

Provincial Forum Community Reflections October 18-20, 2009

Inspiring Education A DIALOGUE WITH ALBERTANS



Government of Alberta ■
Education



Introduction

Project Overview

The *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans* initiative came about as a result of the desire of the Honourable Dave Hancock, Minister of Education, to hear from Albertans about how education in Alberta could help tomorrow's students find their passions and prepare for success.

Albertans have already built a world-class education system, staffed by excellent educators and administrators. The purpose of *Inspiring Education* is not to review today's system but to address the needs and outcomes of education in 20 years' time.

The initiative is designed to provoke ongoing public discussion about the value of education as a foundation for the future civic and economic success of the province. It aspires to develop public understanding and expectations about the nature and necessity of education in fulfilling the potential of every Albertan.

Based on a well-developed understanding of the value of education, the initiative focuses public discussion on how Alberta's education system can best meet future students' needs, including how it is governed, administered and provides services.

The end results of these public discussions will be heightened public appreciation of the value of education, a long-term vision for education in Alberta, a policy framework to guide the operation of Alberta's education system and, potentially, revisions to the *School Act*.

Public Discussion

This unique public dialogue is led by a Steering Committee, co-chaired by Jeff Johnson, MLA, Athabasca-Redwater, and teacher Brent McDonough. They are joined by three MLAs and 17 other individuals from across the province, representing a range of backgrounds and perspectives. A Working Committee, with members from provincial government departments and stakeholder groups, has supported the Steering Committee by exploring a variety of policy and governance options.

Steering Committee members have met with an extensive cross-section of Albertans with diverse views and perspectives. During the dialogue, participants have been encouraged to listen, collaborate and communicate, resulting in a better understanding of how the work of various stakeholders and partners

supports the other and contributes to the success of Alberta's students. Participants have included students, parents, educators, stakeholders, elected officials (MLAs and school trustees), First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, and community and business members. To date, approximately 2,000 Albertans have shared their hopes, dreams and aspirations for the future of education. They have discussed what they think an educated Alberta might look like in 20 years. Many have also identified the types of changes needed to realize their vision for education and have shared their personal commitment to enabling change. This paper reflects their voices.

Your Voice

The provincial forum will give you an opportunity to add your voice to the *Inspiring Education* dialogue. Participants will be challenged by internationally renowned speakers, and subsequent conversations will further refine thinking on a vision for education. In addition, those present at the forum— both in person and online – will examine topics related to values, policy, and governance, and discuss the implications of potential changes for the future.

Following the provincial forum, the Steering Committee will use the input received from all phases of the *Inspiring Education* dialogue to shape a vision for education and a policy and governance framework.

Today's Context

Our world is very different from the world of only 30 years ago, much less 100 years ago when the foundation of Alberta's current education system was created. Today, many broad forces are affecting education systems, as well as social and economic systems. All have the potential to impact the stability and viability of communities. These include:

- A global recession and economic uncertainty,
- Changing demographic patterns, including an aging population,
- Increased immigration,
- Global mobility of, and competition for, skilled workers,
- The growing pervasiveness of digital technologies and rapidly evolving technologies,
- An information explosion, with greater ease of access to information by citizens,
- A growing need for information literacy skills to evaluate, interpret and use information effectively, efficiently and ethically,
- Recurring threats to food safety and the global food supply,
- Global warming,
- Greater environmental awareness, and
- Threat of a pandemic.

In Alberta, additional local forces exist:

- Meaningful engagement with the increasing population of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples,
- The significant exposure of Alberta's economy to international market forces,
- The need for all industries to make the transition to a knowledge-based, globally dependent economy,
- Increased competition with other provinces and countries for skilled workers,
- Increasing pressure on water supply and quality,

- Greater pressures and competition for land use,
- Sustaining social programs, such as health services, and
- Maintaining the viability of small communities and the rural way of life in the face of a steadily increasing urban population.

All of these trends and issues are expected to remain and intensify over the next 20 years—others will also emerge.

A key challenge we face as a province is to educate our children and youth to be agents of their own destinies rather than being passive in the face of these external forces. However, preparing learners to be adaptable, resourceful, resilient, and flexible is not enough to ensure they achieve their potential. They must also develop the capacity to form and maintain relationships to achieve success. There has never been a more opportune time to consider relevant ways to meet the changing needs of learners.

To Minister Hancock: When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope that... schools will still turn out the most educated and capable students, but that the focus will be more on human relationships, human happiness and fulfillment, and how we can work together to solve terrible, complex social problems. (June 10, 2009 Community Conversation – Red Deer)

Values

During community discussions, participants considered the following values as some that are important to creating a vision for future education in Alberta. As you read the values, think about what they mean to you personally and what they might mean for education in the future. Also think about other key values that should be considered.

Opportunity

Learners have opportunities to achieve their highest potential. Education is responsive to individual abilities and learning styles.

To My Grandchildren: When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope that you are able to take advantage of most, if not ALL, opportunities that came about. Remember that learning is a life-long experience, with many challenges and opportunities that make us who we are – YOU ARE UNIQUE, AS YOU ARE “YOU!” (June 3, 2009 Community Conversation – Bonnyville)

Fairness

Learners have equity of opportunity regardless of widely differing ability, economic circumstance, cultural and ethnic background, and geographic location.

Students: When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope that each and every one of you will feel that you belong and have a place in the education system. I hope that we can truly meet your needs and support your dreams. (June 20, 2009 Community Conversation – Red Deer)

Citizenship

Learners cooperate and help others and consider the impacts of their choices on others. Education strives to develop citizens who are full, active participants in the economy, society and democracy; who contribute to their communities (e.g., workplace, local community, faith community, province, country, and the world); and who are sensitive to the social and environmental footprints they leave.

To My Child: When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope you reflect on your education and are able to go out to the world and be an inspiring, contributing member of society, be globally responsible for your environment and embrace all the cultures surrounding you and be actively contributing to education for yourself and your kids. (May 6, 2009 Community Conversation – Grande Prairie)

Choice

Learners have a choice of programs and methods of delivery. Parents, who have primary responsibility for their children's education, may choose from schools that are public, separate, charter, francophone, or private. They may even opt for home education.

My Children: When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope that you are encouraged to learn at your own pace and aspire to new heights as you make your life choices. I want you to be your own individual and not be judged because your learning style is different. I want you to accept yourself and others for who you are. (June 17, 2009 Community Conversation – Calgary)

Diversity

Individual learners' needs and ways of life are respected and valued by the education system. In harmony with a vision of a province that is multilingual, multicultural and inclusive, the education system harnesses the strengths of the diversity within our society.

Future Students: When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope that all students, including the First Nations and Aboriginal peoples will have a significant role and place in Alberta and in the world. That the traditional ways of learning are utilized in our classrooms and that values related to nurturing a healthy society have a role in shaping our education systems. Oh yeah, that there will be more than one education system allowed!! (June 3, 2009 Community Conversation – Bonnyville)

Excellence

Learners are motivated to exceed expectations. Those involved in the delivery of education, notably teachers and administrators, work together to achieve excellence in teaching and student performance.

When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope that our educators are equipped with a knowledge that is as deep as it is broad. I hope that... they are motivated to walk the extra mile and encourage their students to do the same to reach their fullest potential.... I also hope that each student is given the opportunity to pursue excellence in any field of endeavour that they should so choose – and that government and administrators allow for this to happen. (May 20, 2009 Community Conversation – Lethbridge)

An Educated Albertan

During community discussions, participants identified the following as some of the key characteristics that an educated Albertan in 2029 will have. Consider whether an Albertan with these characteristics will be well-positioned to realize their full potential and to succeed and contribute to society 20 years from now.

Responsibility: “I am a contributing citizen of my community, province and the world.”

Building on the foundation provided by her family, the educated Albertan in 2029 has become self-reliant, recognizing that she is responsible for her own life. She takes full ownership of all her decisions and holds herself accountable for her actions, regardless of the outcome. She strives for excellence and personal success.

She is aware of how Albertans and Canadians fit into the world, and she is an advocate for social justice. She contributes to her community’s economy, politics and the environment. She sees herself as a citizen of the world—globally minded and globally committed, a steward of the Earth leaving a positive footprint wherever she goes.

Resilience: “I am flexible and adaptable.”

As she has grown up, she has seen many changes in society and the economy. She has gained a foundation in languages, the arts, economics, technology, information and environmental literacy. She knows how to identify problems in order to find the best solutions, as well as how to acquire, interpret, evaluate, create and communicate knowledge, which leads to understanding and wisdom. Using these competencies and drawing on the supportive networks she has developed, she adjusts to change with an attitude of hope.

She is self-disciplined, and she sets goals and works in a disciplined way to achieve them. Many people describe her as tenacious because she persists in tackling tough challenges when they come. And always, as an educated Albertan, she keeps growing and learning.

Risk-taking: “I explore possibilities.”

She explores options and challenges herself constantly to solve complex problems, looking for creative and innovative approaches. Sometimes she makes mistakes, but that is not failure – it is learning. New ways of doing things often result in ideas and solutions that would not be born of traditional and logical methods.

She has the courage to dream, to make bold decisions, even in the face of adversity, recognizing that to hold back is to be held back. She takes herself out of her comfort zone because she knows she will be able to grow more outside of it.

Relationship-building: “I respect others.”

She has steadily expanded her sense of connectedness and interdependence with others, from her parents, family members and friends to her teachers, employers and community members and outward to the global community. She is well-prepared to assume the responsibilities of a parent and a mentor. At the same time, she has learned to reflect on who she is as a unique individual and to care for herself, physically and spiritually.

She understands that teamwork, collaboration and communication are critical to building relationships, as is the demonstration of humility, fairness and open-mindedness. Life experience has opened her eyes to the importance of respect, empathy and compassion for those who are struggling. She understands and embraces diversity in all people.



Policy Themes

This section discusses some central themes related to policy that emerged during community conversations. Take into account what shifts might be needed to ensure a relevant and learner-centred education in 2029.

Definition

The role of government¹ is to achieve the outcomes identified for education in the province. However, on its own, government can assure very little—it needs the help of multiple partners linked into networks of governance. Public policy facilitates the building of partnerships and shared governance.

Policy is a deliberate and consistent course of action that helps you reach your destination. It defines values, principles, critical outcomes, attributes, and milestones.

What We Heard From Albertans

The *Inspiring Education* framework for policy development should be based on values and principles. A fundamental message from the spring conversations was that to reach desired outcomes in 2029 learning should be relevant and learner centred.

Learner-centred System

The primary focus of a relevant education system² must be to identify the learner's individual potential, encourage the discovery of purpose in and passion for life, and acquire an appreciation of continued

¹ Government refers to the formal organizations responsible for management of the education system (currently, this includes entities such as the Alberta government, schools boards, and municipal government).

² This is the formal system established and supported by the Alberta Government, with the primary responsibility currently resting in the portfolio of the Minister of Education.

learning throughout life. Education should develop the attributes, skills, and competencies of the learner, as well as provide a foundation of knowledge.

Also, education in 2029 should support the family and community as they help the learner develop an understanding of morality and citizenship, as well as basic skills for survival, adaptability and prosperity. Education should support participation of the learner in the local, national and global communities, and should prepare the learner for the transition to work and further education and to fully engage in their community.

Education in 2029 should provide learners with meaningful involvement in decisions affecting their learning and their lives. It should give them opportunities to help design their own learning programs and pathways and to develop the capacity to take responsibility for their own learning.

Assessment, which varies according to the learning styles of individual children, should be designed to determine whether the skills and content learned are relevant. It is a measure of personal growth from self-assessment.

Thus, education should be innovative and flexible. The learners' needs for learning and personal development should determine how education is governed and administered.

To My Child: When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope it is flexible and adaptive, broader and better tailored to each individual rather than to a whole. I hope that there is a greater understanding of how to incorporate different learning styles and a greater belief that learning happens everywhere, not just between the four walls of a "classroom." I hope that students have the opportunity to explore their dreams earlier in their education, and they are encouraged to move forward with their goals, and that education is more student-led than "teacher-directed." (June 17, 2009 Community Conversation, Calgary)

To Our Young Teachers: When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope you are as curious, as innovative, as welcoming and as compassionate as you are today. (May 20, 2009 Community Conversation – Lethbridge)

Minister Hancock: I envision a system for learning that is adaptive to the learning needs of students and provides multiple points of re-entry to address their learning needs based upon the need and circumstance. I envision a curriculum that furthers critical thinking and innovation and the engagement of the learner. (May 20, 2009 Community Conversation – Lethbridge)

Equitable and Inclusive Learning Opportunities

All learners should have access to the same quality and wide-ranging educational opportunities, regardless of where they live in Alberta. Education in 2029 should demonstrate a universal acceptance of and belonging for all children.

The core curriculum should cover languages, mathematics, science, social studies and physical education, as well as information literacy, economics, visual and performing arts, career and technology studies, and life skills.

Multiple mechanisms should provide learners with the opportunity to learn core curriculum in ways that align with their preferred learning styles, abilities, interests, and circumstances. Those opportunities should be available in a typical school facility, in the community, online or in any other manner that maintains the quality of the program as defined in provincial standards.

Learning should be supported by a standard set of digital technologies, including computers, computer applications, the Internet and related classroom equipment, and emerging technologies. Online learning should be available to all learners engaged in publicly funded education, regardless of geographic location, socio-economic circumstances, or ability. Learners attending a “regular” school should have access to online programs in the same way as learners engaged in distance learning.

My Children: When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope you haven't forgotten where you come from. I hope you have dreamed Big!! I hope you have invented and discovered what we thought of as impossible. I hope you have beat and eliminated diseases that we deal with. I believe you will succeed because this generation now desires to give you all the tools and opportunities you need for the future. We believe in you!! Make us proud!
(May 13, 2009 Community Conversation – Ft. McMurray)

Coordinated and Integrated Supports

Learners (and their families, as necessary) should have equitable access to supports to ensure they reach their potential as they move through their formal education.

In-school supports should include:

- Educators,
- Educational Assistants,
- Allied professionals, including therapists and counsellors, and
- Personal aides.

Community supports should include:

- Not-for-profit agencies,
- Family support workers,
- Mentors and role models (e.g., elders), and
- Business partners (e.g., work experience, Registered Apprenticeship, Junior Achievement).

Government should also provide a broad range of coordinated and integrated supports for families.

We need to have more community focus in the work of schools – we need to look at how we integrate education and all the social services so that parents do not have to struggle to make the connections that they need to make to support their children. We need to make the services meet the needs of the family – a more holistic and less departmentalized approach to serving children (June 17, 2009 Community Conversation – Calgary)

Governance Themes

This section discusses some of the main themes related to governance that emerged during the community conversations. Reflect on the changes that may be necessary over the next 20 years to bring the proposed governance characteristics to life.

Definition

Governance is the process through which people make decisions: the roles, responsibilities, and empowerment to achieve outcomes. It answers the question: how do we best organize ourselves to deliver on the outcomes we want for learners, for society, and for education? Governance clarifies and enhances working relationships.

What We Heard From Albertans

Participants in the community conversations told us that governance for the future of education should have the following characteristics:

Community Involvement

Education in 2029 should actively engage communities in the delivery of programs and services to learners. When students go out to the community, every context should be a learning context (e.g., nature, service work, volunteering). When the community comes into the formal learning environment, it should provide a network of support for learners and families: experts for learning, mentors and role models, including First Nations elders and immigrant community leaders.

Active engagement of the community should include mechanisms for municipal governments, businesses and community organizations to participate in school jurisdictions' development of policy and provision of programs and services.

Bring community back into school. Why isn't school teaching the whole child? We should be looking at the health of the child, the mental health of the child. Extended families would come in and children from broken homes would come in – all underneath the same roof of the school. (June 3, 2009 Community Conversation – Bonnyville)

Accountability and Shared Responsibility

Many members of the community share accountability in the education of our children. Governance structures should support the development of the qualities and abilities of an educated Albertan, to strive for excellence, and to ensure accountability:

- Learners should be accountable, to the best of their ability, for taking responsibility for their own learning outcomes.

- Parents should be accountable, to the best of their ability, for ensuring their children enter the formal learning system ready to learn.
- Educators—teachers and principals—should be accountable to learners, families and communities.
- Communities should be accountable for supporting families, educators and others involved in providing coordinated assistance to learners.
- Elected officials should be accountable for managing public resources invested in the formal learning system.
- The education system should be accountable for establishing and maintaining standards related to learning content, student achievement and related non-academic outcomes.

All these entities should work together to create a shared vision and mission, to define roles and responsibilities, and share resources to achieve common objectives. This model of governance should enhance flexibility to meet learner needs, build relationships, and encourage innovation.

Parental Engagement and Choice

The family forms the foundation of a learner's success. It nurtures, guides and supports the learner in early learning, including development of values and character.

Parents, guardians and the intergenerational, extended family should be primary partners in the formal education of their children. Partnership allows meaningful decision-making at all levels that affects the education of children in their families.

Parents and guardians should have many choices about how their children are educated. In some cases, families should be supported through early intervention and mapping, knowing that it will help prepare their children for success when they move into formal learning programs. In addition to such programs administered by a public school system, parents should have the choice to enroll their children in virtual (online) programs, or educate their children themselves. They may also take advantage of any local options that might be available and for which their children are eligible – separate (Catholic), francophone, charter or private school. Parents may also facilitate their child's learning through experiences in the extended community, such as field trips or study tours within the province, country or around the world.

To Minister Hancock: When I think of learning in the next 20 years, I hope that you will strengthen, support, encourage and protect parents' responsibility to educate, train and guide their children to maturity and adulthood; encourage choice so that children and adults of any age may offer their God-given talents, skills, and abilities to their respective communities for the benefit of others; remain focused on the character of children and adults; and promote family values – for so goes our society. (June 20, 2009 Community Conversation – Edmonton)

