

IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES

HISTORY OF RECENT EVENTS

[Prepared by ASBA, September 5, 2006]

1. September 2001: Alberta Education report “Removing Barriers to High School Completion”

Alberta Education released a report prepared by its System Improvement and Reporting Division entitled “Removing Barriers to High School Completion – Final Report” in September 2001.

This report was prepared to assist Alberta Education in meeting a target set in its 2000-2003 Business Plan to improve high school completion by 19 year olds from 70% to 75%.

This report was based on a literature review, data analysis, and recommendations from 22 focus groups conducted throughout the province.

Key recommendations were as follows:

- Enhancing early childhood development supports.
- Enhancing cooperative education opportunities and improving linkages between school and work.
- Tracking students – between secondary and post-secondary education.
- Identifying and supporting best practices.

2. October 2003: Alberta Commission on Learning [ACOL] Report

The Minister of Education released the report of the Alberta Commission on Learning entitled “Every child learns. Every child succeeds”. [The ACOL Report] in October 2003.

Recommendation 11 of the ACOL Report is as follows: “Develop and implement a comprehensive and province wide strategy with the goal of ensuring that 90% of students complete Grade 12 within four years of starting high school”.

A few of the key strategies suggested to achieve Recommendation 11 included:

- Early identification of students at risk of dropping out.
- Adequate personal and career counseling in every school.
- Flexible arrangements for students to complete Grade 12 and make successful transitions.
- Targeting strategies at different reasons why males and females drop out.
- Interventions in children’s early years in school so they don’t get left behind.
- Reviewing the current CTS program.
- Expanding work experience opportunities and promoting career exploration.

3. February 2, 2005: Task Force Established

On February 2, 2005, the Minister established a Task Force with broad representation from stakeholder organizations, including the ASBA.

The Task Force met several times during 2005, and received input from a variety of provincial consultation meetings including 6 Zone meetings [115 people], 6 principal meetings [50 principals], 6 at risk student meetings [41 students], 6 First Nations, Métis, Inuit meetings [60 participants], 1 meeting with recent drop outs [12 participants].

The Task Force also reviewed earlier work in the area, such as the SIR report, the ACOL report, and a new literature review completed by Dr. Karla Satchwell in December 2004.

4. November 20-22: ASBA Fall General Meeting Workshop

One of the workshops at the FGM on November 20-22 focused on Improving High School Completion. Workshop participants were provided background on the topic and an opportunity to suggest and prioritize selected strategies. ASBA prepared a report of the workshop proceedings entitled “How to improve Alberta’s high school completion rates: Insights from Alberta’s school trustees.” ASBA President Maureen Kubinec mailed a copy of the report to all school board chairs on February 17, 2006 and also sent a copy to the Minister on March 1, 2006.

The 8 highest priority strategies suggested by workshop participants and highlighted in the report were as follows:

- Additional funding to enable jurisdictions to offer early intervention.
- Additional funding to support counseling, coordination of community services and exit interviews.
- Societal pressure to reinforce the importance of education generally and specifically vs. outside jobs or leaving school early to work.
- Improving relevancy of provincial curricula and high school courses to ensure learning needs and aspirations of non-university bound students can be addressed effectively, and advocating that post-secondary institutions review and modify if necessary their entry requirements, specifically in Mathematics to fit the level actually needed for success in the area of future study.
- Financial incentive/disincentive to keep kids in school.
- Ensuring each at risk student has at least one adult in the school who knows them well and will support them in their learning.
- Cross ministry cooperation aimed at increasing high school completion.
- Curriculum and funding for schools to provide career development planning with trained counselors [not necessarily certificated teachers].

5. May 15, 2006: Release of “High School Completion Rate Task Force Report”

On May 15, 2006, the Minister released the Task Force Report that was dated November 2005. Although this report was released, and task force members were thanked for their participation, no commitment was made to publicize the report and no explanation was provided regarding why the release of the report had been delayed for so long. Alberta Education staff have indicated that the report is not to be considered a public document.

Accompanying the release of the report, the Minister indicated an intent to conduct further regional roundtables and to hold a symposium to develop a provincial strategy.

The report contained 25 recommendations in the following 5 key areas: Success For All Students; Classroom and School Climate; Career Information and Planning; Providing Student Supports; Research and On-Going Student Initiatives.

Recommendations in the Task Force Report that were most related to ASBA priorities and policies included the following:

- Alberta Education improve the relevancy of provincial curricula and sequencing of high school courses to ensure the learning needs, aspirations and interests of non-university bound students can be addressed effectively in school programs, and encourage post-secondary institutions to review and modify, if necessary, their entry requirements in Mathematics in particular to fit the level actually needed for success in the area of further study.
- AE work together with stakeholders to identify and address all the constraints that restrict program offering and flexibility, including but not limited to the elements of the CEU funding model.
- AE working with school jurisdictions review Outreach policy and effectiveness of the program in improving high school completion rates, the identification of any barriers in program funding and delivery, and the identification of opportunities for sharing promising practices.
- AE provide additional funding to enable jurisdictions to offer early intervention programs for at risk pre-school students as appropriate to their contextual needs.
- AE work with stakeholders to research the learning, social and emotional needs of ESL students, especially those with low literacy levels in their first language, and review funding and program flexibility to ensure school jurisdictions are able to address those needs.
- AE support school authorities in ensuring that at risk students have at least one adult in the school who knows them well and will support them in their learning.
- AE ensure that curriculum and funding are available for schools to work with students to come to know themselves and engage in meaningful and timely career development planning with staff which may include trained career counselors, and work with other government departments to expand the range of credentialed occupations.

- The Minister of Education work with the Minister of Advanced Education to ensure entry requirements for apprenticeship programs are clearly articulated with high school programs, especially programs such as those comprised primarily of Knowledge and Employability courses.
- AE provide jurisdictions with non-enveloped, upfront financial support in addition to CEU funding to assist in addressing the needs of at risk secondary students for the 2006/2007 school year.
- AE ensure that there is additional funding to support guidance counseling services and to coordinate the delivery of multi-agency and school based services including exit interviews of students leaving school.
- The Government of Alberta investigate the potential impacts of increasing high school completion through amending the School Act to reflect that students attend high school until they complete high school or reach the age of 18.

6. June 27, 2006: Press Release re Further Consultation and Symposium

On June 27, 2006, AE issued a press release indicating that a further 19 regional consultation sessions had been held in May and June of 2006. The release also announced that a provincial symposium would be held in Edmonton on September 24-25.