

Alberta

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Inspiring Action on Education

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**Government
of Alberta**

Foreword by the Minister of Education

Albertans know the importance of education. It's about our children realizing their potential and achieving their hopes, dreams and aspirations. It's about each student belonging in a caring and inclusive network of educators who support them. It's about strengthening our society through the experiences we have in school as students and our relationship to the community as youth, adults and parents.

In Alberta we can be proud that we have one of the finest education systems in the world. This is a testament to the dedication of our teachers, administrators, school board staff and other educational specialists and professionals who are committed to doing the best they can every day.

But we know that the world is changing, and that education must change with it to prepare students for a future none of us can predict. And the change is well underway.

As Minister of Education, I launched several major initiatives, including *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans*, *Setting the Direction for the Future of Special Education in Alberta*, and *Speak Out: The Alberta Student Engagement Initiative*. Each of these, along with other government initiatives, has played a part in painting a picture of what the future of education should look like. It is a bright future, but one that requires us to take bold steps forward and facilitate, create and collaborate in the change necessary to make it a reality.

Inspiring Action on Education is a discussion paper that describes how we might make those changes to achieve our preferred future for education in Alberta. The title is a reference to the *Inspiring Education* initiative, which is among the broadest and most imaginative dialogues on the future of education that we have ever seen. Indeed, international education thought leaders have described our initiatives as leading edge, beyond what any other jurisdiction is doing. *Inspiring Education* was about dreaming the dream, and *Inspiring Action* is about what we all must do to make this dream a reality. Now that government and our community have received and studied the *Inspiring Education Steering Committee Report*, it is time to act.

On behalf of Premier Stelmach and my government colleagues, I invite you to read, consider and provide your input on this paper. Think about what it will mean for children and students. Think about how society can benefit. And think about what your own role will be in ensuring that this vision takes hold, because government cannot do it alone.

We will need each and every Albertan to play a part in building a bright future for our children. This begins with education and we must do everything we can to ensure that each and every child has the opportunity to maximize their potential – to be able to grow up equipped to take care of themselves and their families and contribute to their communities. Alberta's future depends on a well-educated population capable of competing with the world.

Original Signed

Dave Hancock, Q.C.
Minister of Education

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Why is a Transformation of the Education System Needed?

Nationally and internationally, Alberta's education system is doing very well. Given the high-performing system we currently have, why is the government taking a bold and courageous step and asking, "What will we, the people of Alberta, require of education 20 years out?"

While many Albertans are proud of where we are today, they are also thinking ahead. It is important not to rest on assurances that we are among the best in the world, but rather to ask, "Is today's system good enough to prepare students for the future?" As good as our system is today, we believe that substantive improvements are essential to sustain our world-class education system.

Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education is vital to the formation of the person, family, community and province. It is fundamentally important to our society and our economy – our society because it is one of the most crucial ways in which we develop citizens who share common democratic values of freedom, equality, compassion and respect for diversity; and our economy because the education system provides young Albertans with foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy and the competencies essential to building the creative economy of the future.

Students who complete high school are much more likely to report good health than those who do not, K-12 educational attainment is an overall quality of life determinant, and there is a strong relationship between education and the average earnings of individuals. Learning fosters our ability to think and be creative, and to come up with solutions to complex problems. It enables us to envision and embrace the kind of lives we want for ourselves and our children.

Evidence is mounting that many problems experienced by students in middle and secondary schools – such as disengagement, dissatisfaction with their schooling experience, and dropping out – are significantly linked to the learning environment and disengagement is disproportionately experienced by students living in poverty, ethnic minorities, and other students with diverse learning needs. In the case of Aboriginal people, high school completion is half that of other students, employment levels are lower, and there is an over-representation in support and justice systems.

Alberta's demographic picture continues to change, resulting in increased diversity within the province and the education system. A changing workforce, rapid advancements in technology, and increased global competition mean that learning is more critical than ever. Alberta must shift from its historic dependence on natural resources and primary products to higher value derivations of those products. We must also continue to diversify in areas such as biosciences, life sciences, information technology, nanotechnology and other knowledge-based products and services. Educated Albertans with the skills we need for today and tomorrow will be an important part of making this shift.

There will never be a better time than now to begin the transformation of our education system so that our students are ready for the future. Every school year that we let pass is another year for which we have limited the learning opportunities of more than half a million students in Alberta. Our world has moved in a new direction, and education must keep step.

Provincial Context

The policy directions outlined in this document occur within the broader context of provincial government strategies and initiatives aimed at building a stronger future for Alberta. Education is connected to the overall economic future of the province and the Government of Alberta is implementing new strategies to ensure that our province has one of the most innovative and competitive economies in North America.

For example, the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy will help to give an external, big-picture perspective on what Alberta needs to do to secure the province's long-term prosperity, and will provide guidance on actions the Alberta government can take to best position the province for the future. Recent changes to advance Alberta's energy competitiveness will ensure that our energy sector remains viable and successful over the long term, and we know that a strong education system contributes to a competitive energy sector. The Alberta Innovates Connector Service – the first of its kind in Canada – is a new service that provides one-window access to Alberta's realigned research and innovation community. The Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system has an important role to play in the government's commitment to research and innovation as it enables future researchers to build the competencies they will need to be successful.

As well, a human capital plan will advise government on how to invest in the labour force and promote private sector investment in skills development. Education is critical to providing the foundational skills that employers depend on to make our workforce innovative and productive. As the world of work and economic activity changes, education will ensure our population has the ability to adapt, take on new roles and develop new opportunities. In these and many other ways, education is connected to the overall economic future of the province.

The provincial government is also working collaboratively on the *Success in School for Children and Youth in Care – Provincial Protocol Framework*, which is scheduled for phased-in implementation beginning in September 2010. The protocol will guide school boards and Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs) in working together to improve the educational results of this population. In the coming months, discussions will be held between school boards and CFSAs to create both regional agreements and implementation plans that are manageable for their regions.

Finally, Alberta's literacy framework – "Living Literacy" – coordinates the efforts of the Government of Alberta and our many partners to improve Albertans' literacy levels. People who are able to create, evaluate, use, and share information and knowledge contribute to the sustainability of the economy, enjoy better quality of life, and are well-positioned to achieve their full potential. Alberta's K-12 system is a critical builder of literacy and develops students' abilities to think deeply about what they read and to express themselves accurately and effectively in a variety of contexts.

Moving Forward Together

The need to re-position our education system is clear. Alberta Education has and will continue to champion change. But we cannot do it alone. All of us – from teachers and principals, to educational organizations and associations, to students and parents and all committed Albertans – must pull together to accomplish change. And it was by listening to Albertans that we first set out on this journey.

Recognizing the importance of education to the overall provincial context, the government has engaged with Albertans through a number of initiatives to begin envisioning our future education system.

- ***Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans*** is the preeminent and overarching initiative which has developed a twenty-year vision of an educated Albertan as someone who is engaged, ethical and entrepreneurial.
- ***Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta*** started out addressing the needs of students with specialized learning needs and moved toward the notion of an inclusive education system which takes responsibility for *all* students.
- ***Speak Out: The Alberta Student Engagement Initiative*** has provided an ongoing forum for students' voices to be heard and to inform decision-making that affects them.¹

The provincial government, in collaboration with Aboriginal leadership, the federal government, school authorities, and communities is working to create new ways to enhance educational opportunities for Aboriginal students. The recent establishment of a Ministerial First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education Partnership Council and the signing of an historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on First Nations education will provide Alberta with a common vision for strengthening learning and educational success for FNMI students. The MOU signed by the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta and the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs in Alberta, provides a framework for collaboration and will support a range of First Nation education-related issues including parental and community engagement, Treaty and cultural awareness, and ongoing work on tuition and education service agreements.

The FNMI Education Partnership Council establishes a commitment between the provincial government, First Nation and Métis leaders and communities to take action on shared priorities that impact FNMI student success. Ensuring that Alberta's First Nation, Métis and Inuit people are involved in the creation and provision of education supports and services is also an important part of moving forward if Aboriginal students are to achieve their full potential.

¹ For more information on these initiatives, see Appendix 1.

In order to further strengthen evidence-based decision making, Alberta Education will continue to participate in collaborative research arrangements with partners throughout and beyond the province. Alberta Education will also strengthen its efforts to ensure that research results are disseminated to schools and teachers to better inform their practices and priorities. Action-oriented and site-based research in schools across the province will be more strongly supported enabling greater innovation. Knowledge sharing and collaboration with Kindergarten – Grade 12 stakeholders and our post-secondary institutions will also be strengthened.

Inspiring Action on Education is about taking Alberta's education system to the next level. The purpose of *Inspiring Action* is to establish a discussion framework for the vision, values, principles and policy directions that will be central to this transformation and to continue the dialogue with Albertans about education. *Inspiring Action* builds on the work of *Inspiring Education*, *Setting the Direction*, *Speak Out* and other initiatives. It is an expression of the government's intent to move forward with a principles-based, comprehensive, holistic and informed transformation of the education system, and frame the finer discussions around setting the stage for future legislation, regulation and policies.

Your feedback at this important stage is critical. *Inspiring Action* represents years of thinking about where the education system needs to go, and proposes policy directions to get us there – but not without your input. Please take the time to read this document carefully and tell us where you think we are on the right track and where you think we need to make changes to our future course. Together, we can build an even stronger education system that will serve all Albertans for decades to come.

A Framework for New Education Legislation

The last major revision to the *School Act* occurred in 1988, and provided the legislative foundation for Alberta's education system for more than twenty years. In 2009, the Minister of Education, Honourable Dave Hancock, launched a review of the *School Act* in order to proactively prepare for the outcomes of the various public engagement initiatives described in this paper.

The Need for New Legislation

New legislation is a key component in the realization of a long-term vision for education that ensures that all students experience success and have the knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies to be successful in the 21st century. New education legislation is needed that will outline a philosophical shift by the provincial government in the provision of K-12 education. New or revised legislation will help stimulate the education system to chart a new course, enhance the ministry's responsiveness in meeting system and stakeholder needs, and allow for more system autonomy.

Key Areas of Change

Future legislation will be more enabling, empowering, supportive, and less prescriptive. It will describe a framework that focuses on reducing systemic barriers, is forward-looking and allows the education system to be more flexible and able to respond to the diverse learning needs of students more quickly and effectively. While this enabling legislation will establish higher order policy direction to ensure, for example, equitable access to quality education, it will also encourage creativity and innovation and open the door to greater possibilities.

Key areas of change for new legislation will be based on the following:

- lower the minimum age for funded access to children who, at September 1 in a year, are at least 3 years, six months of age;
- raise the upper age limit for funded access to those individuals who, at September 1, are under 21 years of age;
- raise compulsory school attendance from 16 years to 17 years of age;
- all children who are legally resident in Alberta have a right of access to the K-12 public education system;
- students should be able to access instruction in a variety of settings, times and at a pace that reflects their individual needs;
- student success is the primary goal of the education system and government has a responsibility to provide the structure and supports to allow students and their parents the opportunity to explore different paths and directions;
- the connection of local communities to schools and elected school boards, as well as the connection of students to their communities, is an important element in the success of our public school system. Government has a responsibility to determine the structure of school boards, to set provincial standards for the roles and responsibilities of boards, and to support maximizing trustee and board competence; and
- ensure a balance between local autonomy and fiscal responsibility.

Benefits of New Legislation

The anticipated impacts of new legislation include:

- improved accessibility and responsiveness to meet the needs of all Alberta students. For example, students being able to access education at their own pace on their own time (recognizing that education occurs beyond the boundaries of a school building), and creating a more inclusive education system for those with diverse learning needs;
- increased understanding of what it means to be an educated person in the global context and how educating Alberta students is in the public interest;
- developing stronger relationships between Alberta Education, other ministries, non-profit voluntary groups and key stakeholders based on a shared governance model which empowers stakeholders to deliver educational programs and services and be accountable for that delivery;
- greater involvement of Albertans beyond those directly involved in the delivery of education including parents, the community, and previously un- and under-represented groups; and
- reduced administrative burden by limiting the number and extent of requirements imposed on the education system to those areas of highest risk or critical importance. Furthermore, new or revised legislation should only set out basic requirements and allow for flexibility, where appropriate, in implementing the requirements.

Following the introduction of new legislation, a full regulatory review will be conducted. However, it is recognized that many of the characteristics of the new education system cannot be legislated, either in the new Act or in new regulations.

Guiding Statements

The vision, values and principles describe the purpose, motives and intentions that underpin our education system, and which guide and are reflected in each area of policy and governance.

Vision

To inspire and enable students to achieve success and fulfillment as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit within an inclusive education system.

Values

Values describe the ideals we seek to embrace and fulfill in the operation of the education system. This discussion paper adopts the following values from the *Inspiring Education Steering Committee Report*:

- Opportunity:** Learners are exposed to rich learning experiences that enable them to discover their passions and achieve their highest potential.
- Fairness:** Learners have access to the programs, support services, and instructional excellence needed to achieve desired outcomes.
- Citizenship:** Learners have pride in their community and culture. They have a sense of belonging and work to improve both the community and the world.
- Choice:** Learners have a choice of both programs and methods of learning.
- Diversity:** Learners' differing needs, cultures, and abilities are respected and valued within inclusive learning environments.
- Excellence:** Learners, teachers, and governors achieve high standards.

Principles

Principles promote a common understanding of new policy directions and are the basis of sound and consistent decisions. Achieving our vision for the future of education in Alberta requires that the following principles, as described in the *Inspiring Education Steering Committee Report*, be embraced by all partners in education, including parents and families, teachers, support staff, school boards, government, businesses, communities and not-for-profit organizations.

Learner-centred. Decision makers should consider the needs of children and youth first and foremost when making decisions.

Shared responsibility and accountability for results. Acknowledging that parents are the primary guides and decision-makers for children, all partners in education should share responsibility and accountability for education outcomes.

Engaged communities. Community resources should be more fully engaged to support learners, including expertise, facilities, services and learning opportunities. Community resources—whether local, provincial, national or global—should actively participate in the education of learners.

Inclusive, equitable access. Every learner should have fair and reasonable access to educational opportunities regardless of ability, economic circumstance, location, or cultural background. Their needs and ways of life should be respected and valued within an inclusive learning environment. Some learners will require additional, specialized supports to fully access these opportunities.

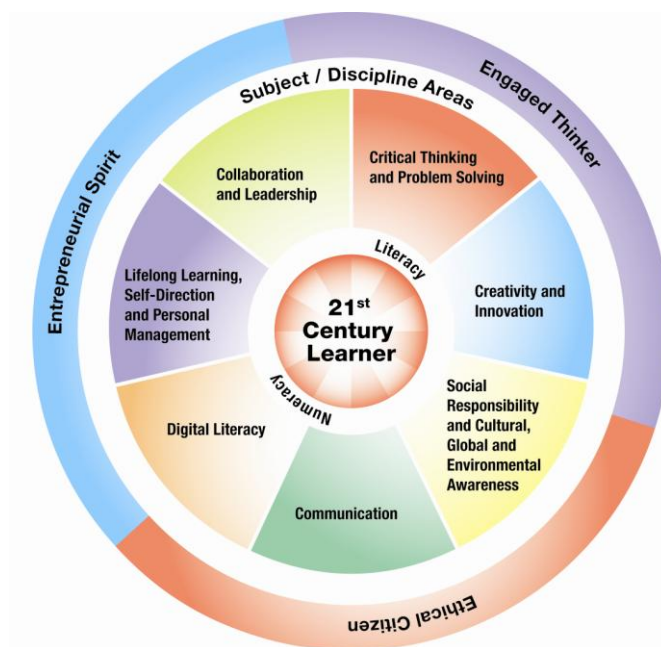
A responsive, flexible approach. Children and youth should have meaningful learning opportunities appropriate to each learner’s developmental stage, including learning that is experiential, multi-disciplinary, community-based, and self-paced. To ensure the learning opportunities are relevant, the education system must be nimble in responding to the changing needs of communities and the world.

Sustainable and efficient use of resources. Decision-makers should identify and adopt strategies that optimize resources (financial and human) and minimize duplication.

Innovation to promote and strive for excellence. Creativity and innovation are central to achieving excellence in education. Learners, educators and governors must be creative, innovative and entrepreneurial to attain the highest possible standards.

Competencies of an Educated Albertan

Governments, business leaders, researchers and communities in Alberta, Canada, and around the world, investigating the requirements of 21st century learners, have identified the need for competencies to be more central in the education of young people if they are to be active participants in an increasingly knowledge-based and globalized society. Competencies enable students to understand their world, engage fully in their education, relate well to others, manage their lives wisely, and contribute positively to their communities.



Competencies transcend subject areas and are developed through learning approaches that include subject/discipline-specific learning outcomes. A competencies-based, student-focused curriculum requires the attainment of attitudes, skills and knowledge as well as values for living, learning and working. Students are engaged thinkers, demonstrate ethical citizenship, and develop their entrepreneurial spirit.

The following competencies, based on a review of recognized national and international frameworks for learning in the 21st century, will especially contribute to the transformation of Alberta's education system. In this system, literacy and numeracy remain competencies of primary importance to all learning. Learners with strong literacy and numeracy skills acquire, create, connect and communicate meaning in a wide variety of contexts. In addition to literacy and numeracy, the following competencies are interrelated and could be expanded upon in the future:

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Creativity and Innovation
- Social Responsibility and Cultural, Global and Environmental Awareness
- Communication
- Digital Literacy
- Lifelong Learning, Self-Direction and Personal Management
- Collaboration and Leadership.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Alberta students have the critical thinking skills to function effectively in a complex, fast-paced society. They can use higher-order thinking skills to critically analyze and synthesize information, available from an increasing number and variety of sources and perspectives. They consider the context and seek additional information and perspectives when analyzing information. They are able to reflect on their learning, recognizing strengths and weaknesses in their reasoning and in arguments presented by others.

Alberta students have the optimism and confidence to solve challenging, complex, novel and ill-defined problems, whether they relate to their learning, their work or their personal lives. They can identify and predict problems and solutions that are not readily apparent. These students are aware of and can use multiple approaches to solving a problem, including collaboration. They also understand that a problem can have several solutions and that some are more effective than others. They can gather and use a variety of resources to facilitate their success in arriving at a solution.

Creativity and Innovation

Alberta students are creative, entrepreneurial and innovative. They take advantage of opportunities to be productive and have an appreciation for creative works. They are curious and open to new ideas. They demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in response to change. They demonstrate initiative, imagination, spontaneity and ingenuity when engaging in a variety of creative processes to develop original ideas. They recognize that they can take risks, learn from their mistakes and in doing so, develop resiliency. They persevere, demonstrate optimism, maintain a positive attitude, and see opportunities when faced with obstacles and challenges.

Social Responsibility and Cultural, Global and Environmental Awareness

Alberta students are active and responsible citizens, attuned to social, cultural, global and environmental contexts. They contribute positively and actively to the quality and sustainability of their environment, communities and society as a whole. They respect social, cultural and environmental interconnectedness and appreciate diverse cultural perspectives within local and global communities. Their potential to contribute to their communities is enhanced and they value fairness, equity and peace, while acting responsibly, empathetically and ethically. In developing their identity, students see themselves as participants in a broader world.

Communication

Alberta students understand and communicate effectively, expressing themselves clearly in a variety of ways to convey meaning. They demonstrate the ability to listen and interact respectfully with others, read for information and enjoyment, and speak and write clearly. They communicate within literary, mathematical, scientific, social and artistic contexts—formally and informally—using a variety of current and emerging technological tools. The ability to communicate effectively provides students with the foundation necessary for engagement in lifelong learning and the ability to interact with their local and global communities. This competency has a major impact on their academic, social and occupational success.

Digital Literacy

Alberta students participate fully in a local and global society as confident and competent users of current and emerging information and communication technologies that are integral to living in the 21st century. They access, understand create and share information effectively and ethically, and engage in problem solving and the communication of ideas through a variety of media. Applying critical-thinking competencies and technical skills, they are able to analyze, evaluate and manage large volumes of information. They use technology confidently and carefully in innovative, effective and responsible ways.

Lifelong Learning, Self-Direction and Personal Management

Alberta students develop competencies that help them to contribute actively and positively in their communities. Throughout life, students balance various roles and life-work priorities while understanding their personal strengths, history and identity. They participate in career exploration and planning as they adapt to change and seek opportunities for personal and professional growth throughout their lives. They act autonomously, make responsible choices and demonstrate personal financial literacy, taking ownership for emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual and social well being.

Collaboration and Leadership

Alberta students collaborate and demonstrate leadership by participating meaningfully and effectively in the life of the community. They build respectful and caring interpersonal relationships, manage conflict and differences, and build consensus. Students accept responsibility for their actions. They recognize and leverage their own, and others' strengths and potential, and work together to mutually influence, motivate and mentor each other in the pursuit of common goals.

Policy Directions

In order to move forward from ideas to reality, we need to begin to articulate policy directions. Policy is about establishing a consistent course of action that will guide educational programming and decision making. The policy directions that follow are based on the vision, values and principles set out in the previous sections of *Inspiring Action*, and further articulate educational transformation. After policy directions have been established, new legislation and regulations will be developed as part of an enabling framework for achieving student-centred system-wide success. The following policy directions are based on meeting the needs of all students and outline the key areas of change that have been identified as essential to transformation. These directions are about providing the best possible learning opportunities for our students and reflect a change in the overall way students will experience education in our province.

As you read these policy directions, think about what they will mean for Alberta students, the broader societal context, and your role in facilitating policy – whether it be as a member of an educational organization, an engaged community member, a concerned parent, a teacher, or a student.

Inclusive Education

What it is

An inclusive education system is one that takes responsibility for all students, focuses on their strengths, and emphasizes what they can do rather than focusing on their limitations. While inclusive education is not about the automatic placement of every student in typical classrooms, it does involve the sharing of a commitment to meeting diverse student needs in all school settings so that all students experience a sense of belonging and acceptance in their learning environments.

What it means

An inclusive education system means that:

- all decisions are made based on the needs and interests of students.
- expectations are high for all students and a number of pathways are used to ensure their success.
- outcomes in the programs of study are the starting point for planning and instruction for students.
- programs of study are complemented with a continuum of supports and services where classrooms, schools, school authorities, and the specialist community are equipped to make it possible for all students to have their needs met.
- programs of study and measures of achievement will continue to be accessible to all students.
- school-based expertise is augmented by current research and new technologies to support teachers.
- teachers have resources and tools to support them in using the programs of study in more robust ways to address the diverse learning needs of all students.
- accessible learning resources are available so that students are provided with learning opportunities that address their interests, strengths and needs.
- students demonstrate their learning in multiple ways, including through refined assessment strategies which measure their progress and growth.
- principals lead in creating positive learning cultures where all students and staff feel welcomed and supported.
- teachers are skilled in collaborating effectively with parents, principals, teacher assistants, psychologists, or other specialists.
- parents are included as important and respected members of their child's learning team.

How it could be achieved

The implementation of a truly inclusive education system requires each one of us to think and work differently. It will occur through the development of a collaborative model based on collective responsibility for the success of each student. Supports and services for students will be delivered collaboratively in the most logical and natural setting to “wraparound” the student. Efforts will need to be made to expand the capacity of our education system so that it responds to the needs of all students. To make this possible, a collaborative process will be established between Alberta Education, Health and Wellness, and Children and Youth Services. This means an enhanced opportunity for everyone to work together across provincial, regional, and local levels.

A Coordinated Approach to Early Learning

What it is

Early childhood experiences impact future learning, health, and well being. A coordinated approach to early learning is a provincial approach where communities work together to support children and families through access to high quality and inclusive learning across a range of early childhood settings.

What it means

A coordinated approach to early learning means that:

- from birth, all children have opportunities to experience and benefit from quality early learning experiences enabling them to begin their formal school experience ready to learn.
- quality early learning educational opportunities, that are appropriate to a child's stage of learning and development, are incorporated into academic programs at the elementary level.
- families will have knowledge and resources along a continuum of supports and services to help children achieve their potential.
- communities have the capacity and resources to effectively support early childhood development and there is support for the transition from home to school.

How it could be achieved

Alberta Education will work with other ministries to promote a seamless continuum of supports and services for children and families. The Early Child Development Mapping Initiative will provide the information for parents about how to help ensure that the needs of children are addressed up front and not just 'accommodated' by the time they come to school. Collaboration between Alberta Education, Health and Wellness, and Children and Youth Services will be enhanced. Schools, communities, parents, and families will come together at the right time and in the right place in order to develop a well-coordinated approach to nurturing our most valuable resource – children. Government will also partner with communities to continue building on a range of early childhood development initiatives that encompass health, social services, and education.

Personalized Learning with Flexible Timing and Pacing Through a Range of Learning Environments

What it is

Learning in the 21st century requires relevant and empowering experiences for all young Albertans. There is a need to broaden *what* students learn, *when* they learn, *where* they learn, *how* they learn, and the *rate* at which they progress in achieving learning outcomes. Personalized learning involves the provision of high-quality and engaging learning opportunities that meet students' diverse learning needs, through flexible timing and pacing, in a range of learning environments with learning supports and services tailored to meet their needs.

What it means

Personalized learning means that:

- students progress in programs at a pace that suits their needs and enhances their success.
- students build on individual strengths and achievements, pursue their passions and interests, and learn in ways that are consistent with their individual learning styles.
- barriers to learning are reduced to allow more flexible hours of instruction and schedules.
- students have access to a greater variety of learning experiences that include and extend beyond traditional education settings and benefit from increased community involvement in their learning.
- multi-disciplinary learning teams comprising teachers, teacher assistants, health professionals, social workers, community members, and parents provide 'wrap-around' supports and services to optimize student success.
- students contribute to diverse learning communities in which the social component of learning and the development and sharing of knowledge is central to their educational experience.
- technology and community-based activities are used to enrich learning experiences and enable students to apply their learning in real-life contexts.
- there is a greater emphasis on assessment *for* learning (i.e., an ongoing exchange of information between students and teachers about student progress toward clearly specified learner outcomes).
- students are lifelong learners who thrive in, and adapt to, a complex and rapidly changing world.

How it could be achieved

A personalized approach to how students engage in their learning could be achieved by building relationships within and among multi-disciplinary learning teams to ensure a holistic approach to student success. Consideration could be given to differentiated high school diploma designations that support students in pursuing their chosen learning and career paths. Students and teachers would be supported by robust learning and assessment resources that address a range of learning environments and accommodate diverse backgrounds, abilities, cultural perspectives, and personal interests.

Student-Centred Education

What it is

Recognizing that all students have unique interests and learning styles, increasing their involvement in decisions that affect them increases their ability to achieve their potential.

What it means

Education that is student-centred means that:

- there is less focus on schooling and more focus on education.
- there is an increased focus on ensuring that the needs of students are central to all decisions relating to their education.
- students are responsible for being actively involved in their learning.
- students collaborate and have a voice in how, where, when and the rate at which they learn, and are responsible for their choices.
- all students are empowered to participate in self-reflection and evaluation throughout their education.

How it could be achieved

Education partners including government, school boards, schools, students, parents, teachers, post-secondary, business, industry and increasingly mobilized communities will need to develop and enhance relationships to support young Albertans. Focusing less on the system and the school and more on the student and their education will be achieved by learning partners recognizing and understanding the importance of student needs and the student voice. Partners will actively engage the student voice in further developing innovative and creative opportunities to optimize student success. This will involve developing new models and approaches to identifying student needs, developing flexible learning opportunities and supports, and creating responsive policies and enabling structures. Traditional learning approaches will be enhanced to incorporate emerging learning and teaching approaches, expanding learning contexts and enhanced learning experiences.

Responsibility for High Standards and Performance

What it is

Albertans must have the assurance that all students are succeeding in their learning and that resources being invested on education are being effectively used. Everyone involved in education is responsible for continuously improving his or her own skills and abilities.

What it means

Responsibility for high standards and performance means:

- accountability measures are meaningful and useful to students, parents, teachers, principals, school communities, school boards and the Government of Alberta.
- information is used to predict and prevent problems.
- information identifying underperforming groups of students is available in a timely manner to support intervention efforts.
- accountability measures benchmark Alberta students' performance in comparison with other leading jurisdictions, nationally and internationally.
- progressive standards of ability and performance are established for teachers, principals, superintendents and trustees.
- teachers, principals, superintendents and trustees have the benefit of regular feedback from their peers.
- professional development for teachers, administrators and other staff is ongoing.
- Albertans regularly receive information from schools, school authorities and the Government of Alberta.
- teachers, school authorities and Alberta Education share responsibility for continuous improvement through the development of teacher professional competencies to support student success.

How it could be achieved

Truly inclusive student-centered education requires that everyone involved in education accept collective responsibility for the success of every student, which begins in the early years and includes the development of competencies. Albertans have access to transparent, reliable and consistent ways to gauge provincial and school authority success. Alberta Education provides school authorities with meaningful information and supports to assist them in identifying areas of success and for improvement. School authorities are responsible for their results and have the flexibility to determine how they can best address the diverse needs of students. Albertans hold the education system accountable for the investment in education. Thinking differently and engaging actively in collaborative efforts with Alberta Education, partners will further refine accountability measures and reporting mechanisms to assure Albertans that their investment in education meets their expectations and contributes to the province's prosperity.

Research

What it is

Research informs sound policy and decision-making. Education research underpins system change and is used to create the best possible learning environments for young people. Research that informs policy and practice is critical to the success of our students and to ensuring a bright future for all Albertans.

What it means

An enhanced approach to research means:

- all stakeholders in the education sector use research to make evidenced-based decisions.
- research builds a solid foundation to focus educational change and policy development for improving student engagement and learning.
- research conducted by post-secondary institutions informs and is informed by student experiences, teacher practices and school and board-level work.
- leadership to champion research and development is foundational to innovation, growth and change.
- teachers and school communities undertake research to address local needs and priorities.
- student learning experiences are enhanced through the engagement of students and parents with researchers in research initiatives.
- teachers share and use findings to inform their practice.
- the education community understands global trends and accesses research to support personalized student learning.

How it could be achieved

Research and innovation will be encouraged and supported as part of a strong education system. Education research is integral to all parts of the education system, and all stakeholders will need to collaborate to conduct, interpret and apply research findings. Research partnerships will identify and expand our existing knowledge base regarding how students learn and how to facilitate the most appropriate learning environment.

School Boards

What it is

School boards have a vital role in the governance of our education system and have the autonomy and flexibility to respond to local needs and as well as provincial priorities.

What it means

Flexible and responsive school boards:

- are responsible for ensuring that students achieve provincially defined curriculum outcomes in locally relevant and appropriate ways.
- are able to effectively respond to local needs and circumstances within their communities.
- build connections with other organizations (e.g., municipalities, local libraries, service organizations, child and family services authorities) through coordination and collaboration to effectively address the needs of all students through a continuum of supports and services.
- comprehensively support students through, for example, collaborating with health and social agencies and facilitating the provision of a continuum of supports and services to students in schools.

How it could be achieved

In the new *Education Act*, the roles and responsibilities of school boards will be identified. School boards will have an increased emphasis on student achievement, community engagement, transparency and accountability to their communities. School boards will work to enhance public confidence in our education system.

Curriculum

Curriculum is a widely used term, which has many interpretations. For the purposes of the dialogue for transformational change in Alberta's education system, curriculum is defined as having the following interconnected components: programs of study, balanced assessment, and learning and teaching resources. Curriculum is foundational to students' learning experiences. Alberta students are engaged in activities that are guided by the outcomes in the provincial programs of study, supported by balanced assessment tools, and learning and teaching resources.

Curriculum: Programs of Study

What it is

Programs of study set provincial standards for students. It is important for students to know and understand what is expected of them and apply what they've learned to other contexts. It is critical for students to know how they are progressing in their learning and what they need to do to achieve success.

What it means

The transformation of programs of study means:

- building on Alberta's accomplishments, Alberta's programs of study emphasize the development of competencies, based on a solid foundation of attitudes, skills and knowledge as well as values developed through in-depth study of concepts within subject/discipline areas.
- students have the opportunity to develop in-depth knowledge and understanding while also exploring their interests and passions.
- that by reducing the scope of provincially mandated programs of study, there is enhanced flexibility in meeting students' needs by enabling learning opportunities designed at the local level.

How it could be achieved

This policy direction towards learning that is more competency-based will require a redesign of the focus and content of the province's programs of study, and how they are developed. This will include revising programs of study to provide opportunities for students to explore concepts in more depth while reducing the breadth of content. This will also include a more consistent focus on competencies across the programs of study. Building on Alberta's successes, there will be an increased focus on authentic learning opportunities within relevant contexts. The processes and standards for development of programs of study will be enhanced to engage a broader range of stakeholders and partners and reflect 21st century technologies.

Curriculum: *Balanced Assessment*

What it is

Assessment plays a critical and an integral role in learning and serves several purposes for students, teachers, parents, and the broader education community. Formative assessment, often called “assessment *for* learning,” is used to provide ongoing, timely feedback to students and teachers to help guide teaching and learning by providing essential information to teachers and students so that learning strategies are effectively aligned with individual student needs. In addition to formative assessments, students, teachers, and parents need to know what has been accomplished through summative assessments, often referred to as “assessment *of* learning,” that demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.

What it means

Taking a balanced approach to assessment means that:

- students have varied assessments that provide timely and relevant feedback to help them continue to develop competencies, that are relevant and meet their learning needs.
- assessments are compatible with high-quality and engaging learning opportunities with flexible timing and pacing through a range of learning environments that focus on student success.
- teachers are skilled and knowledgeable in the administration and interpretation of balanced assessments.
- assessments are based on learning outcomes for competencies defined by the programs of study, and provide assurance that educational outcomes reflect Albertans' investment in learning.
- the scope of assessment is expanded to include “assessment *as* learning,” where students learn how to assess their own learning and that of their peers.
- students are more engaged in their learning, and reflect on and assess their own learning and that of their peers.

How it could be achieved

There needs to be greater alignment of assessments with individual learner needs that support varied learning strategies to enable the achievement of learning outcomes. To effectively develop learner competencies, teachers must be supported in developing new assessment strategies and practices to help students demonstrate competencies in all learning environments. In order to support learning with flexible timing and pacing through a range of learning environments to meet the diverse needs of all students, provincial assessments could also be made available on-demand. Also, there may be an opportunity to focus increasingly on competencies such as literacy and numeracy in provincial standardized assessments.

Curriculum: Learning and Teaching Resources

What it is

Learning and teaching resources include textbooks, web-based content and general reference materials, available in print, digital, video and audio formats. Resources are aligned with the outcomes in the programs of study. They provide invaluable support to educators implementing the programs of study through the provision of rich, meaningful, and engaging opportunities for Alberta's students. As innovations in technology continue, flexible and adaptable digitally-based resources are instrumental in providing Alberta students high-quality 21st century learning opportunities with flexible timing and pacing through a range of learning environments.

What it means

Relevant and engaging learning and teaching resources means:

- students and teachers have access to digitally-based learning and teaching resources that can be adapted and used in all learning environments to meet the diverse needs of students.
- resources align with the standards set in the programs of study and support the development of competencies based on a solid foundation of attitudes, skills, and knowledge as well as values acquired through in-depth study of fundamental concepts within subject areas.
- learning and teaching resources leverage the effective use of technology as tools for learning and for engaging learners in multiple social contexts.
- learning and teaching resources support balanced assessment approaches and practices in learning environments across the province.

How it could be achieved

Providing digitally-based learning and teaching resources that are adaptable for use in a range of learning environments and that are more focused on developing learner competencies will require a redesign of the format, focus, and content of resources and how they are created. The processes and standards for creation, acquisition, and availability of learning and teaching resources will be enhanced to engage a broader range of stakeholders and partners and reflect 21st century technologies.

Teaching our Children

What it is

The nature of learning and teaching is changing. The professional teacher is a learning leader, a collaborative partner, a researcher, a reflective practitioner, and a change agent with expertise in recognizing and responding to the academic, cognitive, affective and emotional learning needs of students. Teachers facilitate flexible, innovative, and personalized approaches to learning by creating environments that engage students in compelling and authentic work. Today's teachers are student-centred and future-focused, helping students learn to be responsible, caring and productive citizens. Teachers recognize that the strength of the education program is fundamentally a reflection of the strength of a learning community committed to student learning and achievement, where all members share in the responsibility of the education system to support and respond to the needs of all students.

What it means

A strong, professional teaching workforce means that:

- teachers provide strong leadership and effective instruction to energize, challenge and excite students about learning.
- teachers help students discover the confidence and capacity to apply new insights and creativity, express new ideas, develop critical thinking skills and discover their talents and passions.
- teachers create innovative and authentic learning environments and activities that engage and enhance student passions, interests, and abilities.
- teachers are skilled at demonstrating how learning is relevant and meaningful to students in their homes, in school, and around the world.
- teachers are leaders of learning communities, skilled at relationship building, and know how to access the services and supports of teacher assistants, health professionals, social workers, community members, and parents for the benefit of students.
- teachers strengthen their competencies, remaining current and vibrant in their teaching methods by engaging in professional development, supported by strong school and system leadership.
- teachers capitalize on the use of emerging technologies to engage students in their learning.

How it could be achieved

A teacher is the most significant change agent in the learning process. Teacher recruitment practices will ensure that highly qualified, innovative, and student-centered teachers are attracted to the profession. Teacher preparation programs in our post-secondary institutions will continue to strengthen working relationships with Alberta school boards and other education stakeholder associations to prepare excellent graduates who enter the profession with enthusiasm and the commitment necessary for today's learning environments.

Government, universities, professional associations, and school authorities will collaborate to ensure school leadership competencies are enhanced. Experienced teachers will mentor beginning teachers and all teachers will participate in ongoing training and development to strengthen competencies set out in the Teaching Quality Standard. Teachers will engage in new collaborative relationships with community partners to share resources and solutions with other helping professions.

Technology for Learning and Innovation

What it is

Digital technologies have the unique potential to dynamically transform the student learning experience by helping students become engaged thinkers, global citizens, and active learning participants in collaborative social learning environments. Today's digital technologies enable students not only to do things differently, but to do different things that would otherwise not be possible inside traditional classrooms using traditional learning tools. Technology enables different ways of learning and opens up new opportunities to connect, explore, innovate, and create and share knowledge.

What it means

Harnessing the power of technology to enhance learning and teaching means that:

- students and educators have access to a comprehensive technology platform for learning when and where they need it.
- students take greater control of their own learning by using technology to personalize their learning experiences, explore their own directions, and use tools that match their learning styles.
- students have equitable access and opportunity to use technology seamlessly as an integral part of their learning environment and to have engaging and empowering learning experiences both in and outside of school.
- educators understand the profound impact that contemporary technologies have on how students learn, and are skilled in teaching in face-to-face, online, and other non-traditional environments.
- administrators create dynamic, digital learning cultures which maximize the use of media-rich resources to create relevant and engaging learning experiences.
- schools connect with parents in their homes and workplaces, and reach out to the global community in ways never before imagined.
- there are greater opportunities for efficiencies and innovation in administration, professional development, assessment, and the provision of specialized services.

How it could be achieved

While technology makes things possible, people make things happen. To support this policy direction we will build on the strengths of people in our system and the wider community to increase our capacity to adapt to continual change. A systemic approach will be taken to plan a technology platform that supports emerging learning needs and allows for enhanced collaboration, communication, and sharing. The changing nature of technology will be embraced, new technologies will be explored, and our schools will be transformed into networked learning environments that reflect the changing world.

In order to adapt to the continual emergence of new technologies and the vast array of tools and applications, standards for technology that enable this future will be adopted. We will work together as a system to ensure that students will be supported by a robust technology infrastructure that is responsive to their needs, and continually evolves to support the learning, teaching, and administrative demands of a knowledge organization.

Parental and Community Engagement

What it is

Children learn first from their parents. The role that parents and the broader community play in education is critical. Parents are central motivators, influencers, decision makers and nurturers of their children and have a critical role in the foundational years of their children's development. Parental engagement plays a significant role in a child's future success. It enables children to acquire knowledge, learn to think, and discover their skills, aptitudes, abilities and passions. But, parental engagement in the education of children is not in and of itself a universal remedy.

This is where the "community" comes in. A community takes many forms. It can be a group of people living within a geographic boundary, people with the same interests, common purposes, or intents. The education system of the future is envisioned as a well functioning community of students, teachers, parents, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and other service groups and agencies.

What it means

Involving parents and the broader community in the education of Alberta's children means that:

- through the active and committed support of parents, children embrace learning with enthusiasm, confidence and energy.
- parents are more informed about how to engage more effectively in their children's education.
- parents feel valued as active and essential contributors to the success of their children and their children's learning environment and, by extension, to the success of their community.
- there is greater local governance.
- school boards first seek to establish partnerships with community members, organizations and service providers before undertaking service improvements to students.
- schools also engage with local neighbourhoods and the neighbourhoods where students live.
- the public has accurate and timely information about education.

How it could be achieved

Alberta Education is committed to working with parents to ensure their children come to school as nourished, enthusiastic, confident and capable learners and will support parents and families so that children come to school ready to learn. The concept of the school as a community centre that is the base from which a variety of comprehensive services are coordinated and provided to students, families and other community members will be explored. The development of learning communities (i.e., parents, educators, school boards, not-for-profit organizations, and others collaborating to address students' learning needs) will also be explored, as will ways to better use learning opportunities available outside schools.

Collaboration and Shared Governance

What it is

Shared governance pertains to participants, within Alberta's education system, clearly understanding their education roles and responsibilities and being accountable for them. Everyone, whether it be the provincial government, elected school boards, neighbourhood schools, parents, school councils, students, teachers, or stakeholder organizations, has a role to play in a shared governance model based on ongoing conversations among diverse partners in education.

What it means

In a shared governance model:

- governance is more flexible, adaptable and able to lead through common purpose.
- stakeholder groups work collaboratively with each other, the provincial government, and other education partners to advance common goals.
- the education system is flexible, responsive, and able to adapt more quickly to present and emerging challenges and opportunities.
- there are fewer rules mandated by the provincial government, with a movement toward a principles-based approach to governance providing assurance that the education system is functioning with the best interests, safety, and well-being of students in mind.
- there are overall boundaries and standards within which the system functions, and people are given the tools they need to do the job effectively and efficiently while maximizing innovation and continuous improvement in communities across the province.
- governance is demonstrated by the collaborative actions of teams that include both traditional and non-traditional stakeholders: membership in such teams might include parents, not-for-profit organizations, and Aboriginal communities.

How it could be achieved

While traditionally thought of approaches to "ownership" still apply to the system (i.e., teachers are responsible for their classroom, principals are responsible for their school, etc.) realizing a new vision for governance will mean greater commitment to cross-sectoral collaboration between education, health and social agencies as well as not-for-profit organizations. The student voice will be listened to and considered in decision making. Approaches to governance which are more collaborative, balanced between the provincial government and local school authorities, and which reflect the unique needs of local communities, will be explored. Building on our current model of elected school boards to strengthen the local democratic process might involve enhanced governance at the local level through, for example, community or volunteer appointments to ensure balanced Aboriginal representation on a board responsible for a large number of Aboriginal students or which has a tuition agreement with a First Nation.

Next Steps

Inspiring Action on Education speaks to an informed transformation of the education system. Change will not happen overnight. It will take hard work and dedication and the collaborative involvement of all education partners. This includes teachers, parents, students, local communities, businesses and not-for-profit organizations. Continued societal and economic change is inevitable, and by readying the education system for the future, we can continue to ensure that Alberta is ahead of the curve. As we position ourselves for change, we will consider multiple viewpoints, not just the loudest voice. We will look at the research and evidence, work collaboratively with our stakeholders, and continue listening to all Albertans about their ideas for what an educated Albertan and a world class education system should look like. Embracing change means Alberta will continue to provide the highest quality learning opportunities and enable our children to reach their full potential. Join us in being a part of this change.

Engaging with *Inspiring Action*

As part of a continuing dialogue with Albertans on the future of education, we want to hear from you and invite you to be a part of an innovative online engagement process, available at:

<http://education.alberta.ca/engage>.

If you are unable to access the internet you can also contact us by mail or fax:

Mail: Alberta Education
Policy and Planning Sector
9th Floor, Commerce Place
10155 – 102 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L5

Fax: 780-422-0880

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this discussion paper.

Appendix 1

Talking with Albertans about the Future of K-12 Education

Over the past couple of years, Alberta Education has engaged a broad cross-section of Albertans in discussions about what the transformation of the education system should look like. Three of these initiatives are highlighted here.

Inspiring Education

Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans was initiated in 2008. *Inspiring Education* is the visionary overarching element of these three initiatives and represents a new way for Alberta Education to engage with its stakeholders, partners and all Albertans. It was established as an interactive conversation with Albertans and designed around the question of what characteristics an educated Albertan should possess twenty years from now. As part of the *Dialogue*, a series of community conversations with Albertans took place in eight locations across Alberta in the spring of 2009. In addition, a provincial conversation was held in Edmonton in fall 2009 with approximately 1,000 Albertans who participated in discussions on potential policy and governance options for Alberta's education system.

Setting the Direction

Setting the Direction was launched in the spring of 2008 with a mandate to create a new framework for special education. The initiative involved approximately three rounds of consultation during 2008 and 2009, including a two-day Minister's Forum in Edmonton. Participants included students, parents, teachers, teacher assistants, principals, elders, school authority administrators, trustees, medical professionals and special education specialists. As the initiative developed, it became broader in its focus, and began to centre on the idea of an inclusive education system that values and takes responsibility for *all* students in their diverse learning needs. In this way, it informed *Inspiring Education* as a holistic approach to education that is student-focused.

Speak Out

Speak Out is an opportunity for Alberta's youth to share their experiences and ideas and help decision makers understand the issues that are important to students. During 2008 and 2009, students in Grades 9 to 12 were invited to talk about education in small group facilitated discussions held across the province. Students discussed learning styles, best practices and what they would like to see happen in schools. Additionally, the Minister hosted a Speak Out Conference in Edmonton in May 2009 where members of a Minister's Student Advisory Council were announced. This Council consists of 24 youth, aged 14 to 19, with different backgrounds, opinions, experiences and perspectives from all regions of Alberta. Consistent with the approach taken by *Inspiring Education*, *Speak Out* is an ongoing dialogue that is continuing to engage students online as well as through a second round of forums which were held in fall 2009 and spring 2010. A second Speak Out Conference was also held in May 2010.