

The Alberta School Leadership Framework: Promoting Growth, Development and Accountability



A. FOUNDATION

In this context, the term ‘school leader’ refers to principals as well as assistant, associate and vice principals.

1. Framework Vision

All Alberta schools are served by suitable, highly competent educational leaders who create learning cultures through which each student has an opportunity to engage in quality learning experiences that lead to achievement of the goals of education and address the student’s learning and developmental needs. In this context, student engagement refers to three dimensions of the learning experience – social, emotional and intellectual—that result in students’ becoming engaged thinkers and ethical citizens, and their development of an entrepreneurial spirit. Quality learning experiences are school-sponsored activities that foster students’ capacity to think critically, be resilient, adaptable and confident in their abilities, take personal responsibility for life-long learning and collaborate to achieve a common purpose.

A collective ‘ownership’ of education is promoted by school leaders by building the leadership capacity of all members of the school community and engaging them through opportunities to be meaningfully involved in decision-making, to develop shared values, beliefs and vision, and to help create an effective learning culture for all.

The school is only one of many community-based sites for students’ learning, extending from the home to the larger community, which they can access at any time. Conversely, the school serves as a hub for community supports and services to young people and their families and a community learning centre for all ages.

2. Framework Purposes

The *Alberta School Leadership Framework* (Framework) elements represent a principle-based foundation for school leadership in Alberta. Its purposes are to promote innovative and transformative leadership models, to elevate and define the role of school leaders, to accommodate local priorities and contexts and to extend the traditional concept of ‘school.’



Consistent and sustained implementation of the Framework by school leaders and education stakeholder organizations and institutions will improve school leadership in Alberta, contribute to the resolution of school leadership workforce issues and achieve the Framework vision.

The Framework outcomes include the following:

- a. School leaders ensure that the learning needs and well-being of students are the basis of decision-making and programming.
- b. School leaders positively influence the teaching and learning conditions in the school and thereby contribute to the quality of instruction provided by teachers.
- c. School leaders foster teachers' instructional efficacy by promoting their professional learning and reflective practice and through the on-going supervision of their practices.
- d. Through the acquisition and refinement of the *Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders (Competencies)*, aspiring and practicing school leaders are successful throughout their careers.
- e. School leaders strike a fair and optimal balance in the time and effort devoted to fulfilling their various responsibilities and in meeting community expectations.
- f. The school community actively supports and understands the challenges faced by school leaders and accepts new models of school leadership.
- g. The school community is assured that Alberta's school leaders have the knowledge, skills and attributes to fulfill their responsibilities and to address community expectations.
- g. Education stakeholders have a foundation and a common language for policy development and programs to ensure sustained quality school leadership across the province.
- h. School authorities' workforce succession plans are effective in identifying, nurturing and recruiting future school leaders.
- i. Leadership preparation institutions and professional development organizations are provided with a set of *Competencies* upon which to focus the content of their program.

3. The Changing School Leadership Role

Across the Western world, school leadership is receiving unprecedented attention from educational researchers and policymakers as a consequence of a number of challenges:

- a. The impending retirement of a sizable portion of the ranks of practicing school leaders
- b. The drop in qualified applicants for school leadership positions and in teacher applicants for leadership development programs
- c. Research findings that have concluded that, next to the teacher, the school leader has the most impact on the student's school experience and ultimately his/her school success
- d. The increased accountability for results accruing to all educational leaders, particularly at the school level, emanating from state (provincial) and local authorities and community expectations
- e. The emergence of new models of school leadership that promote a balanced approach to instructional leadership and management responsibilities.

Alberta has the opportunity to be at the forefront of empirical research and practice in addressing the challenges facing school leadership in the 21st century and, more importantly, to implement measures that ensures that all Alberta schools are led by effective school leaders—now and in the future—who are successful in fulfilling the Framework vision.

There are several reasons for the urgency that Alberta's education stakeholders have attributed to the endeavour to develop a Framework, including the following:

- a. There are some notable differences between the knowledge, skills and attributes required of school leaders a generation ago and those required now; today's responsibilities call for competencies which many school leaders may not have acquired or sufficiently developed.
- b. School leaders' workloads have become arduous as a consequence of increased managerial responsibilities related to school-based budgeting, decision-making and governance and their greater accountability for results.



- c. Today's school leaders are especially challenged to devote sufficient time and attention to instructional leadership as a consequence of the time and effort that managerial duties require.
- d. To effectively support, supervise and evaluate teachers, principals need to acquire the knowledge, skills, confidence and credibility to carry out their instructional leadership responsibilities at the outset of their careers; they also need to refine their knowledge of emerging teaching, learning and student assessment practices throughout their careers.
- e. Models of transformational and distributed leadership need to be refined for the Alberta context and implemented through new preparation and professional development programs.

4. School Leadership Workforce Challenges

The Ministry has recently gathered and analyzed field data regarding the supply of and demand for school leaders in Alberta over the next few years that provide impetus for the development of the Framework. Some notable data and their implications are as follows:

- a. As of 2008,
 - i. The average age of school leaders (i.e., principals and assistant, associate and vice principals) in Alberta was 48.3 years; 49% were over the age of 50 years
 - ii. The average age of retirement of school leaders was 57 years, lower than in previous years
 - iii. 28% of new school leaders had less than 8 years of teaching experience and 48% had less than 7 years of leadership experience
 - iv. 32% of new school leaders relinquished the role within three years
 - v. 44% of assistant, associate and vice principals had less than 4 years of leadership experience.
- b. In 2009, Alberta school authorities reported that the number and quality of applicants for school leadership are dropping, with some remote jurisdictions reporting unfilled school leadership positions.

Implications: Education stakeholders need to develop strategies to accelerate the acquisition and refinement of the *Competencies* by new school leaders who:



- may have far less preparation and teaching and leadership experience than earlier generations of school leaders but face higher levels of accountability and increasing and more diverse community expectations
- need to devote more time to support, supervise and evaluate the increasingly large number of new teachers
- must master the routine duties of the role in order to be pro-active and innovative in responding to emergent issues and education reform initiatives.

B. FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS

The Framework Elements define effective school leadership in the Alberta context and create the conditions to ensure that the Framework vision is fulfilled. The successful implementation of the Framework elements will be instrumental in stakeholder efforts to attract more teachers to the ranks of school leaders.

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 certain 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.

Education stakeholder organizations and institutions have collaborated to develop research-based guidelines and principles for improving the preparation, induction and professional development of school leaders in Alberta and to identify the complementary roles of education stakeholders in supporting, guiding and directing school leaders.

1. Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders (Competencies)

School leaders have significant responsibilities for ensuring quality student learning and teacher practice efficacy and for promoting an effective learning culture in the school community. The development and career-long demonstration of the *Competencies* by school leaders lead to the fulfillment of these responsibilities. The *Competencies* extend the Ministry's 2009 *Principal*



Quality Practice Guideline to apply to all school leaders; i.e., principals as well as assistant, associate and vice principals. As provincial requirements, the *Competencies* validate the role of Alberta school leaders and ensure province-wide consistency and alignment in the initiatives related to school leaders' preparation, induction, professional development, supervision and evaluation.

The **Procedures** included in the *Competencies* ensure that aspiring, beginning and veteran school leaders have the opportunity to develop the related knowledge, skills and attributes and are actively supported in their daily leadership practice. As a consequence, school leaders have the opportunity to be successful throughout their careers in fulfilling their mandated responsibilities and in meeting community expectations. In acknowledgement of and to promote the professional status of school leaders, school authorities are expected to provide opportunities for school leaders' meaningful input into school authority requirements and procedures related to school leadership. School leaders are accountable for the results of their practice. The robust practice supervision process included in the **Procedures** serves to qualify and empower school leaders to be successful.

2. School Leader Preparation

School leader workforce challenges and the introduction of new *Competencies* require significant changes to the content, design and delivery of school leader preparation programs. Preparation programs for aspiring and beginning school leaders should be informed by current research, be closely linked with the field, promote shared leadership models, be accessible and address the *Competencies* and school leaders' responsibilities related to their professional growth, supervision and evaluation. Participants in school leader preparation programs should be provided with opportunities to identify their learning needs and to meet them through a variety of pathways and program entry points and in diverse educational contexts.

Based on a review of international research and through consultation with Alberta's education stakeholders (including practicing school leaders), the most effective features of school leadership preparation programs will be identified and used to inform program content, delivery systems and accessibility.



3. School Leader Induction

Induction is an essential component of school leadership development that bridges initial preparation and career-long practice. Effective induction programs offer aspiring and beginning school leaders learning experiences in authentic contexts with trained mentors and role-models. The opportunity to apply leadership theory and best practices to real-world problems in controlled, low-risk settings infuses participants with the required knowledge, skills and confidence to be successful. Induction programs allow new school leaders to acquire the 'basic' knowledge and skills to thrive as they embark on their new careers; this provides also them with the opportunity to develop a reflective practice, a professional identity and a pro-active, innovative perspective. Sponsorship of induction programs provides hosting school authorities with opportunities to broaden their leadership workforce, to enhance their learning culture and to address emergent issues.

Based on a review of international research and through consultation with Alberta's education stakeholders (including practicing school leaders), the most effective characteristics of school leader induction programs will be identified and used to inform program content, delivery systems and accessibility.

4. School Leader Professional Development

Today's ever-changing school leadership role is characterized by an emphasis on continuous improvement, increasingly diverse community expectations and high levels of accountability. School leaders cannot sustain effective leadership without a personal commitment to professional development throughout their careers. Professional development is a process of refining and leveraging practice strengths and enhancing practice. School leaders' professional development should focus on the acquisition and refinement of the *Competencies* and on meeting school authority requirements. Professional development opportunities extend the benefits of school leaders' induction experiences with ongoing, job-embedded and career-long learning.

Based on a review of international research and through consultation with Alberta's education stakeholders (including practicing school leaders), the most effective characteristics of school leader professional development programs will be identified and used to inform program content, delivery systems and accessibility.



5. Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

Current stakeholder efforts to support and promote effective school leadership, as well-intentioned as they are, may appear to be at cross-purposes and to lack coordination. Successful initiatives to attract, develop and retain school leaders in sufficient numbers to meet the demand require the aligned, collaborative efforts of all education stakeholders. The Framework includes clearly-defined and complementary stakeholder roles and responsibilities to implement the Framework elements.