

FRAMING A NEW ***EDUCATION ACT*** FOR ALBERTA

Alberta School Councils' Association • ***School Act Review Submission***

INTRODUCTION

The Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) Board of Directors appreciates the opportunity to provide suggestions for the *School Act* review and/or the development of a new *Education Act*. This submission is based on consideration of the Alberta Education *School Act* Review Discussion Paper for Legislative Review, ASCA policy positions, and discussion at the *School Act* Review Stakeholder Committee meeting of October 9th.

A NEW EDUCATION ACT

At the Review meeting of October 9th, participants were challenged to think of the new legislation as a series of broad philosophical statements - statements that would capture Albertans' beliefs that a farsighted education system should be relevant for the foreseeable future and the longer term, one that would enable decision-making at various levels of governance (local or community, regional and provincial).

Given the potential philosophical and enabling nature of the new *Act*, the ASCA Board of Directors feels the legislation could be organized into four core sections: ***Students***, ***Parents/Guardians***, ***Governance***, and ***Responsibility/Accountability***.

(The ASCA Board of Directors recognizes the important role of teachers in the system and feels there should be another section entitled "teachers". However, given the evolving nature of teaching and learning, particularly within the context of facilitating student learning through a variety of delivery methods, and the parameters of the agreement between the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Government of Alberta, the Board withholds comment at this time.)

The following outlines the ASCA belief corresponding to each category and attempts to capture each section's philosophical underpinning.

Students: *Student learning and success is the focus of all efforts in the education system.*

Parents/Guardians: *As clients of the education system, parents are active participants in their own children's learning, as well as being enthusiastically involved and engaged in the system by providing advice to the principal and school board through the vehicle of school council.*

Governance: *Elected school boards, as governors of education locally and regionally accountable to their local electorate, are fundamental to a robust and successful education system.*

Responsibility/Accountability: *All participants in the education system are responsible for furthering successful student learning. System decision-makers publicly demonstrate the goals, objectives and strategies in place to enhance student success, report on progress towards those goals, and are accountable to the public for the achievement of the goals and the success of students.*

These overarching statements can be further amplified through the addition of brief descriptive concepts:

Students

- Engagement (willingness/eagerness of students for/in their learning)
- Equitable/inclusive learning opportunities (student centered)
- Preparedness (at every stage of learning):
 - For citizenship in a democratic society
 - To appreciate/respect cultural diversity and the environment
 - For work (ethic, knowledge, skill)
 - For lifelong learning (curiosity, thirst to know and learn)

Parents/Guardians

- Responsibility to encourage and support student learning (education is seen as critical to the success of individual, community, province and society as a whole)
- Engagement:
 - parents engaged in their child's education and learning
 - parents as clients of the system (respect for parents' views and desires for their child)
 - parents' involvement in an advisory role that has meaning (school councils remain legislated as advisory, but role is clarified (no fundraising))
- Choice (programs, blending, options for learning)

Governance

School Boards:

- Role
 - Elected governors of education locally/regionally
 - Policy setters
 - Representative and reflective of the community
- Autonomy/Authority
 - Hiring of superintendent (without "permission")
 - Borrowing powers (with repayment plan)
 - Partial taxing authority
 - Decision-making - shared governance/collaboration (willingness to bring in other entities when student success would hinge on "wrap-around" services)
 - Ensure parents are meaningfully involved and engaged in education (primarily through vehicle of school councils)
 - Community connectivity/involvement

Responsibility/Accountability

- Students ⇒ take responsibility for their own learning.
- Parents/Guardians ⇒ take responsibility for their children's learning.
- Teachers ⇒ take responsibility for their competence and are accountable to parents and the school board for furthering student learning and achievement.

- Principals ⇒ take responsibility for providing an environment that promotes and encourages student learning and success, involve and engage parents in an advisory role through robust and vibrant school councils, and are accountable to the superintendent of schools regarding student success and achievement.
- Superintendents ⇒ are responsible for the management of the system, creating a culture of learning and collaboration among all participants in the school system, and are accountable to the school board for the success of the system's students.
- School boards ⇒ are responsible for connecting with and reflecting the wishes of their communities regarding the education of their community's children, are accountable to the communities within their jurisdiction and the Minister of Education regarding the achievement of the goals established to enhance student learning and achievement.
- Alberta Education ⇒ is responsible for the development of standardized curricula related to the Programs of Study, establishing the outcomes to be achieved through the implementation of the curricula, and for the regular reporting of results of student achievement provincially to Albertans; and are accountable to the Minister of Education for school boards' compliance with the provisions of the *School or Education Act, Regulations and Policies*.
- The Minister of Education ⇒ is responsible for ensuring education is funded appropriately to enable each child to achieve to their maximum potential.
- The citizens of Alberta ⇒ are responsible to demand and support a constantly improving public education system.

In addition to the foregoing, the Alberta School Councils' Association believes the following:

1. Private schools offer an element of choice for some parents and students, and as such are considered a component of Alberta's education "system". However, ASCA maintains public education should always be supported and funded at a higher level than private schools.
2. Charter schools offer choice within the public system, and should be held accountable for results for improved student achievement in the same manner as schools and school boards.
3. School boards need to remain elected. In instances where distinct school authorities see opportunities to govern as one, incentives from the government of Alberta should enable "consolidation".
4. The new legislation should not have "minimums" (e.g. number of teaching days or number of hours of instruction) but rather inspire and enable new and creative ways of "doing business" from governing, to service delivery (instruction and access), to local decision-making. Sharing governance and decision-making in order to further student success should be encouraged and rewarded.