



Community Conversation Summary

A series of *Inspiring Education* community conversations were held across the province between April and June 2009 in Alberta communities. *Inspiring Education* is an ongoing initiative and not a traditional government consultation. It is an open dialogue with the community that encourages all participants to share their ideas and experiences while asking them to learn and consider the perspectives of others. The process uncovers the kind of insight that is needed to create an education system that will meet the hopes, dreams and aspirations of all Albertans.

This summary provides a high-level overview of the key themes identified by participants in the 10 community conversations. The summary focuses on the similarities and unique attributes of each community conversation and includes the themes identified each day and a review of the ideas for bold changes proposed by participants.

Individual community summaries are available separately and can be found online at: <http://www.inspiringeducation.alberta.ca>.

LOCATIONS AND DATES

Community	Date
Edmonton	April 29
Grande Prairie	May 6
Fort McMurray	May 13
Lethbridge	May 20
Calgary	May 23
Medicine Hat	May 27
Bonnyville	June 3
Red Deer	June 10
Calgary	June 17
Edmonton	June 20

In attendance at the 10 community conversations was a cross-section of participants from three distinct groups. One group was composed of individuals who signed up to attend; another was composed of representatives of stakeholder organizations and others who were invited to attend; and the last was composed of members of the public who were randomly selected. Participants included parents, high school students, post-secondary students and staff, teachers, school and central office administrators, members of not-for-profit and business communities, former teachers, grandparents, elected officials, and interested members of the public at large.

In addition to the 10 community conversations, there were two Government of Alberta conversations and one Alberta Education staff conversation. Approximately 1,100 people participated in all 13 events.

PROCESS

At each conversation, participants were assigned to small groups of up to six people, as well as assigned a facilitator and note-taker. During the course of the day, participants engaged in several activities and considered a range of topics and questions. These included discussion of past learning experiences; hopes, dreams and aspirations for the future; and what qualities and abilities will be required by Albertans to live successfully in 2029. The final part of the day asked participants to project forward 20 years to consider what “bold and courageous”

ideas and decisions might be required to help them realize their hopes, dreams and aspirations. They were also invited to make statements of personal commitment or resolve to support change.

The conversations were recorded and saved on computers at each table, then transferred to a “theme” table for aggregation and review. In all, 12 sets of data were generated during the day. These data sets were reviewed in preparation of this summary.

ANALYSIS PROCESS

For ease of reading, we have sorted the data collected from all 10 community conversations into common themes. We have then arranged them in decreasing order of importance. Where possible, the thematic summaries include comments from the participants at the dialogue sessions to provide illustrations of the kinds of statements we heard. Using the same approach as was used to provide live feedback at each event, we looked initially at the frequency of certain words or phrases using a “word cloud” software application (Wordle – www.wordle.net). This created a “picture” of the words that most often appeared in participant discussions. The larger a word or phrase appeared in the “Wordle,” the more frequently it was mentioned. We have provided an example of a Wordle at the beginning of the section on “Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations.”

Once the word frequency was available, we read through the notes from each session to understand what participants felt most strongly about as they discussed that topic. We then selected extracts from the notes to provide a representative sense of the comments participants made during the dialogues. Once we had the information about the frequency and a sense of the tone and passion in the participant comments, we summarized the theme in one or two paragraphs.

NOTE ON PRESENTATION

Quotes (as captured by note-takers) are presented in *blue italics*; messages written by participants are reported in *black italics*. Both kinds of comment are illustrative and generally representative of comments made by participants. They are reported essentially verbatim, with minor edits only to support ease of reading.

Past Learning Experiences

The initial responses from participants were collected in reply to a question about past learning experiences. This was intended to provide an initial basis or grounding for the subsequent data collected. There are three primary conceptual groupings that incorporate the many experiences shared in this part of the Community Conversations.

A predominant theme that emerged from the *Past Learning Experiences* exercise was learning through experience. In some conversations the “experience” meant travel or a very tangible or physical interaction with the environment. Experiencing learning in life is included in:

- Using all five senses
- Visiting or living in other places and travelling
- Experiencing the difference in others and the world around us
- Learning and working on the land or farm and/or experiencing nature
- Using one’s abilities to move, to experience life through one’s body (i.e., making things by hand)

Past learning also involves a significant social component:

- The central role of the family: parents engaging with their children and the importance of extended family
- Time with peer groups and friends
- Formal education and the significant role of school and significant adults, such as teachers or coaches
- Time with other people – relationships beyond home and school

Another key theme identified was the centrality of learning to our existence – the importance of being excited by learning, and how creating a love of learning has value in helping Albertans become lifelong learners:

- Life is all about learning
- Learning includes looking back/remembering and reflecting
- Learning is always ongoing and continues over our lifetime
- Discovering one’s passion can become one’s focal point
- There is a lot of joy in the learning process

Past learning also involves the need to be resilient and creative in overcoming challenges. The need for perseverance, hard work and flexibility to accomplish goals, as well as the willingness to take risks and step into the unknown, were also identified:

- In the course of learning, there is a need to overcome challenges and obstacles
- Learning includes risk-taking
- Formal learning should provide avenues to be creative
- Hard work is rewarding

Hopes, Dreams and Aspirations for Future Learning



A number of themes emerged in the conversations in response to a question about participants' "hopes, dreams and aspirations." Of the themes identified, the following six emerged as particularly powerful, based on participant responses.

The first three themes were clearly evident in most communities.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE, WORLD CITIZEN

This hope describes a future where all Albertans will have a global perspective. They will be able to see beyond their local area to understand the world better. Multiple skill sets will be required by students in order to become global citizens. This idea of a global classroom would provide opportunities for students to be connected and to enable online conversations with people in other parts of the world or the universe (e.g. an astronaut).

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

This hope is about giving Albertans the tools and resources to achieve what they want to achieve so they can be connected to a wide variety of possibilities. This would allow children in Alberta to go as far as they want in all aspects of their lives. There should be no limit to how much we can learn and how much we can develop skills and competencies.

LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE

This hope encompasses the offering of experiential, tactile and discovery learning where Alberta students can be truly engaged in what they are doing. It is important that learning occurs in many different environments, making it a much more enjoyable and relevant experience.

The following three themes were shared slightly less frequently, but they were still common in the discussion of participants in conversations across the province:

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABLE

Albertans need to understand how nature works, and they need to know how to care for the earth. We need to ensure our impact on earth is minimized and that our resources are sustainable and protected for our children and grandchildren.

LOVE OF LEARNING

This hope is all about education being a journey which should be enjoyable. Children need to experience the joy, triumph and pleasure in learning.

LEARN FROM THE PAST

This hope highlights the importance of assimilating new ideas, yet building on the excellence of the past.

Inspiring Messages

Participants were asked at the end of the morning session to write messages of inspiration related to learning and education. These could be addressed to anyone and were posted on the wall in the room for all participants to read. The following samples provide a sense of the variety and scope of these “I-Messages.”

Minister of Education...

I hope that we can proudly say that we continued the journey we have started. That our students are global citizens with knowledge, critical thinking skills and wisdom grounded in a deep sense of social justice and responsibility.

I hope: we can have our best people teaching; we maintain the best public education system in the world; we encourage critical thinking and lifelong learners.

My Children/À mes enfants...

J'espère que vous pouvez bénéficier d'au moins deux langues dans vos méthodes d'apprentissage d'aujourd'hui et dans vingt ans. J'aimerais aussi vous donner des ailes et de bonnes racines aux générations à venir pour vous aider au travail et à voyager à travers le monde. J'espère que l'apprentissage soit moins pénible pour chacun de vous.

I hope that you will make strong relationships with family and friends. Take time to learn from them. I hope you won't take your teachers for granted and realize that all experiences are learning experiences. I hope that you will have an unlimited access to educational resources that are free and easily attainable. I hope that you will realize your educational goals and continue learning as much as you wish to learn throughout your entire life.

My Grandchildren

When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope that you have been taught the values you need to be a member of society. I hope that you have been given the courage to follow your passions and the skills to achieve your goals. I hope that you have developed the flexibility to meet all of life's challenges.

You are children of the global village. You have endless opportunities to search, grow and become the best that you can be. Use your gifts and talents to continue the betterment of the earth, your community and your family. Be true to yourself always and honour those who have come before you. Learn from them and work with your children to continue the quest of life. Be happy. Love Grandma

Élèves de la Province de l'Alberta

Lorsque je pense à l'apprentissage dans 20 ans, j'espère que tous apprenants pourront vivre un succès à l'école en plus d'une joie d'apprendre.

Future children and future educators...

When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope children find joy in life, learning and relationships. Know that you can all be successful. Educators, please remember that your positive attitudes and behaviours will influence the joy that children will experience. Be respectful of all individuals, as together we will shape the future.

Educators/Teachers...

When I think of learning in 20 years, I hope you have the tools, resources, respect and support from society to help shape our youth into healthy, happy and productive citizens of our world!

Alberta Education

I hope that we can make space for students and teachers learning in all the domains and that we can learn to respect and measure many different kinds of learning. We need diversity in 'outcomes' as well as 'inputs'!

Qualities and Abilities



When considering the necessary qualities and abilities of an educated Albertan in 20 years, participants identified the following four key attributes or concepts:

CREATIVE AND CRITICAL THINKERS

This describes a person who has the ability to synthesize data. Albertans need to be able to evaluate and analyze multiple perspectives and theories, and they will need the ability to evaluate choices. They will also need to be engaged in problem-solving by using a balance of critical and creative thinking along with a practical knowledge and skill set. Albertans will need to be willing to think outside the box and ask the right questions, as well as know how to find the right answers.

FLEXIBLE, ADAPTABLE AND RESILIENT

Albertans will need to be adaptable and resilient in a continuously changing world. They need to be willing to embrace change and life's challenges. This will include the ability to re-invent themselves and their skill set, so adaptability is essential. An Albertan must be a lifelong learner who can adapt quickly, is optimistic and open to new ideas, and is resilient in the face of change.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Albertans will need to possess multiple ways of communicating with others, so they can be understood in a variety of environments. The need to genuinely engage with others requires the understanding of different points of view and beliefs, and the ability to share ideas and communicate with others in a way that is effective for that person and appropriate in a given cultural context. Albertans will also need to communicate in many mediums and use multiple methods to share knowledge within a global community.

The fourth quality and ability that was identified was "citizenship." What was meant by this term seemed to have a different meaning as evidenced by the responses from participants in larger communities such as Edmonton and Calgary, as compared to individuals in smaller centres in the province:

Smaller centres:

RESPONSIBLE COMMUNITY CITIZENSHIP

An engaged and responsible citizen has pride in their education and their country. They are active in the community, and they participate in society. They add value to the world by reducing their carbon footprint. They leave a positive legacy by contributing and being productive while also having time for family, friends and the community. They see and value each other's strengths and they have the desire to work together to achieve goals. They are responsible citizens and active participants in democracy.

Calgary and Edmonton:

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE AND CITIZENSHIP

Being a global citizen is important because the world is getting smaller. To be a global citizen you need to be open-minded to multiculturalism, and you need to be able to communicate with others on a global scale. It is important to be a global citizen and to compete globally. It is important to have both a global perspective and a strong value system, where individuals understand that "we" is more important than "me."

Bold and Courageous Ideas and Decisions

Every community conversation generated a large number of specific recommendations for “bold and courageous” changes to education. Overall, similar kinds of ideas were raised in each session, although the emphasis on these ideas or themes varied slightly across communities. The most frequently generated “bold and courageous” ideas and decisions suggested by participants were:

- ❖ **Take a Courageous Look at the Existing School Structure:**
 - *Change the school so it is not based on the factory model*
 - *Change the grouping of students*
 - *Change and/or eliminate grading*
 - *Change the timing and/or length of the school day and year*
 - *Create smaller class sizes*
 - *Global classrooms where thousands of students are learning the same things at the same time*
 - *Consider creating a school which is a hub for the community and wrap-around services*

- ❖ **Update and Change Curriculum and Instruction:**
 - *Develop a well-rounded curriculum which includes the arts, physical education, music, etc.*
 - *Bring more experts into the school (especially trades)*
 - *Allow for experiential learning – real life learning*
 - *Introduce more options into high school, allowing for job and career exposure*
 - *Develop more individualized and differentiated learning*
 - *Teach children how to think critically, to access information and to assess it*
 - *Students determine what they learn and the teacher facilitates*

- ❖ **Develop New Governance Structures:**
 - *More broad-based governance*
 - *More local and community governance*
 - *Effective inter-ministry collaboration (in the Alberta Government)*
 - *Increase parental and family engagement with education*
 - *Ensure students have a voice*

- ❖ **Engage the Wider Community in Education:**
 - *Bring the community into the school*
 - *Take the school out into the community*
 - *Include service-based (community volunteer) learning as part of the requirements*

- ❖ **Develop New Methods of Assessment and Evaluation**
 - *Focus on assessment for learning*
 - *Measure competencies, not knowledge*
 - *Don't teach to the test*

- ❖ **Technology**
 - *Use technology to deliver services to rural communities*
 - *Technology and learning need to be integrated everywhere*
 - *All students should have their own computers and be able to work anywhere*

- ❖ **Revise Current Teacher Preparation, Support and Professional Development:**
 - *Review certification and the role of the Alberta Teachers' Association*
 - *Review role of post-secondary education of teachers (teacher training and preparation)*
 - *Ensure effective, ongoing professional development (constant upgrading of knowledge and skills)*

- ❖ **New Ideas for Funding**
 - *Change current funding model based on Carnegie unit to an outcome-based model*
 - *Re-model funding so that there are equitable opportunities for rural and urban children*

Personal Action / Commitment Statements

At the end of the day, participants were asked to write personal action or commitment statements which were posted on a wall for all participants to read. The following samples provide a sense of the variety and scope of these “commitment statements.”

I will continue to be a voice in the education process by participating on school council and attending meetings and seminars that affect education. I will continue assisting my children with their learning beyond what they get in the classroom. I will spread the word!

Je donnerai mes opinions et mon encouragement à des rencontres formatives comme celle d'aujourd'hui. Je ferai mon possible d'être entendu dans mon domaine de travail qui vise au développement d'un futur meilleur pour nos jeunes et nos écoles, commençant chez-nous, en famille. Je communiquerai mes connaissances, ma culture, mon multiculturalisme et le bilinguisme autour de moi. Merci.

I will commit to learn and embrace the new systems that come my way. I am the youth that is being discussed; it is my responsibility to accept this effort.

I came here today frustrated with our current education system. Throughout our conversations, I became encouraged that a need for change has been recognized and may be realized. I left energized with a willingness to help facilitate a change to improve learning for Alberta's youth.

As a teacher, I can improve my teaching practices to those that empower my students to be engaged in learning. I can celebrate progression that is not measurable, yet valuable. I can contribute, to lead through example that we learn best when we learn together.

In order to move forward with Inspiring Education, I will continue to be committed to elevating the position of Aboriginal people in our communities. I am convinced that by demonstrating respect for and by making society value FNMI [First Nation, Métis and Inuit] elders and citizens, all of society will gain pride, peace and compassion. These qualities are necessary for students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and for community health and success.

I will continue to be a resource for parents, with these dreams from the future uppermost in my mind from which I will draw ideas to help them advocate for their child.

I will provide strong leadership, build effective partnerships and ensure each student's needs are met; I will be accountable, transparent, seek community input and be an advocate for children in our district and province.

I can, as a student, become an advocate for my own education. I can, as a sister to two younger siblings, support their education in my own way: by providing my experiences as knowledge and wisdom. I can, as a citizen, help to change society and preconceived ideas about education/learning, so that the “new” becomes the “norm.” So that all learning and teaching styles are recognized as great in their own right. So that no one falls through the cracks.

Continue to advocate for education in cultural competence for pre- and in-service teachers, in order to better prepare and support them for work in today's diverse classrooms.