect of decentralization is the problem of devising allocation formulae that are truly equitable. The cost of educating children is a function of how they can be grouped for instructional purposes. Accordingly, the cost of educating a group of 21 regular Grade 4 students in one school may be marginally less than the cost of educating a class of 28 in another, but the first school will receive only 75 per cent of the funding given to the second. Such problems can become magnified in smaller schools, in multiprogram schools and when dealing with small numbers of students with special needs—wherever economies of scale cannot be realized. Even sophisticated formulae that allow for program size, transiency factors and the like do not eliminate such inequities. Inequities of allocations can be compounded by the differences that can develop without centralized monitoring between schools in different socio-economic settings.

The linking of revenue to enrolment and the advantages that accrue when economies of scale can be realized have caused school-based budgeting to become identified with another educational phenomenon—the "marketing" of schools. Schools that share attendance areas begin to compete for students, each trying to grow to the optimum size for economic viability. Critics note that, to the extent that some schools succeed and others fail, inequities are exacerbated. Such competition may have other adverse effects. A school's preoccupation with projecting a positive image for itself can lead to the glossing over of problems that require care and attention. The resources devoted to promoting the school have to be diverted from their original purpose—the education of children.

In some jurisdictions, the decentralization movement has gone well beyond budgeting to encompass functions such as staffing at the school level. In the interests of allowing schools to assemble staff members who are compatible with one another and with the objectives of the school, each principal has assumed the role of staffing officer. Teachers declared surplus to one school must find placement elsewhere. In large districts, this has led to protracted and disruptive staffing procedures that have had a negative effect on staff morale.

Obstacles to the success of school-based budgeting frequently include the following:

- Absence of any one or more of the "requirements" identified earlier in this paper.
- Expectations that are too high. School-based budgeting is not a panacea for solving all of a school's or district's problems.
- Inappropriate "downsizing." Decision makers may consider downsizing of the administrative and support staff, and they may receive pressure from elsewhere to do so. While the role of some personnel might change, care should be taken not to jeopardize the effectiveness of the school program.
- Difficulty in striking a workable balance of minimum standards through collective agreements, board policy, legislation and provincial mandates while ensuring flexibility for meaningful decisions at the school level.

- Inaccurate beliefs about equity, both in funding and in program. In some instances, a concern for educational equity has led to standardization of procedures and programs. However, since the students they serve are not uniform, school programs should vary in accordance with diverse student needs. When equity is synonymous with uniformity, the needs of some students are not met.
- Skepticism. Many of those involved may be skeptical that the advantages of school-based budgeting will outweigh the disadvantages. It may be viewed as the latest passing fad and, because it means changed procedures and puts different demands on teachers' time, some may be fearful or resentful. They may also worry about the security of their positions. In short, change of this magnitude creates stress.

There have been other problems associated with the various decentralization schemes which have been tried. These include

- the tendency, particularly in times of restraint, to cut back on ancillary services such as teacher-librarians and school counsellors and on funding for professional development;
- the amount of staff time, and particularly administrator time, that is diverted from education to budget matters;
- the conflict that can be created by the competition for funds within schools and the possible adverse effects on collegial relationships, particularly between principal and staff;
- the amount of flexibility, which is a function of school size, and the fact that small schools derive little benefit;
- the problems raised when schools are made responsible for matters outside of their control (eg, short-term staff absenteeism and equipment breakdown) and the hardships that this can create, again particularly in smaller schools;
- the fact that implementation of school-based budgeting and the type of involvement allowed are dependent on the leadership style of the principal;
- the difficulty of maintaining standards of plant maintenance and program offering and of ensuring equality of educational opportunity for children; and
- the absence, in some cases, of centralized professional development funds for which teachers may apply on an equal basis to support individual professional growth opportunities.

## Conclusions

The basic premises that underlie school-based budgeting and decision making are consistent with Association policy, which calls for the involvement of practising teachers in decision making related to the development, implementation, operation and evaluation of educational programs.

However, few of the present school-based budgeting formats have been successful in providing a consistent and meaningful role for teachers in decision making. In many cases, it has become an overwhelming time burden.

Finally, current experiments with decentralization do not deal with the problem of schools being compelled to budget on the basis of inadequate resources. Without some guarantee that adequate resources are made available, involvement in budgeting can require teachers to become accomplices to decisions made at other levels, which have undesirable educational consequences.

## **School–Community Relations**

[2022]

The teaching profession believes that parents and the business community are essential partners in public education. The Association supports partnerships that are founded in mutually respectful ways; that support student learning; and that do not exploit schools, staff, or students and their families commercially. In addition, the Association supports community schools and calls upon the Government of Alberta to adequately fund them so that all students can grow into healthy and productive citizens who contribute to the good of society. Where partnerships between educators and parents and between education and business are formed, the principles that guide the establishment of these educational partnerships are outlined as follows.

Parents and teachers working together is a powerful way to help students succeed. The teaching profession affirms that effective parent–teacher relationships will be formed with mutual respect, honesty, openness and trust. Further, both parents and teachers must commit to a collaborative approach, one underpinned by effective communication strategies, accountability and clearly established goals.

Another avenue for parents and teachers to work together is through involvement in school councils. The Association supports the establishment of school councils that involve parents and that are enabled through guidelines developed by school authorities that outline the role of school councils as advisory and collaborative bodies. Finally, the Association supports the establishment of educational policy that is the product of collaboration between teachers and the input of school councils.

The teaching profession believes that the interests of the business community are advanced when public education establishes a foundation of learning that prepares active, caring citizens of a democratic society—citizens who meet their full potential. A more traditional view might argue that business typically has had three goals in education: providing market access to a captive audience of students, inspiring students’ ideological allegiance to a free market world view on issues of public concern and using schools as training centres to produce the workforce required by business. While many businesses do not share the last view, it is important to establish standards for education–business partnerships and sponsorships and to develop guidelines for partnerships.

Several factors are essential in establishing ethical standards for education–business partnerships and sponsorships. First, the expectations of each partner must be clearly defined before both enter the partnership. Second, partnerships should not in any way compromise the goals of public education. Third, the participation of teachers and students in partnerships must be voluntary. Fourth, neither students nor their families should be exploited because of an education–business partnership. Finally, business partners must not promote specific products, determine curricula or influence educational policies.

Education–business partnerships should operate under the following guidelines. Partnerships should be based on sound educational principles and should recognize and respect the ethics and

core values of all partners. Partnerships should recognize that the school is a collegial environment and that partnerships must meet an identified educational purpose, not a commercial motive. Before a partnership is established, there should be a full discussion involving the participating school staff, parent representatives and prospective partners, and if a partnership is established, it should be regularly and systematically evaluated. Teachers are in the best position to make decisions about school resources, program methodologies and other pedagogical issues, and prospective partners need to recognize this. The integrity of public education must be protected through a transparent decision-making process that includes public participation.

Partnerships should not be undertaken for the purpose of monetary gain, to exploit students or their families, to place restrictions on the academic freedom of the school, or for the right to influence curriculum or educational policy. In addition, partnerships must not promote exclusive or restrictive arrangements between schools and participating business partners. Partnerships should not be established to compensate for inadequate provincial funding but, rather, should complement the education system. In no way should partnerships reduce the obligation of corporations to pay their share of taxes to support public education.

The Association believes that, in principle, schools should be free of business for profit and should be advertising-free zones. Commercial enterprise in schools must be consistent with educational values and must not infringe on the individual's freedom of choice or freedom of expression or the academic freedom of the school community. Commercial enterprise must not exploit students as a captive audience, and curriculum materials produced by commercial enterprise must be subjected to rigorous evaluation, with specific attention to accuracy and completeness, commercialism, bias, and stereotyping. Corporate money for scholarships or awards should be given only to recognize educational achievement, sporting contributions, community leadership or citizenship. Donations or endowments for athletic or pedagogical purposes should be consistent with educational values, and acknowledgements should be made only in appropriate ways.

In summation, the Association believes in partnerships between schools, parents and businesses that are mutually beneficial and grounded in educational considerations. To that end, parents and teachers have a responsibility to work together to help students in a respectful fashion, school councils hold a consultative role in terms of shaping educational policy at schools, and educators and businesses should work together in a manner that improves the education system for the betterment of society.

# Teacher Education and Certification

[1967, revised 1970, 1976, 1981, 1987, 1997, 2007, 2017]

The quality of service given by the teaching profession is a major determinant of the standards of education in the province and, therefore, of the status of the profession. Hence, the Association is vitally concerned with the creation and maintenance of a competent and effective teaching force. The Association must be the principal partner in making decisions affecting the preparation of teachers, including recruitment, selection, admission, institutional preparation, internship, placement and programs of support in the early years of practice. The Association recognizes that other institutions have a legitimate interest in teacher education and certification. These include the Department of Education, teacher education programs in Alberta universities and the Alberta School Boards Association.

Teacher education and certification is the responsibility of the Government of Alberta. However, some responsibility is delegated to the teaching profession through the *Teaching Profession Act*. This act recognizes teaching as a profession and gives legal status to the Alberta Teachers' Association.

## Recruitment and Selection into the Profession

The aim of recruitment is to provide adequate numbers of capable teacher candidates, while the aim of selection is to ensure that only competent teachers reach the classrooms. Since the quality of entrants affects the profession and the quality of education, the Association must be consulted in matters of recruitment and selection. University entrance into a teacher education program should be based on standards equivalent to those of other professional programs, with an emphasis on selection factors that research has demonstrated to be relevant to teaching success to assist both the candidate and those involved in teacher education with developing an understanding of the candidate's suitability for teaching. The Association provides to prospective education students information on what will be expected of them as teachers and what they can expect in return for their services as teachers.

## Teacher Education Programs

The granting of degrees in education in Alberta should be through teacher education programs within Alberta universities recognized by the Association, who in their primary function of teacher preparation should be dedicated to excellence in teaching, learning and research. These institutions need to provide a teacher education program that promotes collegial, collaborative, reflective professional relationships and practice. The program incorporates and integrates a balance of (1) high-quality undergraduate teacher education programs with strong field experiences, (2) service to the professional teaching community through continuing professional development opportunities and (3) established research and graduate study programs. Further, teacher education programs should employ academic staff who are certificated teachers; who have demonstrated excellence in teaching experience in elementary or secondary school; and who maintain their currency through frequent contact with schools and teachers through research, visitation and professional activities. Teacher education programs should ensure that faculty members associated with teacher education programs emphasize and model the application of current educational theory to teaching practice.

The minimum preparation prior to first certification should be four years of university-based teacher education culminating in a degree that includes general education, subject preparation, study of pedagogical strategies and field experiences based on a professional practice standard determined by the profession. The Association advocates that at least two years of the four-year teacher preparation program should be taken on the campus of a degree-granting institution where the teacher education program assumes responsibility for the design, approval and continuous evaluation of the teacher education program with the direct involvement of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

The final two years of a teacher education program should include the pedagogical strategies and field experiences prerequisite to initial certification as well as instruction by a certificated teacher in the legal, ethical and professional nature of teaching with an emphasis on the services, structure and function of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Teacher education programs should structure their programs to emphasize skill development in the areas of planning for teaching, identifying and responding to learner needs, pedagogical practice, assessment and reporting methods, clear communication, and classroom management. Teacher education programs in Alberta should ensure that the preparation of teachers to work with a diversity of students is comprehensive and includes elements that prepare teachers to respond to the socioeconomic, ethnocultural and linguistic diversity of students and to support the success of Indigenous students. Teacher candidates must be prepared to plan effectively for the inclusion of students with exceptionalities so they can implement effective instructional practices for a wide range of learners within inclusive learning environments. Teacher education programs must also prepare teacher candidates to implement effective instructional practices within multigrade classrooms and to recognize and respect the range of gender and sexual identities.

Teacher education programs in Alberta universities should provide expanded opportunities for postgraduate education programs through off-site courses, flexible scheduling, modified residency requirements, portability of course credits, extended program completion time limits and alternate forms of delivery.

## Certification

Certification is the crucial checkpoint in determining who shall teach in Alberta schools. Teachers prepared in Alberta should be certificated only on the recommendation of an Alberta university. The certification of authority to teach and the decision to discontinue such authority is a responsibility of the profession. The Association accepts responsibility for the development and application of procedures for certification to assist those teachers who experience difficulty and, if necessary, to suspend or cancel certificates of those deemed to be lacking competence.

The basic preparatory requirement for certification should be a four-year course or equivalent in an education faculty. Requirements for permanent certification of teachers prepared in Alberta or whose first certification is in Alberta should be the successful completion of one full school year of teaching experience or equivalent in an internship. The same requirements for certification should apply to teachers prepared outside the province as apply to those prepared in Alberta. There should be one type of permanent Alberta certificate, and all teachers, including teachers of special subjects,



librarians or school counsellors, should be required to hold this certificate. To ensure that the profession remains current, any teacher returning to teaching after an absence of five continuous years should be required to meet the minimum requirement in effect at the time of return.

To adhere to both legal and ethical requirements and to protect the interests of learners and society, school authorities must ensure that no person be permitted to commence teaching in a school in Alberta until issued an Alberta teaching credential. While in emergency situations the use of a letter of authority as a teaching credential is sometimes used, the use of letters of authority should not be expanded.

## Field Experience Programs

*Field experience* refers to a combined minimum of a one-semester or equivalent period of not less than 13 weeks of full-time, classroom-based experience as part of the requirement for initial teacher certification. It has the status of a regular credit course toward the bachelor of education degree.

The Association recognizes that an effective teacher education program must integrate educational theory with teaching practice. Consequently, the nature of classroom-based field experiences for teacher candidates is of vital concern to the Association. Substantive changes in field experience programs should occur only with the consultation and approval of the Association. The Association's position on the nature of a suitable field experience and the role of practising teachers in its design and implementation is as follows.

Teacher education programs in Alberta universities and the Alberta Teachers' Association jointly acknowledge that field experiences are key processes in teacher education, which require for their success a close collaborative relationship between the teaching profession and the preservice teacher education program. Field experiences create conditions that recognize and promote teaching as a reflective and collegial practice. Teacher education programs in Alberta universities and the Alberta Teachers' Association are committed to field experiences that develop the student teacher's reflective capacities for observation, analysis, interpretation and decision making as well as the competencies required for effective teaching and learning.

Field experiences provide opportunities for inquiry into teaching and an orientation and socialization to the teaching profession. Field experiences provide an opportunity for prospective teachers to consider how students learn and why, their own teaching strategies, and the social and cultural milieu that influences learning and teaching within schools. Field experiences provide a forum for preservice teacher education program faculty, professional teachers and preservice teachers to engage in meaningful discourse regarding competing ideas, approaches and pedagogical strategies that inform teaching.

Teacher education programs in Alberta universities and the teaching profession share in the commitment to foster these opportunities. The field experience program will continue to be a matter of ongoing examination, refinement, enrichment and improvement involving preservice teacher education programs, the Association, the Department of Education and other relevant government departments as well as partner groups.

An effective field experience must incorporate the following basic features: (1) a graduated set of classroom-based field experiences extended throughout the teacher preparation program; (2) appropriate orientation of the student teacher to the school, the system and the profession; (3) procedures that will provide for effective evaluation of student teachers during each phase of the field experience program; (4) an opportunity for field experience in both rural and urban settings; (5) formative and summative evaluation consistent with Association policy; (6) each field experience connected to a specific on-campus course; (7) participation by the Alberta Teachers' Association in the resolution of professional conduct disputes related to field experience programs in schools; (8) an appeal procedure for student teachers who are unsuccessful in their field experiences and a remediation plan, developed by the teacher preparation program and provided to the cooperating teacher, for those students who must repeat a practicum; (9) evaluation of a student teacher's performance as a shared responsibility of cooperating teachers and preservice teacher education program personnel, provided that cooperating teachers have the major responsibility for final evaluation; and (10) safeguards to ensure that the field experience is not compromised by activities related to teacher recruitment.

## Field Experience Implementation

The implementation of a comprehensive and effective field experience program requires that the Government of Alberta make sufficient resources available to provide (1) inservice opportunities for cooperating teachers, (2) travel and expense allowances for student teachers that ensure equitable supports regardless of location of cooperating school, (3) ongoing communication with all personnel involved in the field experiences, (4) personnel to offer consultant services to cooperating teachers and student teachers, (5) compensation for cooperating teachers and (6) teacher secondments to teacher education programs in Alberta universities.

Secondments of practising teachers to teacher education programs, for up to two years to assist with the design and implementation of field experiences, must be accompanied by a written agreement with their employers that guarantees their return to a position no less favourable than that held immediately prior to the effective date of the secondment.

The Association represents teachers on bodies that determine and implement criteria and procedures for the recruitment and selection of cooperating teachers. The Association is obligated to ensure that classroom teacher involvement in field experience programs remains on a voluntary basis and that conditions for teacher participation are satisfactory.

Cooperating teachers for field experience programs should be selected on the basis of the following criteria: (1) a bachelor of education degree or its equivalent and a permanent Alberta teaching certificate; (2) three or more years of successful teaching experience; (3) ability to project a favourable image of the teaching profession; (4) ability to establish and maintain good interpersonal skills and to apply mentoring, communication and supervisory skills effectively; (5) ability to analyze and evaluate teaching and learning skills effectively; (6) willingness to participate in meetings, consultation, seminars and other activities related to field experiences involvement; and (7) possession of active or associate membership in the Association.

As it represents the interests of the profession, the Alberta Teachers' Association must be the principal partner in decisions that determine and implement criteria and procedures for the recruitment and selection of cooperating teachers. It is central to the interest of the profession that cooperating teachers' involvement in field experience programs and activities be voluntary, with decisions made at the school level, by the teacher and in consultation with the school principal. Prior to implementation of any field experience program, sufficient resources, including time and inservice, must be provided so that school-based certificated personnel can meet their commitments to both their students and student teachers.

Honoraria should be provided to cooperating teachers to acknowledge their contributions. The honoraria should be based on factors such as current teacher salaries and time devoted to the field experience program. These honoraria, sponsored through grants given by the Government of Alberta and administered by the teacher preparation programs, express appreciation for the valuable contributions made by cooperating teachers.

Student teachers' participation in their field experience program should be evaluated by a pass/fail method and supported by a written description of performance. Wherever possible, teacher education programs should ensure that school-based administrators are not used as faculty consultants or advisors for field experience assignments in the school in which they serve as principals. This will help safeguard the field experience component from activities related to teacher recruitment.

## **Internship**

Internship is a period of supervised practice in a school following initial certification but preceding permanent certification. Internship provides an orientation to school systems, to the community and to school operations, as well as a lower-stress opportunity to try out teaching styles and techniques. The intern assumes the role of a teacher colleague rather than that of a student. The Association must have a key role in internship programs.

The Association believes that an effective internship program must incorporate the following basic features: (1) Appropriate teaching opportunities (for one full school year or equivalent), which allows the intern to experience a full range of in-school teaching assignments. Such an assignment would initially be no more than 40 per cent of a regular teaching load and, in the latter portion of the internship, no more than 80 per cent; (2) An opportunity to observe and/or participate in administrative, curriculum, policy, extracurricular and other appropriate activities at both school and school system levels; (3) Formative and summative evaluation consistent with Association policy; (4) Active membership in the Association and subject to the Code of Professional Conduct; (5) An Association inservice program meeting intern and school system needs associated with the internship program; and (6) Successful completion of the internship program leading to permanent professional certification.

The Association supports preservice institutions with teacher education programs in their efforts to maintain the integrity and to build the capacity of their teacher education preparation programs. The future of the profession depends on responsive, comprehensive and effective teacher education programs, supported by those in the profession, and further depends on certification requirements that honour and maintain the high standards of the teaching profession.

# Technology and Education

[1999, revised 2004, 2007, 2014]

## Technology and Educational Change

As within the broader society and economy, new information and communications technologies will continue to transform education in profound and largely unforeseen ways. It is vital that the teaching profession actively participate in the process of shaping educational policy and practice in this area.

Skill sets of today's multi-literate students in the area of technology cannot be ignored. Technology offers teachers a new range of opportunities to enhance the learning environment of students; however, rapid change makes it challenging to establish which pedagogical strategies are most effective. This is compounded by the fact that there are few longitudinal studies regarding technology implementation with significant sample sizes for comparison purposes, especially at the elementary and middle levels.

Innovative teaching and learning with technology is a dynamic, challenging and creative act. Just as educators adapt emerging technologies to enhance student learning, new technologies come forward. Compounding this complexity is that emerging technologies can influence almost everything from infrastructure to classroom teaching, and educational policy almost always lags behind the implementation of technology. Amidst these changes, for example, is growth in the movement towards "Big Data" whereby individuals (and their data) become "atomized", with behaviours tracked in real time and then compared with millions of other individuals. Issues of privacy, data access, and who actually owns student and teacher data will grow enormously in the near future, along with the many moral and ethical issues raised by the use of data analytics and data mining of student information.

Since teachers are most aware of the complex circumstances in which implementation of a technology occurs, they have a unique and essential perspective that must be considered in the public discussion in terms of the place and purposes of technology in schooling. Teachers are in the best position to determine the value of an emerging technology in terms of its potential for the enhancement of teaching and learning.

In addition, teachers are committed to a vision of public education that must be vigorously defended at a time when the trend toward growing disparity, inequity, privatization and corporate interest in the "education industry" can exert a powerful influence on the way that technology affects educational change.

There is an increasing tendency in public life to see the world and ourselves solely in economic terms, and education is no exception. Included in such a perspective, technology is advocated as a necessary lever of change that will adapt education to the needs of globalization, restructuring and the marketplace. In responding uncritically to the imperatives of a digital age, this view emphasizes the need to bring schools more into step with the world of work, so that students will possess the skills to survive in a changing society and be prepared to meet the needs of employers. This drive towards an economic imperative is amplified by a global educational reform movement (or GERM, as coined by Pasi Sahlberg) that threatens to sidetrack meaningful educational change in Alberta. The GERM movement is characterized by a focus on standardization, growing bureaucratic interference in teachers' professional practice and zealotry for technology as the simplistic solution to the complex challenges school communities face.

In the context of the growing impacts of the GERM, the profession is concerned that focusing predominantly on preparing children in K–12 education for the world of work has begun to distract from the broader goals of education, causing society to lose sight of the social and developmental needs of children and how they can develop into informed and engaged citizens empowered for democratic life. To succeed in a globally competitive workforce, students will need to be not only confident and competent in the use of digital technologies, but also capable of dealing with the enormous challenges posed by such issues as climate change, water shortages, overpopulation, economic destabilization, urbanization and pollution.

The teaching profession is committed to a more balanced vision of public education—one founded on the principles of universality and equity, the fostering of the potential of individuals and the development of citizens in a democratic community. The profession understands that our future successes must be built on a shared goal of excellence through equity in our education system. It is within this context that the Association sees potential for the new technologies to enhance the humanistic, engaged enterprise of public education and to provide a sense of connectedness with community and civil society. The Association believes that integration of emerging technologies should be supported in a way that respects these ongoing values and traditions of public education.

## Technology, Teaching and Learning

As professionals, teachers use their knowledge and experience to analyze the classroom context as they make decisions about the teaching strategies, learning experiences and assessment practices that are best suited to the needs, interests and motivation of students. It is not technology itself but the professional decisions that teachers make about technology and its use in the classroom that will determine its impact on student learning.

The essence of teaching is a pedagogical relationship between teacher and student that may be assisted but not replaced by technology. It is evident when teachers are able to seize the teachable moment, to communicate their passion for learning and to develop students' individual gifts and talents. Technology must be used in ways that are compatible with this understanding of the nature of teaching and learning.

Teachers are required to be flexible, responsive, innovative and creative in working with all students. Technology must support, not constrain, these aspects of the teaching process. In all learning situations, emphasis must be placed on the pupil–teacher relationship, since the most advanced technologies will never replace the need for human interaction in the development and construction of knowledge. Teachers should embrace technological innovations based upon their potential to expand and extend the educational experiences of students.

Although teachers may be personally committed to this pedagogical interpretation of how technology should be used, it would be a mistake to assume that teachers can be fully in control of its influence in our classrooms. Teachers must use critical judgment when determining how technology should be integrated into the curricular and pedagogical dimensions of their teaching practice. Teachers must be vigilant in ensuring that technology is used to enhance, not displace, the human dimension and purposes of education.

## Technology in the Learning Environment

Teachers support the use of technology as an instructional tool that enables new forms of communication, inquiry, discovery and the creation and sharing of knowledge. The teaching profession needs to proceed carefully and responsibly in integrating technology into learning environments.

Teachers should use technology for its unique attributes and not in ways that replicate what face-to-face teaching can do as well or better. To adequately support social and emotional development, face-to-face instruction is the preferred option for most students in K–12.

Information and communications technology can, for example, expose students to real-world problems and place learning in a relevant context. Students can safely and easily manipulate variables in complex experiments and observe the results. The new technologies also make it possible for students to represent and communicate their knowledge using multimedia. Many students can edit their work more effectively and are able to produce professional-looking assignments.

With the developing minds and bodies of children and youth there is an increasing need to be cautious of the impact of online digital activities for offline health and mental well-being. When implementing technology, teachers, as pedagogical leaders, should take into account such factors as the age, gender and education level of students, the socioeconomic status of the community and the beliefs that a student's parents and peers hold about the value of technology both in and outside a school setting.

Children now spend more time with television, movies, computers, Internet, cellphones and video games than they do with their parents, teachers, or any other influence in their lives. Several research studies have confirmed that children and youth in Canada spend an average of seven-and-a-half hours a day in front of screens. Evidence-based decision making must be brought to bear on the choices of the media that students engage with in classrooms and the overall time in front of screens above and beyond the seven-and-a-half hours a day already occupying their lives. As media use and screen time continue to climb for students in and out of school, evidence and policy must guide the extent of students' screen time in schools to protect their health and development.

Research by Magee et al (2014)<sup>1</sup> has identified long-term associations between the length of screen time at younger ages and a predictable decrease in sleep at older ages. This decreased sleep at younger ages further predicted an increase in media use as children got older. The circular relationship between screen time, media consumption and sleep also has many other implications, including childhood obesity and declines in readiness to learn as students increasingly arrive at school with poorer sleep quality and quantity. As digital technologies are engaged to enhance student learning, achieving a healthy balance, cognitively, socially and physically for students, across screen media, becomes increasingly important.

The growing number of students with special needs, in particular, stand to benefit from new technologies, especially if the trial-and-error process is less threatening when done through interaction with the computer. Individuals with learning difficulties can be assisted by distributed learning, digital and/or e-learning activities which suit their learning needs. It is important that special education teachers are able to understand the potential of assistive technologies to facilitate learners with disabilities. It is important that assistive technologies be reviewed by teachers and that special education teachers be supported in the development of resources.

Distributed learning, digital and/or e-learning may offer new forms of choice for students, and may address some small and rural school issues specifically by expanding educational options and providing greater access to courses for some learners. Interaction between student and teacher is the key variable to success in the effective use of technology in learning environments. Face-to-face communication improves the likelihood of a successful educational experience for the student.

Learning environments and activities need to be informed by sound educational theories and should be developmentally appropriate. These theories suggest that children may lack the rich experiences needed to construct knowledge of the world around them, and distributed learning activities will need to be tailored to provide slowly increasing levels of independence. These must be developmentally appropriate and respect differentiation of students.

Based on diagnosis, teachers can make decisions regarding combining content and tools that can complement aspects of traditional face-to-face instruction. Teachers can mix online or video-conferencing with face-to-face and other modes of instruction in ways to benefit and maximize student learning.

By contrast, software that merely provides an online workbook is perhaps the most ineffective and costly use of the technology. As a research tool, the Internet not only offers students access to vast new material but also raises important concerns. Unlike text-based resources, this material is not refereed or censored, creating a tension between free speech and offensive content. As a result, teachers will need to focus more than ever on the exercise of critical judgment and address the need for media awareness.

Students must know how to respond to aggressive advertising, racist and offensive content, cyberbullying, and to strangers they may meet on the Internet. Cyberbullying on the Internet is a growing concern for the safety of students in and out of the school. Many students experience the threats and humiliation that are associated with cyberbullying or cybersmearing, and there is an increased need for school divisions to develop policies to deal with this issue. In addition, teachers must advise students on how to become discerning with respect to digital communication, and how to respond appropriately when they are targeted by inappropriate online activity. All students using the Internet must be supervised by a teacher, and younger students should only use the intranet or sites on the Internet that a teacher has previewed. These concerns aside, it may well be that, of all the technological applications, the Internet offers the most potential for unique and novel enhancements to good pedagogical practices.

Greater access to information does not equate with knowledge and practical wisdom, but when teachers have thoughtfully constructed a purposeful and appropriate learning experience for and with students in which the Internet plays an indispensable part, it can be a valuable addition to the total repertoire of teaching practices.

## Resources

While teachers normally use their professional judgment in selecting resources, they now face new and special problems concerning the quality and suitability of technology-based resources. Schools are currently being bombarded with sophisticated sales promotions for material of questionable merit. Since the development and marketing of technology-based educational resources is expensive and because there are a limited number of publishers for this material, there is a danger that unsuitable materials will be used in classrooms.

When technology-based resources are evaluated for authorized use in the Alberta curriculum, they must be vetted for Canadian content and adherence to the principles of tolerance and understanding by the department of education. Procedures must also be created to involve certificated teachers in the ongoing review, approval and evaluation of the education suitability of distributed, digital and e-learning resources not produced by Alberta certificated teachers. A government-supported centralized clearinghouse could ensure that these resources meet the same standards as other authorized learning resources, and teachers would be able to make their selection from a list of screened resources, saving time and money at the school level.

## Professional Development

Effective technology integration requires three major components: training for professional staff, timely technical support and access to hardware and software.

Underutilization or poor utilization of existing technology in schools inevitably results from inadequate attention to professional development. The positive effects of computer-based technologies in facilitating student learning and performance will be seen only when teachers have the knowledge and skill to use it appropriately.

Teaching methodologies in distributed learning, digital and/or e-learning are significantly different from traditional teaching, and teachers require substantial professional development to be effective in online environments. Access to professional development and ongoing support are required and must be in place. Also, to be effective, professional development must reflect the context of classroom teaching and curriculum rather than be restricted to skills training.

Teachers require significant professional development to adjust to the pedagogical needs of teaching in distributed learning environments. However, distributed learning also has the potential to provide new and flexible professional development opportunities for teachers.

Engaging in reflection and dialogue about the relevance of learning activities in distributed learning, digital and/or e-learning environments will be paramount to professional growth. Time must be allotted to enable teachers to become familiar with available software, to design lessons and to discuss technology use with other professionals. Teachers must have primary involvement in the design, development and selection of instructional materials, including educational technologies and digital resources, and must receive adequate time and compensation for work involved in the development of related materials.

## **Funding for the True Cost of Ownership**

The initial expenditure on technology infrastructure is only the tip of the iceberg when all the other associated costs are considered. Schools must budget to include the costs of acquisition, maintenance, upgrading and replacement of technology for schools. As well, the costs of software, licencing agreements, network infrastructure, Internet access, technical support and personnel, and professional development must be ongoing.

Keeping up with changing technology is almost an impossible task for schools with limited funding. To support the technology budget, some schools may reduce funding or cut staff in other programs. The long-term effects of these decisions will result in a narrowed curriculum and diminished educational experiences for students unless there is an increase in funding for education.

Introducing distributed learning, digital and/or e-learning initiatives with the expectation of reducing costs to the district or school is inappropriate. When working in distributed learning environments, enhancing and improving student learning must be the primary objective. In order to establish environments conducive to providing quality learning experiences for students, teachers must be provided with adequate time and resources, and teachers must be assigned reasonable work.

In the context of present funding levels and with the increased cost of technology, teachers must be judicious in identifying the most appropriate uses for technology.

## **Automation**

With new advances in artificial intelligence, robotics or advanced computer algorithms, many human activities will be at risk of automation or computerization in the future. An Oxford University (Martin School) research study (2013) provides a probability ranking of 702 North American occupations (including many within the education sector) where automation and displacement will occur and put close to half of North American jobs at risk of computerization by 2030. Transport, logistics and office roles are most likely to come under threat while professions such as teaching, which are involved in creative work, social perception and promoting the development of fine motor manipulation, will have a low probability of being increasingly automated.

However, one area in the education sector that is being explored for increased automation, as a means of reducing costs, is the machine scoring of qualitative writing. Machine-learning algorithms that predict scores for student writing are now being used across North America to save costs for the marking of large-scale standardized testing. It is, however, an innovation where students can easily be misled to focus more on structure and grammar than on the essay's content. While these technological tools may promise consistency, they warp the very nature of writing as a deeply contextualized interaction between human beings. Alberta teachers oppose the use of machine-scoring writing as a substitute for teacher-based assessment and evaluation of students' written responses.

The move to machine-scored essays also has the potential to direct funding toward technology investments and away from teachers and their professional development. The Association relentlessly advocates for adequate funding, support, resources and time for teacher professional development related to the infusion of technology into pedagogy, along with curriculum, assessment and digital reporting.

The Association believes there is a place for technology in educational assessment, but with the clear recognition that its mechanized and standardized valuations are no replacement for the sound judgment and ability to interpret context and meaning that teachers bring to the equation. Governments and school systems must invest in building the assessment capacity of Alberta teachers rather than supporting a distorted focus on automation or investing in digital technologies as a substitute for teacher-based assessment and evaluation of students' written responses.

## **Distributed Learning**

Distributed learning, which is defined as "an instructional model that allows instructor, student, and content to be located in different, noncentralized locations so that instruction and learning occur independent of time and place" (Saltzberg and Polyson 1995), is on the rise. Distributed learning, digital and/or e-learning can augment traditional classroom lessons, replace traditional correspondence courses, and create virtual classrooms through the use of video conferencing and a variety of online tools. It has the capacity to extend and expand the educational experience for students and further enhance technology literacy. Distributed learning may include assessment tools, such as quizzes and self-assessment, and facilitate assignment submission and return. Online learning environments may also include collaborative and communication tools that expand learning opportunities, enable interaction with outside agencies and facilitate virtual field trips.

Distributed learning can be blended with the traditional classroom environment to combine traditional teaching methodologies with online activities to produce rich learning opportunities. To authentically enhance the learning, teachers must ensure that the use of technology is rooted in the curriculum and the needs of the learner.

The Association believes that distributed learning, digital and/or e-learning can augment and enrich traditional delivery methods and has the potential to extend learning opportunities for some Alberta students. Teachers recognize that distributed learning can address the learning needs of some students, and it provides opportunities for collaborative work spaces that are highly engaging.

Distributed learning has the potential to shift the emphasis towards greater learner-centered pedagogy and highly personalized learning. This can only be achieved if appropriate monitoring and supervision of students is in place and if workloads for distributive teachers are realistic and driven by educational goals rather than financial targets.

Teachers at remote sites cannot be responsible for protecting the safety of students in a distant classroom, and adequate supervision of students must be provided for by caring and responsible educators at all times. Implementation of distributed learning environments requires proper monitoring and supervision of students in the school.

Decisions about whether distributed learning programs are appropriate must be based on the professional knowledge of teachers within the context of that learning environment and informed by educational research. Younger learners may be less successful in distributed learning environments because they lack the ability to work autonomously in a learning system that requires more independence. Teachers need to be aware of supervision requirements, especially with younger students, to facilitate learning. Although technology-based learning activities can augment and enrich the learning environment, face-to-face instruction is preferable as the primary mode of instruction, especially in younger grades. In the formative years, foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy need to be developed, and it should be left to the professional judgment of the early childhood teacher to determine the developmentally optimal time and place for technology to be introduced.

Visionary leadership is needed to encourage flexible learning environments that will provide opportunities for distributed educational programs that are relevant to students becoming responsible caring citizens in a democratic society while at the same time safeguarding the learning environment.

## Data Privacy and Protection

In a digital age many companies are beginning to look at ways to profit from student and teacher data that can be easily collected, stored, processed, customized, analyzed and then, ultimately, re-sold. In turn, school districts across Alberta have adopted educational technologies faster than they have instituted policies to oversee vendor collection and use of current or former student or preservice, active and retired teacher data.

As packaged technology solutions are sold to school districts as achieving educational objectives and taking advantage of new opportunities for choice, personalization, cost savings, and flexibility, they are also at risk of transferring increasing quantities of student information and data to third-party providers.

This practice has turned into a billion dollar industry in North America, where private equity investors, education technology companies and transnational corporations are rushing to stake a claim and make a profit. However, school districts across the United States have recently become the subject of lawsuits as they fail to properly protect massive collections of sensitive student and teacher data. Data and privacy issues are significant and will certainly become more contentious as school districts rush to adopt new online systems pitched by private companies without instituting clear policies in advance.

The Association opposes the use of current or former student or preservice, active and retired teacher data for profit or secondary uses for commercial purposes. Therefore to ensure that data privacy and protections are in place, the following twelve necessary conditions should be supported by school jurisdictions and the Government of Alberta as they enter into agreements with technology service providers or vendors:

1. Specification of the purpose of current or former student or preservice, active and retired teacher data collection and the authority of the public school district to enter into the agreement
2. Specification of the types of current or former student or preservice, active and retired teacher data to be transferred or collected
3. The prohibition or limitation on disclosure of current or former student and preservice, active and retired teacher data
4. The prohibition or limitation on the sale or marketing of current or former student or preservice, active and retired teacher information without express parental and or teacher consent
5. The assurance that public school districts will have exclusive control over data access and mining
6. The prohibition on new or conflicting privacy terms when parents are required to activate an account for their child
7. The allocation of responsibilities for granting parental access and correction capabilities
8. The specification of whether foreign storage and processing is allowed
9. The specification of whether other government agencies in Alberta may have access to the current or former student and preservice, active and retired teacher data
10. The specification of data security and breach notification obligations.
11. The prohibition on unilateral modifications of contractual obligations.
12. The inclusion of a right for the public school district to audit/inspect vendors for compliance with contractual obligations

In terms of protection, students must also know how to respond to aggressive advertising, racist and offensive content, cyberbullying, and to strangers they may meet on the Internet. Cyberbullying on the Internet is a growing concern for the safety of students in and out of the school. Many students experience the threats and humiliation that are associated with cyberbullying, and there is an increased need for school divisions to develop policies to deal with this issue. In addition, teachers must advise students on how to become discerning with respect to digital communication, and how to respond appropriately as citizens living in a digital age when they are targeted by inappropriate online activities. All students using the Internet must be supervised by a teacher, and younger students should only use the intranet or sites on the Internet that a teacher has previewed. These concerns aside, it may well be that, of all the technological applications, the Internet offers the most potential for unique and novel enhancements to good pedagogical practices.

## Necessary Conditions

The appropriate integration of technology cannot be achieved simply by decree and the provision of hardware in schools. The following conditions are necessary to ensure that technology serves to enhance the goals of education and schooling:

- A vision of the role of technology in public education based on humanistic and democratic principles
- Proactive leadership to achieve the vision
- Commitment to the central importance of the teacher's professional judgment in decisions about the use of technology
- Identification of appropriate curriculum linkages
- Access to technological resources that are specific to learner needs
- Access to appropriate technology and connectivity
- Timely access to technical support
- Time for teachers to learn about technology and to develop technology-supported curriculum
- Public funding that addresses the total cost of ownership for technology
- School organization and culture that support effective teaching and learning
- Policies at the system and school level that support the appropriate integration of technology
- Acceptance of the teacher as final arbiter in the use and application of technology
- Consideration for the well-being of students

## Conclusion

The Association believes that the integration of technology in our schools where all students can learn should occur in a way that enhances the potential for engaged, pedagogical relationships as the secure foundation of children's education.

Technological trends will emerge and some will have immediate educational relevance or impact. The relevance of other technologies in terms of their potential for improving the learning and teaching process will be marginal or non-existent. Teachers should ask questions in regard to teaching and learning outcomes, available content, cost-effectiveness, leadership and vision, student acceptance, parental support, risk, professional development, applicability and sustainability. The Association believes that developing and implementing digital-age educational activities has the potential to revitalize schools and engage stakeholders in new ways that will require educators to be thoughtful and reflective in an ongoing and embedded way.

In order for the integration of technology to be effective, it must serve curricular objectives and be consistent with a vision of public education that is committed to creating a great school for all students where democratic principles can be advanced and social cohesion embraced across an increasingly diverse and complex society. Alberta schools offer vibrant and creative learning environments in which the teaching profession decides how best to use digital technologies in meeting the learning needs of students and recognizing their individual talents and gifts. In pursuit of this vision, teachers must assert their professionalism and ensure that, in the great rush to implement change, technology does not become an end rather than a means.

This is especially important since the necessary conditions of adequate funding, equal access for schools and children, and appropriate investment of time, resources and support for professional development are not yet in place. The Association encourages the government, school districts, schools and teachers to communicate about these realities and to find solutions that will benefit students and public education into the future.

### Note

1. Magee CA, JK Lee, SA Vella. 2014. "Bidirectional relationships between sleep duration and screen time in early childhood." JAMA Pediatrics: published online (March 3).

## **Working Conditions for Professional Service**

[1970, revised 1991, 2001, 2011, 2023]

Teachers must maintain the right to determine the conditions under which they work. Collective bargaining in the field of education must include all matters that affect the quality of the education system and decision making in public education.

Responsible, comprehensive collective bargaining has stood the test of time as being the most effective means for attaining the goals of the Alberta Teachers' Association and its members.

The Association opposes any attempts to declare teaching an essential service or impose contrived settlements. With the *Public Education Collective Bargaining Act* coming into force in 2016, Alberta's education sector shifted its past practice to a bilevel bargaining model. This model places the more expensive and common matters at the central table, in which the funder (the Government of Alberta) has direct input on the financial expenses for the system. Matters at the local table, with local teachers bargaining with the employer, have a smaller and more niche set of matters that more directly impact the local bargaining units.

Membership in the bargaining unit must be of concern to the Association. It must continue to oppose the exclusion of personnel presently included in collective agreements. The agreements should include all certificated teachers employed by the school authority, with the exception of the superintendent.

The ability of the Association to negotiate job security in the face of innovations in teaching depends on its ability to guarantee that members of the teaching profession will remain abreast of the changes and capable of adjusting to them. In return for a commitment to maintaining the quality of the teaching force, the Association must insist that it has a major voice in certification.

However, the burden of the adjustment to changing techniques cannot be borne by teachers alone. Impending changes in education point out the need for teacher–authority cooperation. Neither party can operate in a vacuum and expect complicated problems to be resolved during the heat of regular collective bargaining. Use must be made of joint meetings prior to negotiations, as well as continual discussion between negotiations and joint study groups to enable the system of collective bargaining to keep pace with changing conditions. For many years, school authorities have determined educational policies unilaterally. Through their impact on teacher classroom functions, these policies affect working conditions. Teachers can implement educational policies more effectively when they have helped to formulate them.

Consequently, teachers must actively participate in policy making. Given a share in the determination of these policies, teachers will be able to evaluate functions before final policy decisions are made. A further policy decision in which teachers must have a decisive voice is that of the determination of the various facets of teacher load. To provide high-quality education to Alberta students, teachers must have sufficient unassigned time for lesson planning and assessment, time during the day for nonteaching professional activities, a limit to the number of students based on class composition factors, and a limit to the total amount of student–teacher



interaction time. Class size, composition and complexity must be tracked, and the data used to inform bargaining.

As well, it must be recognized that teacher participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities is voluntary, and where it is not voluntary, it is considered to be assignable time.

Education expenditures help to determine the effective performance of teachers. Therefore, teachers must have an active part in determining how the education budget is spent.

The curriculum should provide leeway for teachers who desire to be innovative. Teachers need to have control over adapting the curriculum to suit the needs of the individual class. Teachers must also have a greater voice in the actual building of the various curricula.

Improved nonwage benefits must be viewed as part of the total compensation of a teacher. Parental leave provisions must allow teachers to fulfill their roles as parents. Improvement in working conditions and benefits will eliminate systemic sources of stress. The recognition and provision of a comprehensive benefits package for all teachers will provide needed security. It is necessary to recognize that employee-paid benefit premiums must continue while teachers are under contract.

Adequate remuneration for teachers should be based on the following principles:

- Beginning salaries of university graduates from the education faculty should be reasonably equitable to salaries offered to graduates from other faculties.
- The salary scale should grant financial recognition for changes in qualifications and provide an incentive for improvement.
- Financial recognition should be given to experience.

Appropriate infrastructure, favourable conditions of practice and the opportunity to provide a high level of professional service help to recruit and retain teachers.

# Year-Round Schooling

[1991]

The terms *year-round schooling* (YRS) and *year-round education* (YRE) are synonymous. They were originated to describe a reorganization of the traditional nine- or ten-month school year by reducing the summer vacation period and interspersing those days throughout the year, thereby enabling schools to operate over a full 12 months. Specifically, YRS can be defined as a method of scheduling the school year calendar so that

- school buildings can be used throughout the year,
- instructional blocks can be interspersed with shorter more frequent vacation periods,
- instructional time remains consistent with traditional calendars,
- a variety of plans can be offered:

—single-track plans in which all teachers and students follow a concurrent calendar of instruction and vacation with varied timeline options.

—multi-track plans in which two or more groups of teachers and students from the school population are placed on separate calendars, called tracks, scheduled so that at least one group is on vacation at any given time.

In Alberta, students involved in a YRS program would attend classes for the same number of days as they would have in the traditional calendar. It is important to understand that YRS is a reorganization of time to deliver the same educational program.

## Traditional School Calendar

In Canada, because education is a provincial matter, each province has legislation that governs, in whole or in part, its school calendar. In addition, the school calendar will be influenced by established practice as well as local school jurisdiction responsibility. In Alberta, Section 40 of the *School Act* gives local school boards legislated authority to stipulate, within specified limitations, the school calendar, including the number and the days of school operation. Given the possibility of significant variance, school calendars in Alberta have generally remained consistent; that is, students typically attend school September through June for ten months and take a similar summer vacation during July and August. There is also a winter vacation extending at least from December 24 to January 2, a five-day Easter or spring vacation and recognition of statutory holidays. The school year varies from 190 to 200 days and includes instructional days as well as noninstructional days for the purpose of professional development, inservicing, preparation and school start-up and closure activities. The school day varies between five and six hours.

## Context

Year-round schooling is predominantly an American system of school year organization with roots in the late 19th century. To date, YRS calendars typically continue to be used in regions experiencing rapid growth in population and lacking the school space to house dramatic increases in enrolment. In many instances, state legislatures have passed bills offering financial incentives to jurisdictions participating in YRS. To date, no Canadian school jurisdiction has adopted YRS on a systemwide or continual basis. Individual public and private schools, however, have used a year-round calendar from time to time for both economical and educational reasons.

## Areas of Concern

Year-round schooling provides alternatives to existing school calendars. Whether these options improve or reduce the quality of education is not generally apparent.

Proponents suggest that YRS helps by providing calendar, curriculum and family options that more closely fit changing and evolving lifestyles, work patterns and community involvement. They view YRS as being more consistent with lifelong learning and offering a unique opportunity to extend learning to more people. On the other hand, opponents of YRS argue that it is nothing more than a “mechanical” scheduling phenomenon with little increased educational value. They point out that economic rather than educational considerations are responsible for the renewed interest in the concept. YRS is seen as a space and cost cutting measurement of providing education for a rapidly expanding student population.

The success or failure of YRS depends upon many variables and conditions. Each jurisdiction must examine the feasibility of the concept within its own area. While there will be advantages and disadvantages, it must be recognized that the local context, and ideally the students’ best interests, will be the final determining factor. The implementation of YRS could affect the following areas: educational program, administration, society and economics.

1. Educational Program. This area refers to variables and conditions that affect student learning.

- (a) professional development—activities related to professional practice
- (b) instructional
  - (i) program delivery, eg, graded, nongraded, individualized
  - (ii) differentiated programs—enrichment, remediation, extended learning
  - (iii) communication—student–student, student–teacher, teacher–teacher, teacher–parent
  - (iv) opportunities—inconsistencies between tracks, program equity
  - (v) evaluations—flexibility, adaptability
- (c) student achievement
- (d) high needs/risk students
- (e) cocurricular and extracurricular activities
- (f) curriculum—adaptations or modifications
- (g) counselling—availability and coordination of services
- (h) stress—student, teacher, administrator
- (i) alternative programs—home study, distance education, work experience
- (j) scholarships and bursaries—timelines

2. Administration. This area refers to variables and conditions that affect the organization and operation of schools.

- (a) demands on personnel, eg, responsibilities, expectations, roles, time, planning
- (b) scheduling—timetabling
- (c) facility, eg, storage, classroom assignment, teacher work areas
- (d) communications—students, teachers, central office, parents

- (e) school procedures, eg, attendance, evaluations, conferences, reports, registrations, activities
  - (f) staff deployment—assignments
  - (g) staff development—formative
  - (h) coordination of jurisdictional activities—schools, central office
3. Society. This area refers to variables and conditions that affect the relationship between school and community.

- (a) political issues, eg, language, minorities, funding
  - (b) community resources, eg, daycare, recreation facilities, camps
  - (c) workforce, eg, summer employment, job supply and demand
  - (d) lifestyle, eg, flexibility, occupation, values, culture
  - (e) demographics, eg, age, gender, race, family structure, ethnicity
4. Economics. This area refers to variables and conditions that affect cost effectiveness.

- (a) enrolment—minimum number of students
- (b) capital costs, eg, construction, restoration
- (c) operating costs, eg, instructional, administrative, maintenance, transportation
- (d) funding, eg, grant structures, taxes
- (e) contractual, eg, collective agreements, substitute teachers

Implications in each of these areas need to be analyzed prior to the implementation of a year-round schooling program.

## Conditions

For school systems considering year-round schooling, a number of conditions must initially be met. First, the need for change must be motivated by educational considerations; that is, there must be a specific demonstration of how the learning needs of children will be better met. Second, a local feasibility study must be undertaken to determine viability of the plan. This study should examine the aforementioned areas for implications of YRS. Third, stakeholder involvement is critical in the discussion and decision-making processes. Fourth, curriculum adaptations and support structures, if required, must be in place prior to the implementation of the revised school calendar. Fifth, supportive collective agreement provisions are required. Last, a pilot project must be conducted and evaluated prior to adoption of YRS. These conditions are necessary to maintain the integrity of the educational program provided to students.

## Conclusion

Year-round schooling is a reorganization of time to deliver the same educational program that could be delivered using the traditional calendar. A decision to opt for YRS must not be made hastily. There are many considerations that need to be addressed and resolved prior to implementation of YRS. Teachers must be involved in all decision-making processes. If implementation of YRS requires curriculum adaptations, these must be completed in advance. Pilot projects should be undertaken and evaluated prior to the adoption of YRS.

The needs of students must be given the highest priority. Changes to the school calendar should not have adverse effects on students, teachers or educational programs. While the concept of YRS may be feasible and workable in some areas, the motivation for change must be to improve the educational program for students.