

Preparing for the Future

A Summary of Challenges and Solutions

Learning Outcomes

Issue

Albertans must have a clear understanding of what they can expect of Alberta's public education system.

Students currently do not have equitable access to quality public education.

Recommendation

We recommend that the statement of outcomes and expectations for the public education system include the following:

Alberta's public education system will be successful and strong if all students

- learn to learn
- learn to be self-sufficient in work and in life
- learn to be good citizens in a democratic society
- fulfill their intellectual, social, physical, emotional and spiritual potential

The unique learning needs and outcomes of Alberta's Aboriginal communities and the Constitutional rights of the province's Protestant, Catholic and francophone minorities to develop learning outcomes and delivery approaches that support the particular needs of their students is recognized.

We recommend that Alberta Learning appropriately fund a basic, core level of education to give all students in Alberta access to quality public education. The government must fund what it prescribes.

Issue

Curricula must change with advances in knowledge and technology.

The ASBA believes that discussion and dialogue will lead to the development of current and relevant curricula. We welcome the opportunity to give input based on our understanding of the communities that school boards serve.

We believe the current screening mechanisms of Alberta's universities create artificial barriers that impede success for students.

There has not been a formal evaluation of Career and Technology Studies courses. Are they working for students? Is the program meeting its objectives? Is the program making a difference for students, is this money well spent, and are improvements needed?

Recommendation

The ASBA must continue to have a voice in the curriculum development process, especially when province-wide learning outcomes are being discussed.

We recommend actions be taken to ensure post-secondary entrance requirements are not arbitrary screening mechanisms, but rather define background learning essential for success in that post-secondary program.

It is time to conduct an independent study of the actual impact of CTS on students, schools, school districts, teachers, post-secondary institutions, business and industry.

Issue

The ASBA believes that a strong, vibrant education system is enriched when school boards have the opportunity to adopt unique program delivery and pedagogical approaches to meet local needs.

We believe that, within the mandate set out by the government, local school boards have a key role to play in shaping program delivery.

Alberta's public education system must do a better job of responding to the individual needs of students. The public education system must also recognize students' strengths, weaknesses, talents and interests.

Recommendation

Everybody has a role to play in the development and delivery of curriculum. We recommend the following role assignments:

- The province should determine curriculum outcomes and standards, and leave decisions about curriculum delivery to school boards.
- Statements of philosophy and rationale in provincial programs of study should provide *context* for the outcomes that follow, and not be prescriptive.
- The instructional resources authorized by the Minister of Learning should be adequately varied in their underlying methodological approaches to support local choices.
- The province should develop, identify and recommend teaching resources that provide ideas regarding the implementation and delivery of curriculum. These should be suggestions—not prescriptive.

We recommend the development of alternative course sequences at the high school level.

We recommend that the government give school boards the authority to establish local policy regarding the criteria for entry into senior high school core course sequences.

Issue

We believe Albertans must have some means for measuring the success of the system they fund. We want to give all students access to flexible and fair examination timetables and requirements.

Currently, students who choose to attend a “program of choice” offered in a jurisdiction school, other than their neighborhood school, are responsible for their transportation costs. Conversely, students who opt to attend a charter school have their transportation costs covered.

Recommendation

We recommend that

- examination timetables be designed to support flexible school and student timetables
- student assessment be related to what the students are studying
- students be allowed to write Provincial Achievement Tests in the same year that they study the curriculum being tested

Students in the public education system should have the right to enroll in “programs of choice” offered by their own school. The transportation costs associated with a student exercising this right should be covered by the government.

Public Education for a Changing Society

Issue

We believe that, as part of the global community, we must give Alberta students a sense of the world around them. Recognizing the educational and economic value of international education, school boards believe we must explore the opportunities and challenges this presents to the public education system.

It is difficult to keep small schools viable. School boards face the following challenges in this area: attracting specialist teachers to rural areas and offering expanded program opportunities to students attending rural and small inner city schools.

We must take preventative measures to ensure at-risk students are given a fair chance to succeed in school.

More students attending our schools come from different countries. Language and cultural issues pose special challenges.

Recommendation

We recommend that Alberta Learning, in consultation with school boards, review the legislative framework guiding the provision of international education services at home and abroad.

Small schools play a central role in rural communities and inner cities. The implications of closing such schools must be carefully considered. When small schools are needed “by necessity”, we recommend the government provide the special funding to keep these schools open.

Early intervention programs that have been proven to be successful should be implemented across the province. Full-day kindergarten, half-day kindergarten for three and four year olds and early reading intervention are examples of successful programs that should be considered.

We recommend Alberta Learning review funding for English as a Second Language programs and provide funding for ESL Kindergarten services and for the assessment and placement of students who need ESL services.

Issue

We recognize that the foundation for students' educational success is built before children start school. We also know that once students are in school, supports beyond the classroom walls and in the community are key to their continued achievement. When faced with a child in need, the key question to ask is: "Where do the responsibilities of social services agencies end and the responsibilities of the education system begin and end?" We must give our children and students access to seamless supports as they make their way through to adulthood.

As a result of mandate creep, schools are taking on the following roles to meet student needs: providing medical, occupational and physical therapy services and hot lunch programs. Increasingly, communities expect schools to provide non-educational services to students. Education dollars are being stretched.

Recommendation

We recommend that school boards, Child and Family Services Authorities, Health Authorities, Alberta Justice and Children's Mental Health Agencies work together to coordinate the delivery of services to children. Better models need to be developed, and clear authority and accountability must be defined.

We recommend that services for children be provided in a holistic way that recognizes the totality of the child and serves the needs of mind, body and spirit.

We recommend that the government provide adequate long-term funding for all children's services, including early intervention, nutrition and anger management programs, English as a Second Language, support for parents in need, programs for students with special needs, programs for Aboriginal students, and programs which will help teachers deal with cultural diversity, individual learning styles and other challenges in their classrooms.

Governance

Issue

Through locally elected school boards, Albertans have the opportunity to shape the public education system to meet local conditions. We believe legislative impediments to a local school board's ability to respond to community wishes must be eliminated. Current legislation gives school boards the authority to take action only on those issues that are implicitly or expressly sanctioned by the School Act. Other public bodies, including municipalities, regional health authorities and children's services boards have broader powers to pursue their objectives.

A host of regulations impede school boards' authority to manage staff and resources. For example, currently the Minister of Learning must approve the appointment of the superintendent. Clearly articulating the roles and responsibilities of the various players in the learning partnership is essential. School boards must have the authority to manage their staff and their resources in order for them to be effective.

Recommendation

We recommend that the legislation be changed to give school boards greater flexibility to make local decisions. We recommend amending the School Act to grant school boards *natural persons power*. This would give them the authority to undertake any initiative unless it was expressly prohibited by the School Act. This would give school boards more autonomy to act and the same decision-making authority as municipalities. *Natural person powers* were included in Alberta's Municipal Government Act in 1994.

The provisions of the School Act that require the Minister of Learning to approve the appointment of a superintendent should be removed.

Taxation

Issue

The ASBA supports funding equity for school boards; however, we are concerned that when school boards totally lost the ability to tax their local community; they lost a significant accountability link to their communities. School boards' ability to respond to unique local priorities was also severely curtailed. We believe school boards must have a real mechanism to raise funds from their ratepayers to address local priorities. We believe school boards must be directly accountable to those same taxpayers at election time.

Recommendation

We recommend changing the Special School Tax Levy provision as follows:

- Allow school boards to authorize a special levy, by board motion, of up to 3% annually.
- Eliminate the requirement for a plebiscite.
- Require that school boards hold public hearings before approving special levies.
- Prohibit provincial clawbacks of locally raised funds.
- Retain the requirements for school boards to provide a rationale for a Special School Tax Levy.

We recommend that this change be reviewed in five years to ensure that it has

- enhanced the responsiveness of school boards to meet local needs
- improved public accountability
- had no negative effect on equity among boards

Roles of Teachers and Their Association

Issue

We believe school boards must have the ability and authority to allocate and manage all jurisdiction resources in the best interests of the students they serve. In this context, issues like class size or pupil-teacher ratio should be addressed by school boards, as elected representatives of their communities, through board policies and practices.

While the role of the teacher is defined in current legislation, different aspects of this role are dealt with in a variety of different documents, and some traditionally accepted teaching roles are not mandated in current legislation.

Recommendation

We recommend changes to legislation which will restrict collective bargaining to: salaries, special allowances, sick leave and other benefits.

The following issues should not be subject to local collective bargaining:

- role specifications of supervisory personnel
- provision of support services
- provision of classroom facilities
- classroom load
- issues relating to organization and management of the workplace.

The ASBA:

- affirms that school boards value teachers and recognize the important role teachers play in achieving excellence in public education, and believes that it is important to compile the requirements for teachers in one place

Accordingly, the ASBA recommends amending the description of the role of the teacher in section 18 of the School Act in order to

- provide a comprehensive description of the broad professional role Alberta teachers have historically held
- codify teachers' professional obligations, including extra-curricular activities, curriculum development activities, marking of examinations, working cooperatively with other members of the school community, attending meetings and serving as cooperating teachers.

Issue

Under current legislation, if a school board and the ATA cannot agree with regard to whether or not a member of the management staff should be excluded from the scope of the collective agreement, that position cannot be excluded. This becomes problematic because school boards rely on management staff to carry out management responsibilities, for assistance during the collective bargaining process and in matters of staff discipline. Necessary management roles are curtailed in these circumstances.

We believe school boards must have the right to hire, manage, discipline, and terminate staff. Currently, the process for addressing discipline and termination matters –the Board of Reference– is time-consuming, costly and frustrating for boards, and may put students at risk.

Currently, the provincial ATA can overturn a locally negotiated collective agreement. This can make it very challenging to bargain locally. We believe local school boards and their corresponding teacher locals must have the right to conclude, ratify and sign local agreements.

Recommendation

We recommend removing or amending Section 96(2) of the School Act to allow school boards to seek recourse from the Labour Relations Board when the school board and the ATA cannot come to agreement with regard to excluded employees.

We recommend reviewing current legislation regarding the discipline and termination of teachers. This review may result in amending or removing the Board of Reference process.

We recommend giving school boards a broader range of disciplinary measures, including the ability to suspend a teacher without pay.

We recommend amending existing legislation to facilitate local collective bargaining, including establishing the right of teacher locals to conclude, ratify and sign local agreements.

Issue

When an ATA member is guilty of misconduct, the school board's only recourse is to the Alberta Teachers' Association; however, the Teaching Profession Act precludes the ATA from taking action on any misconduct related to collective bargaining. In this context, the ATA cannot be expected to fairly hear charges of misconduct laid against their members as part of bargaining actions.

During the collective bargaining process, school board officials and representatives have been subjected to offensive and unacceptable comment and conduct, including interference with the employers' administrative and decision-making processes.

The ATA is charged with disciplining its members for professional misconduct, yet the association is precluded from disciplining a teacher for misconduct related to collective bargaining..

The operation and administration of the professional component of teaching is not always compatible with the union role associated with the welfare of teachers. Presently, both functions rest with the Alberta Teachers' Association. ASBA policy reflects our belief that the union function of the ATA should be separate from the professional function.

Recommendation

We recommend the creation of legislation which will provide for remedies for misconduct related to collective bargaining disputes.

We recommend that current labour legislation be amended to ensure that dispute-related misconduct can be dealt with by the Labour Relations Board upon application.

We recommend that the government, in consultation with school boards and the ATA, review the structure of the ATA in order to create a made-in-Alberta solution to this issue.

Issue

Currently a number of certificated personnel are excluded from the ATA collective agreement, yet they are compelled by legislation to pay dues to the ATA. As excluded personnel, the belief is that membership in the ATA should be a personal choice. For some, as excluded personnel, a greater comfort exists in the performance of their duties and responsibilities; for others, few benefits are realized in exchange for the dues paid.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Teaching Profession Act be amended so that membership in the ATA becomes optional for certificated personnel who do not fall under the collective agreement.

Investing in the Future

Issue

Albertans have high expectations of our education system. The needs of the students we serve are evolving, and the role of education in our society is changing. Current funding levels are insufficient to provide Albertans with the public education system they expect and deserve.

Key pressure points are:

- salary increases awarded by the provincial arbitration process in the 14% range have created pressures for similar increases for other staff
- addressing the needs of special needs students where funding has not kept pace with the costs associated with providing these services
- operations and maintenance of school facilities, which is part of prudent fiscal management, should not be considered a luxury
- technology costs are currently being funded by diverting resources from other important classroom priorities

Recommendation

We recommend that the government increase funding for public education by \$400 million. These extra dollars will enable school boards to sustain our excellent public education system and provide a springboard for continued leading edge programs for the students we serve.

We recommend that the government invest an additional \$15.9 million per year to meet the needs of severely disabled students and an additional \$114.5 million per year to meet the needs of students with mild and moderate disabilities. We recommend that the government invest appropriate funding to meet the needs of gifted students who require enrichment programs.

We believe that the government should invest \$78.5 million into technology so schools can fully benefit from the SuperNet and other information and communication technology.

We recommend increasing funding to operate and maintain schools by \$60 million per year. Additionally, school boards should be reimbursed for the costs of leasing facilities required for successful outreach programs.

We believe that the government should increase funding by \$142.4 million to bridge the gap between the 14% salary increase imposed by the arbitrator and the 6% increase in funding provided for teachers' salaries.

Issue

The volatility of provincial revenues and legislative constraints on deficit financing pose significant challenges for school boards. School boards must have access to stable, long-term, predictable funding, which must also be flexible to address local needs of boards. Funding should also consider the profile of students and the special needs in each jurisdiction.

Investing in infrastructure only when the province has a revenue surplus creates a scenario where all sectors- health, education and municipalities- get money for new buildings at the same time. As a result, they end up competing for the same trades and resources concurrently, thereby driving up construction costs.

Our experience with AISI demonstrates there is a place for research-based innovation in education. The Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research has yielded great benefits over the years. We believe a similar education-focused fund would ensure that the innovative spirit of AISI is built into our learning system on a continual basis.

Recommendation

We support in principle the creation of a revenue stabilization fund, and we urge the government to make the legislative and accounting practice changes to support such an endeavor.

We recommend that the government establish the “Alberta Learning Innovation Fund” to foster innovation in the K–12 sector.