

Setting the Direction Framework

June 2009

SETTING THE
DIRECTION
MINISTER'S FORUM



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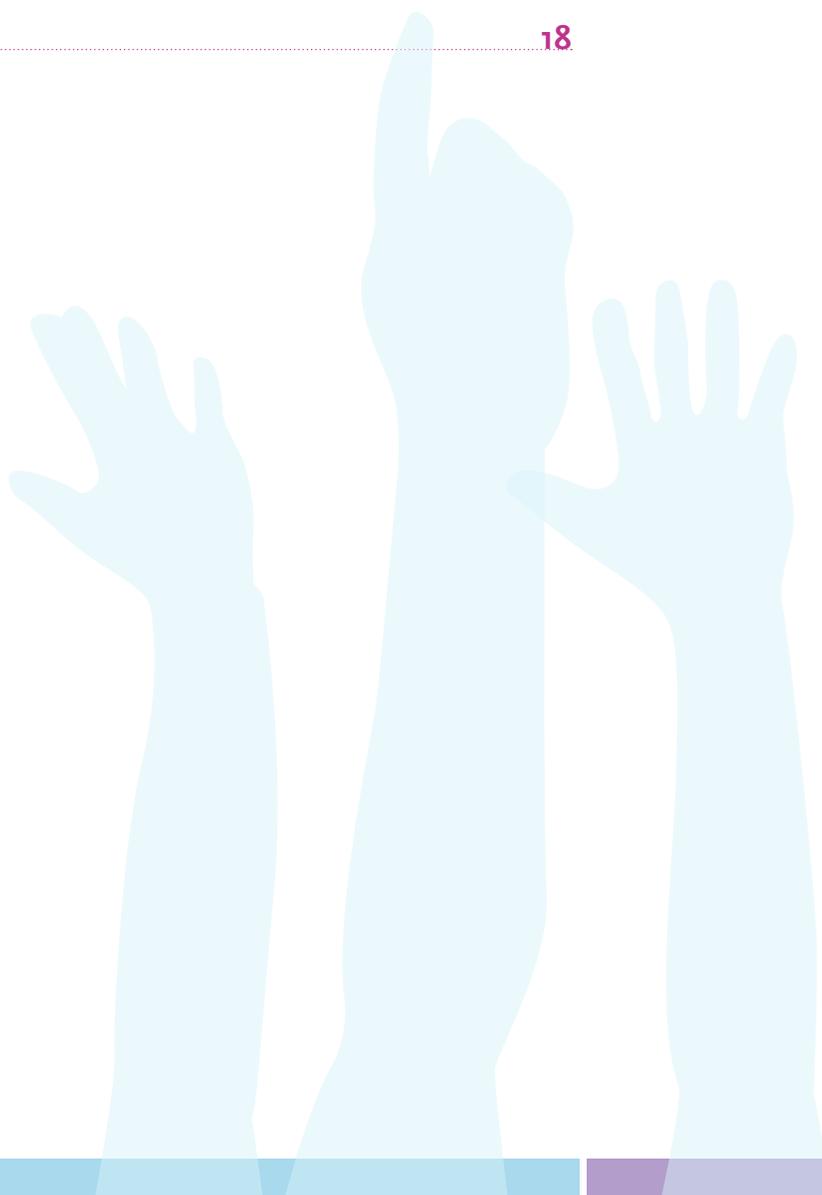
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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The Steering Committee for *Setting The Direction*, having conducted two rounds of consultation with Albertans, reviewed the literature on approaches to meeting the special education needs of students and consulted with experts in the field, is proud to recommend the following framework as an approach to reforming the provision of services and supports to Alberta students with special education needs.

The Steering Committee is grateful to the Stakeholder Working Group for its valuable input and advice; to the Advisory Committee within the Government of Alberta for its insight; to the Setting the Direction Project Team for its stewardship of the initiative and most significantly and importantly to the many thousand Albertans who gave their time, energy and wisdom to this process. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. Bhardwaj". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Naresh Bhardwaj (Chair) – MLA, Edmonton-Ellerslie



INTRODUCTION

Alberta has a long and proud history of meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities and diverse needs. The province serves many thousand students with behavioural, communicational and intellectual needs; as well as students with mental health challenges, learning or physical disabilities and students who are gifted and talented. Over the years, the system has been focused on finding the best ways to support students with special learning needs, and has also been committed to continuous improvement and self-examination to determine where Alberta Education's strengths and areas for improvement lie.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, the *Setting the Direction* initiative grew out of a severe disabilities funding profile review in the Fall of 2007, which uncovered province-wide inconsistencies in the ways that students with disabilities are coded, assessed, and provided the required supports and services; the way policy is being interpreted and the ways in which students' administrative files are managed. That work provided an important snapshot of some of the obstacles to effective program management and programming for students with disabilities.

Rather than simply "fix" the problems, Alberta Education took the bold step of taking a comprehensive look at how the special education system in Alberta works. The Minister of Education appointed a citizens' Steering Committee, chaired by MLA Naresh Bhardwaj and made up of parents, educators and special education and medical experts, who undertook a process of consultation with Albertans about setting a direction for special education in Alberta -- a direction that intends to serve the students of the province well, and at the same time, be an example of innovation in the provision of services and supports to students with special education needs. The consultation process undertaken in *Setting the Direction* connected the Steering Committee with over six thousand Albertans – either online or in person at one of forty consultation sessions. Participants included, but were not limited to, students, parents, teachers, teacher assistants, principals, elders, school authority administrators, trustees, medical professionals and special education specialists. It was through a combination of consultation, research, literature review, work with experts in the field, along with ongoing conversations about issues that the Steering Committee determined what was needed in Alberta in order to serve students with disabilities and their families effectively and with respect. The insights provided by Wayne MacKay (Professor of Law, Dalhousie Law School), Sharon Friesen (President, Galileo Educational Network; Associate Professor, Educational Leadership, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary), Shirley McBride (Senior Researcher, McBride Management Ltd.) and Tom Parrish (Managing Research Scientist, American Institutes for Research) were invaluable in shaping the Steering Committee's recommendations. This document contains recommendations to government for changes in approach and implementation of services to students with disabilities and diverse needs.



While the work of the Steering Committee began as an examination of special education – with a focus on students with disabilities, what has become clear throughout the journey, and the conversations with Albertans, is that Alberta’s student population is increasingly diverse and so the need to address different learning needs in schools will only increase. The adage that “all children are special” was reiterated often in the consultations, further reinforcing the value of systemic change that will de-emphasize the difference between students and build a system based on the value of all learners in schools. Hence, the name of this framework is “*Setting the Direction*” rather than “*Setting the Direction for Special Education*”. As the Steering Committee listened to Albertans, they heard that the phrase “special education” reinforces difference and doesn’t promote an inclusive approach. While this framework considers recommendations for changes to how students with disabilities or who are gifted and talented will be served in Alberta, as was laid out in the Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee, it also acknowledges that for the education system to be as responsive as possible to the diverse learning needs of **all** students, “difference” will need to be de-emphasized throughout the education system. As the Alberta education system improves its ability to serve students with disabilities, it becomes more adept at meeting the needs of a range of diverse students.

The Steering Committee heard through the input of Albertans that special education has become a “place” rather than the provision of appropriate supports, services and strategies to meet the educational needs of students. Albertans expressed a strong desire for the re-connection of what has, inadvertently, become two systems – mainstream education or the “typical classroom” and “special education” – often the place where services and supports are offered. This framework aims to address this issue by recommending a strategic direction that will support one system where **all** partners and stakeholders (not just those with a special education specialization) take responsibility for the education of students with disabilities and diverse needs. This idea of mutual responsibility across the education system for meeting the needs of all students, including those with disabilities, is central to the Steering Committee’s recommendations in this framework.

There have been significant strides made in Alberta to ensure that all students are meaningfully included in school life, and the practice of integrating students into typical learning environments is prevalent. However, participants in the consultation process said that a truly inclusive system is value-based and fundamentally believes in the benefit that all students experience when the needs of those with disabilities are met. Inclusive education, we learned, acknowledges the importance of where a student is placed to learn, and also goes beyond this classroom placement consideration to the philosophical belief that **all** students belong and must be made to feel valued, welcomed and respected members of the education system and society.

In Alberta, the rights of individuals with disabilities, including students, are protected and set out in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and in the *Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*. But Albertans have told the Steering Committee that having apparently distinct education systems can marginalize students with disabilities and gets in the way of a holistic approach to education that will benefit all students. There is strong support for a single education system in which all learning environments effectively support diverse learners.

There are some legal limits on the process of educational change but the proposed redesign of the system described in this framework falls within existing legal parameters. Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees equality to all, including those with disabilities. This constitutional mandate applies to all public, separate, private and Francophone schools. These same rights of equality for people with disabilities are guaranteed in the *Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*, and that statute applies to all schools - be they public or private. Thus educational services must be provided to all students in a way that does not discriminate against persons with disabilities.



Given the wide range of school authorities in Alberta and the high value placed on educational choice, Alberta must develop a system that supports choice for everyone. Thus the single inclusive system approach to education should be embraced in **all** Alberta schools, including charter and private schools. The proposed single inclusive education system is also consistent with the statutorily sanctioned value of diversity, currently stated in the *Alberta School Act*. This redesign of the educational system is the logical extension of both the letter and the spirit of the Canadian Constitution and the laws of Alberta.

A VISIONARY DIRECTION

Participants in *Setting the Direction* have been clear that minor improvements to the education system will not constitute the kind of far-reaching systemic change that is required. This new framework aims to respond to the clear advice of stakeholders and partners, which was: to recognize and respond to disability and diversity *within* our education system by ensuring that educators, schools, and school authorities have the support they need to develop and deliver an inclusive education system.

The desired end point of this work is that the needs of all students will be met within an inclusive education system, rather than through a separate system of “special education”. Such an approach would be an example of the very best of inclusive societies: welcoming, respectful of difference, collaborative and compassionate. The Steering Committee’s consultation sessions with the First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities were a reminder that in aboriginal culture and in many Aboriginal languages there is no word for inclusion, because the notion of not being inclusive does not exist in Aboriginal culture. This framework may be an example of innovation and progress being rooted in ancient wisdoms. This Steering Committee’s commitment to inclusivity and recommendations for how to proceed could be interpreted as a return to the welcoming, non-judgmental ways of First Peoples.

VISION, MISSION, PRINCIPLES

What follows are the Vision, Mission and Principles that are the foundation of the *Setting the Direction* framework:

Vision

One inclusive education system* where each student is successful.

*Inclusive education system: a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice.

Mission

To work with all education system partners and stakeholders to build an inclusive education system, which is based on integrity, best practices, and respect for difference.

Principles

Alberta Education and its partners and stakeholders **believe**:

- that all students can learn and be successful
- that when stakeholders work together in a collaborative and purposeful way, more is accomplished for students.



Alberta Education and its partners and stakeholders **value**:

- an education system that is fair, appropriately resourced, highly accountable and provides equitable opportunities for all students
- parents as vital members of the learning team who contribute important expertise and insights
- diversity as a positive and enriching aspect of Alberta's education system
- the learning that happens for everyone when students with disabilities are effectively included in school life.

Alberta Education and its partners and stakeholders **commit** to:

- working together for the success of each student in an inclusive education system
- ensuring students and families are welcomed, respected and supported so they can be successful
- ensuring teachers and school systems are supported so they can be successful
- being learner-centred in all decisions.

DELIVERING ON THE VISION

The proposed cultural shift represented by this framework needs to be supported by legislation, policy and administrative requirements within the Alberta education system. In addition, the strategic direction described in the framework is supported and upheld by an accountability mechanism and a funding model that supports outcomes that are in line with the strategy. Research is clear that systems fund and measure that which they value. Building from the value base described in the strategic elements above, the desired cultural shift in Alberta's education system will be centred on three goal areas: **Curriculum, Capacity, Collaboration**.

How did the Steering Committee get to these three priority areas? The process was as follows.

Phase 1 of the consultation was an opportunity for participants to tell us what kind of system they want to build in Alberta – essentially their hopes and dreams for the best kind of special education system. This resulted in the development of draft vision, mission and principle statements that were “tested” in Phase 2. In addition, Phase 1 invited participants to tell us about the issues and challenges they faced in the education system and asked them for advice on what would build a better system. These conversations (in person and online) yielded the insight that became Five Building Blocks of Change and thirty “possibilities” for further discussion in Phase 2.

In Phase 2, the Vision, Mission and Principles, were endorsed with minor changes by participants, and the definition of inclusive education was further refined. The feedback on the Building Blocks made it clear that the three most important elements that will facilitate this cultural shift are:

- Curriculum modification -- a willingness to offer adapted learning and evaluation opportunities.
- Capacity building -- an emphasis on ensuring that educators are supported to have the knowledge, skills and attributes to respond to students with disabilities and diverse needs in an inclusive and effective way.
- Collaborative approaches – a system-wide acknowledgement of the importance of cross-ministry cooperation in order to serve students and families as one Government of Alberta.

These three goal areas -- Curriculum, Capacity and Collaboration anchor the development of one inclusive education system.



As the thirty possibilities were weighed and evaluated in Phase 2, participants found that there was overlap between some, and also advised that some key actions would, in turn, prompt further activities. Thus, the thirty possibilities have been condensed to ten key programming recommendations. The Steering Committee believes these recommendations will drive positive change and move the system to become more inclusive. The three goal statements driving the ten programming recommendations (detailed in the Recommendations for Action pages) are as follows:

GOAL ONE: CURRICULUM

Alberta Education's definition of students' educational success encompasses achievement and progress for every student, so that each may have the opportunity to "...achieve success and fulfillment as citizens in a changing world". (*Alberta Education Business Plan 2009-2012*)

GOAL TWO: CAPACITY

The education system is equipped, resourced and ready to support and respond to the needs of all students in an inclusive way.

GOAL THREE: COLLABORATION

A collaborative process to support children, students, communities, schools and families is evident across Government of Alberta Ministries.

CHALLENGES

The major challenge that the changes proposed by this Framework faces is the history and culture of special education in North America and in Alberta in which many students with disabilities were removed from general education classrooms. This was done to provide appropriate schooling for those students, but created a problematic separateness.

There are a number of associated challenges that were flagged during the consultations and are referenced in the literature. (These ideas are explored more fully in the *What We Heard* document and the *Setting the Direction* literature review.) These challenges are:

- the use of a medical model to diagnose disabilities, translate these disabilities into codes, label students by their codes and allocate funding and other resources based on the codes.
- the specialization of special education, which risks undermining the valuable contributions of parents and classroom teachers.
- narrowly defined or understood curriculum and achievement measures which are not designed to support students who learn differently or at a different pace.
- disparate views of funding. When there is designated special education funding (at times based on individually identified students) there is the belief that only coded students can receive funding for resources, supports, services and accommodations, and then only to the limits of the designated funding. When funding is not specifically designated for special education, there is the belief that necessary resources are being withheld.
- local decision-making, which results in inconsistencies across the province in implementation of policies and procedures, and in the provision of services and supports.

These challenges will need to be navigated as changes are implemented.

Given the comprehensive nature of this consultation's feedback from Albertans, the Steering Committee is committed to connecting the *Setting the Direction* work to the other system reform projects that are underway. As *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans* continues to articulate Albertans' vision for education in 2020 and beyond, the vision and principles of *Setting the Direction* will need to be incorporated into Alberta Education's overarching system reform ambitions.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION:

The Steering Committee recommends the development of policy, accountability and funding mechanisms that are supported through comprehensive legislation that will enable one inclusive education system through curriculum, capacity and collaboration.

PRIORITY AREA: CURRICULUM

(Curriculum means: programs of study, learning and teaching resources, instructional strategies and assessments)

GOAL:

Alberta Education's definition of students' educational success encompasses achievement and progress for every student, so that each may have the opportunity to "...achieve success and fulfillment as citizens in changing world". (Alberta Education Business Plan 2009-2012)

PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create provincial tools and models for interpreting the current programs of study so that all students have opportunities for learning and growth based on their strengths.

Consider the following actions to meet the recommendation:

- Develop and support a modified curriculum and learning resources for students with highly specialized learning needs.
- Create ways in which students with disabilities, or who are gifted and talented, can access the curriculum and demonstrate their knowledge.

2. Gather information at the Ministerial, jurisdictional, school and classroom levels to support all students.

Consider the following actions to meet the recommendation:

- Rescind current special education coding system in lieu of a data collection approach that centres on what the student "needs", not what condition the student "has".
- Create a common, non-burdensome computerized approach to capture all Alberta students' achievement and progress potential from year to year.
- Include teacher assessment as a key tool in data gathering.
- Standardize student record keeping and record transfer protocols. (Working with the Provincial Approaches to Student Information (PASI) system changes that are underway).
- Develop provincial processes and student achievement assessment tools to measure and report the progress and growth of students who are disadvantaged by the current tools.

3. Develop accessible learning resources (print and digital) for all students.

Consider the following action to meet the recommendation:

- Create and implement provincial standards for accessible resources.



PRIORITY AREA: CAPACITY

GOAL:

The education system is equipped, resourced and ready to support and respond to the needs of all students in an inclusive way.

PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Develop practices that demonstrate that parents are respected as important members of the Learning Team.

Consider the following actions to meet the recommendation:

- Increase capacity of school staff to collaborate with parents to determine the programming needs of their child.
- Implement the existing Learning Team practice and process comprehensively across the province in ways that are appropriate for each school level (elementary to senior high), and which make it clear to parents that they have a formal and important role as members of the Learning Team.
- Create professional development and awareness raising tools in support of the collaborative process for all members of the Learning Team, including parents.
- Develop a solution-focused provincial process to assist parents and schools in situations that require resolution, advocacy and/or mediation.

5. Implement a province-wide expectation that school-based expertise will be in place to support teachers in meeting the needs of students with disabilities and diverse needs within learning environments.

Consider the following actions to meet the recommendation:

- Explore provincial role descriptions and standards for school-based learning coaches.
- Target provincial ratios for school-based expertise on inclusion.

6. Develop a set of standards so that instructional excellence in inclusive education practices becomes the norm in all schools.

Consider the following actions to meet the recommendation:

- Monitor implementation of the Principal Quality Practice Guideline province-wide.
- Review and revise the Teacher Quality Standard, as required, to include inclusive education.
- Provide provincial professional development opportunities for teachers, teaching assistants and learning coaches to develop instructional strategies for inclusive education in schools and school authorities. Create an online professional development library.
- Work with universities to revise their pre-service training programs to incorporate inclusive education pedagogy.
- Explore beginning teacher induction programming strategies, including mentoring.
- Investigate, develop and implement practice standards for teaching assistants in conjunction with the colleges.

7. Increase access to technologies to support the learning of all students.

Consider the following actions to meet the recommendation:

- Investigate funding models for the use of educational and assistive technologies to support student needs.
- Explore synergies with existing technology initiatives to develop technology-driven supports for students, e.g., the telehealth model.



PRIORITY AREA: COLLABORATION

GOAL:

A collaborative process to support children, students, communities, schools and families is evident across Government of Alberta Ministries.

PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Develop a provincial service delivery model for specialized supports and services to address the needs of students in the context of their schools, family and community in a timely and culturally sensitive way.

Consider the following action to meet the recommendation:

- Develop a mandated collaboration model that acknowledges the role of the school-based learning team and draws on services across Ministries to support students at school and as they transition into post-secondary schools or the world of work. This model must take into account the unique needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and the jurisdictional complexities of offering services on and off reserve. The model should also take existing regional services (including regional service centres) and budgets into account as part of the re-configuration of collaborative services.

9. Develop and support a seamless, Alberta-wide wraparound approach that provides timely access to co-ordinated supports to students, families and schools in the right place at the right time.

Consider the following action to meet the recommendation:

- Develop and implement standards and protocols for a wraparound approach.

10. Develop and implement a model of support for young children who experience at-risk factors that enables programming and support in the most natural pre-school environment along with a seamless transition into grade one.

Consider the following actions to meet the recommendation:

- Investigate an approach to early learning that provides opportunity for children to begin their early learning experiences in an inclusive setting.
- Develop programming and support that includes community, family and collaborative partnerships.
- Investigate the potential of universal screening for all Alberta children.

FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Finance and accountability are integral components of the overall design for the *Setting the Direction* initiative depicted in the Framework Summary diagram accompanying this narrative (Appendix 1). The accountability provisions embody all of the components of the full diagram. In addition to the arrows indicating the conceptual flow of this design from top to bottom is the central idea of ongoing feedback and reassessment. Accountability within this system is ongoing and is based on the results of each year's implementation. The degrees to which initiative objectives have been met are examined each year through the use of the outcome data as a basis for possibly recalibrating the initiative design. Annual consideration is given to whether the initiative's goals, as well as the resource allocation and program strategy components continue to be realistic and appropriate. The overarching *Setting the Direction* framework is designed for ongoing review and reappraisal based on the concept of continuous improvement.



The funding and accountability design starts with clearly specified program goals. These are followed by delineated guidelines of the resources necessary to achieve these outcomes as determined through professional judgment. For example, what range of teachers, therapists, instructional aides, professional development, and specialized equipment are deemed necessary within some specified ratio, for example per 100 students. These resource guidelines are specified to support the strategies designed to meet program goals as listed in the first column of the framework. Applying standardized compensation provides the basis for the amount to be distributed province-wide to meet student special needs. These funds would be used to fully include and educate all students, including those with disabilities, in the education community.

The central column containing the accountability provisions is primarily based on the system indicators of success. Data for these indicators, which are designed to show progress on program goals, are collected regularly for individual students. Results from these data collection efforts would be reported by school, school authority, and also province-wide, for students overall and by select sub-populations. The third column contains the finance provisions associated with the model. The most important feature of the finance component is that it be consistent with, and support, the program goals for the initiative. It is essential that finance provisions not be specified in a vacuum or separate from the overall objectives that they are intended to support, as the design of fiscal provisions will affect how programs are ultimately provided. Consistent with the initiative goals for a single unified and inclusive system for all students, the total amount of special needs funding, as determined through the resource guidelines, is allocated to districts based on their overall enrollment and in consideration of factors associated with geographic banding by school authority size and population to determine equitable resource allocations.

In order to provide an added layer of protection against unusually high costs that may arise through the provision of specialized services, a province-wide cost pool would be established to which local school authorities could apply in cases of extraordinary need.

The last component of the overall framework is identifying best practices from highly successful schools which are practicing effective inclusivity, as well as focusing on what forms of additional support may be needed for struggling schools. These are key elements of the continuous improvement cycle. Based on the performance criteria specified above, it will be important to identify which school authorities are showing especially strong indicators of success overall as compared to similar schools across the province. What might be learned from their success to improve all of the schools in the system? For schools demonstrating much lower than expected results, what additional support or assistance may be needed to produce improved outcomes in the future?

In addition, the concept of generating knowledge about the practices employed by schools producing the strongest results for students and assessing what is needed to shore up schools where students are struggling emphasizes the value of shared responsibility. These measures are focused on system-wide improvement and quality control. They are based on the premise that when a selected population of students is not experiencing success in school, this is a reflection on the school, and, similarly, if a school is experiencing difficulties this clearly falls under the responsibility of the local school authority, and challenges anywhere in the system are province-wide concerns.



SUPPORTING CHANGE

Everyone working on *Setting the Direction*, including the thousands of Albertans who chose to participate in the consultation, recognize that building a better approach to education represents a massive cultural shift that will not be simple or quick to accomplish. The Steering Committee was moved, however, by the extraordinary enthusiasm and optimism that was expressed by participants. Those participants told the Steering Committee that the cultural shift away from “special education” and towards an inclusive education system is the right thing to do, is honourable and ethical, moves Alberta closer to being a truly inclusive society, retains the important focus on students and families and will demonstrate important leadership by the province.

The Steering Committee recognizes that cultural shift is hallmarked by a combination of factors: changes in legislation and policy, funding mechanisms that support change, education and training, communication and clear understanding of the change. Part of the historic impediment to building an inclusive education system is that although such an approach has been recommended, and in some cases prescribed, by Alberta Education in the past, the accountability measures have not guaranteed positive inclusion across the province, nor have the funding mechanisms supported making inclusive practices commonplace. The Steering Committee learned about many excellent examples of inclusive practices across the province. Success for this project would be province-wide prevalence of these practices and an ongoing sharing of best practices so that inclusive education can become commonplace. An inclusive system that meets the diverse needs of students along a continuum of programming choices is the guiding ambition of the Steering Committee.

Should the Minister of Education adopt the recommendations of the *Setting the Direction Framework*, the Steering Committee understands the importance of Phase 4 of this initiative – the change implementation stage.

Communication of partners’ responsibilities and accountability will be key during this phase, as will Alberta Education’s demonstration of its commitment to support and shepherd the positive changes. The current examples of effective inclusive education that exist in the province represent an opportunity for learning; and in the spirit of continuous improvement, results, best practices and innovations should be shared throughout the province. Participants in the consultations were clear that all education stakeholders have much to learn from one another. In addition, participants have been clear that change without help and support is unlikely to “stick”, but that change supported by policy, accountability, funding models and assistance interpreting and implementing change will strengthen the potential for success.

Phase 4 will represent an approach to supporting change across the system in order to make the new future a reality.



CONCLUSION

Does the *Setting the Direction* strategic framework set an appropriate course for the future? The Steering Committee believes that the combination of input from Albertans, combined with the current scholarship on meeting the needs of students of all kinds in inclusive settings, along with the clear direction provided by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* points to an obvious conclusion. It is time for all stakeholders in the Alberta education system to take mutual responsibility for creating inclusive education province-wide. This means believing in and valuing all learners and going beyond classroom integration to a belief system that anchors behaviours, practices and processes that are inclusive and respectful.

The Steering Committee recognizes that cultural, structural, policy and procedural change takes time. The next steps are that the Minister of Education will provide a formal government response to the recommendations in this framework. The Committee looks forward to the Minister's feedback as to which recommendations are accepted, and enthusiastically anticipates implementation of changes by September 2010. The Steering Committee remains committed to being appropriately engaged during Phase 4 stage of this initiative – the supporting change phase.



GLOSSARY

Assessment means the ongoing process of collecting information about students using a number of formal and informal methods across a variety of domains relevant to performance (behavioural, communicational, intellectual, learning or physical characteristics) to develop and implement appropriate programming to support student learning.

Accessible means readily available to the individual or group of interest, with minimal constraints or barriers and may apply to information, knowledge, services and classroom resources.

Capacity and building capacity refers to an education system that has well-trained and supported staff who understand and address diversity in the classroom.

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more individuals or organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to: a definition of mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards.

Curriculum is a broad term that includes the Programs of Study, authorized learning and teaching resources, and provincial assessments.

Disability is used from the standpoint of the Supreme Court of Canada having established that a disability may be the result of a physical limitation, an ailment, a perceived limitation or a combination of all these factors. The focus is on the effects of the preference, exclusion or other type of differential treatment experienced by the person and not on proof of physical limitations or the presence of an ailment.

Diversity and diverse learners describes the wide range of abilities, interests, backgrounds, languages, cultures and religions reflected in Alberta's classrooms today. Diversity has become one of the defining features of Alberta's schools.

Early Childhood Services (ECS) refers to a continuum of programming that is developmentally appropriate and meets the diverse needs of young children and their families. Kindergarten refers specifically to the education program for children in the year prior to Grade 1 and is a part of the ECS continuum. In Alberta, the term "child" rather than "student" is used for learners in ECS programs.

Education means the Alberta Ministry of Education.

Education specialist means a teacher with expertise and experience in a specific field of education, such as reading instruction or teaching children with vision loss, who supports other teachers.

Educational success means students have acquired a range of skills and competencies needed to become the best they can be as adults, including interpersonal skills, academic skills, vocational competency, citizenship and health.

Framework in this document means an organized set of interrelated ideas including vision, mission and principles for policy, accountability and funding to support the future of special education in Alberta.



Health and Wellness means the Alberta Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Home Education Program means a program where a parent assumes the responsibility for the planning, the provision and the evaluation of an education program for their child in Grades 1 – 12. Home education is conducted in association with a public school board or an accredited private school.

Inclusion is the opportunity to be fully and meaningfully integrated into a typical learning environment. Inclusion also refers to an attitude of acceptance of, and belonging for, all students such that they feel valued as part of the school family.

Inclusive education system is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice.

Individualized Program Plan (IPP) means a concise plan of action designed to address students' special education needs, and is based on diagnostic information which provides the basis for intervention strategies.

Learner describes anyone who is learning; it includes students and children in ECS programs, and can include teachers, parents and others.

Learning coach means a fellow teacher with expertise in special education, acting as a mentor and facilitator, to enhance the capacity for addressing diverse learning needs in the classroom.

Learning Team means a team that consults and shares information relevant to the individual student's education and plans, implements and evaluates special education programming and services as required. The team may consist of the classroom teacher, parents, students (where appropriate), other school and jurisdiction staff aware of the students' needs, and others as required. Parents are considered vital and important members of the Learning Team.

Partners describes the array of groups of people and organizations engaged in the education system either directly including for example students, parents, teachers, principals, school boards; and indirectly including for example other government departments, businesses, nonprofit organizations that support the education system.

Paraprofessional means a trained worker who works under the supervision of a professional but does not have professional credentials; in education paraprofessionals are usually referred to as teacher assistants or educational assistants.

Pedagogy refers to the science and art of teaching and the profession of teaching.

Personalized learning focuses on the strengths of the student and addresses not just what the student needs to do but also what the system needs to do to promote better learning opportunities for each particular student. A personalized learning profile identifies learning needs and the resources and supports needed to meet them.

Principal Quality Practice Guideline refers to a set of attributes and competencies for the quality practice of Alberta principals. Link - <http://education.alberta.ca/media/949129/principal-quality-practice-guideline-english-12feb09.pdf>



Programs of Study identify what students are expected to learn and demonstrate in all subjects and grades and include both broad and specific outcomes.

Program assessments are measures to determine the degree to which students have achieved the outcomes of the Programs of Study.

Province means the Government of Alberta and in those instances where we mean Alberta Education, reference will be made specifically to Alberta Education.

Resources are things that can be used for support or assistance and can be drawn on when needed. Resources can include learning and teaching resources, human resources, and financial resources.

School administration means the school principal, assistant principal and other staff members in administrative roles.

School authority is a term that includes public and separate school jurisdictions, Francophone school authorities, charter and private schools.

Special education describes the set of policies, programs and resources that currently define the education of students with disabilities and students considered gifted and talented.

Stakeholders is used in conjunction with the term partners to provide a broader term that includes all groups and entities that have a stake in the education of Alberta's children and youth.

Student in Alberta refers to learners in grades 1 to 12.

Teaching Quality Standard refers to Ministerial Order (#016/97) Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta, which includes descriptors of skills knowledge and attributes required by teachers. Link - <http://education.alberta.ca/media/311294/421.pdf>

Wraparound approach is a philosophy of care that includes a definable planning process involving the child/student and family that results in comprehensive, coordinated supports and services to achieve improved learning outcomes and improved quality of life. Coordinated services and supports, offered through multiple professionals and agencies that are school based and/or school linked, might include health and mental health related services, mentoring, before/after school programs, and other supports and services for parents and families. "Full service schools" is another term often linked to a wraparound approach.



Steering Committee: Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta

Naresh Bhardwaj (Chair) – MLA, Edmonton-Ellerslie

Mike Bruised Head – Principal, Tatsikiisaapo’p Middle School, Kainai Board of Education

Margaret Clarke – Pediatrician, Calgary Health Authority

Joanne Cuthbertson – Chancellor, University of Calgary

Dena Davis – Project Coordinator and Assistant Principal, The Way In

Shauna Gervais – Community Member

Ron Gilbertson – President and CEO, Edmonton Economic Development Corporation

Carole Anne Hapchyn – Child Psychiatrist, Capital Health Authority

Bill McKeown – Vice-President, Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Brian Malloy – Regional Director of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and Suburban & Area Clinics, Capital Health’s Regional Mental Health Program

Anne Price – CEO, Calgary Learning Centre

Iris Saunders – Executive Director, Employabilities

Nancy Spencer-Poitras – Former Superintendent, Principal, School Administrator and Teacher

Marilyn Welsch – Community Member

Marie Whelan – Co-Principal, St. Mary School, Edmonton Catholic Schools

APPENDIX 1: SETTING THE DIRECTION FRAMEWORK SUMMARY

Overarching Recommendation:

The Steering Committee recommends the development of policy, accountability and funding mechanisms that are supported through comprehensive legislation that will enable one inclusive education system* through curriculum, capacity and collaboration.

*Inclusive education system: a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice.

Principles:

Alberta Education and its stakeholders **believe:**

- that all students can learn and be successful
- that when stakeholders work together in a collaborative and purposeful way, more is accomplished for students.

Alberta Education and its stakeholders **value:**

- an education system that is fair, appropriately resourced, highly accountable and provides equitable opportunities for all students
- parents as vital members of the learning team who contribute important expertise and insights
- diversity as a positive and enriching aspect of Alberta's education system
- the learning that happens for everyone when students with disabilities are effectively included in school life.

Alberta Education and its stakeholders **commit** to:

- working together for the success of each student in an inclusive education system
- ensuring students and families are welcomed, respected and supported so they can be successful
- ensuring teachers and school systems are supported so they can be successful
- being learner-centred in all decisions.

Goals:

Curriculum: Alberta Education's definition of students' educational success encompasses achievement and progress for every student, so that each may have the opportunity to "...achieve success and fulfillment as citizens in a changing world". (*Alberta Education Business Plan 2009-2012*)

Capacity: The education system is equipped, resourced and ready to support and respond to the needs of all students in an inclusive way.

Collaboration: A collaborative process to support students, communities, schools and families is evident across Government of Alberta Ministries.

Resource Guidelines:

Establish uniform, province-wide, guidelines pertaining to the full range of students enrolled in all school authorities. They specify target ratios and expected ranges for such resources as teachers, therapists, support personnel and other direct service providers, as well as items such as specialized equipment and professional training. Quantities are expressed per specified overall enrollment (e.g. per 100 students). These guidelines serve as the basis for the funding which is allocated province-wide across all school authorities (including private and charter schools). Funds are for the purpose of providing full educational services to all students. They also serve as indicators of the specific education resources expected in each school.

Programming Recommendations

1. Create provincial tools and models for interpreting the current programs of study.
2. Gather information at the Ministerial, jurisdictional, school and classroom levels to support all students.

Accountability Recommendations

Develop system indicators that clearly reflect program goals for all participants.
Institute a measurement framework that defines high expectations and captures results across all system indicators:

Funding and Support Recommendations

Use funds to fully include and educate all students, including those with disabilities, in the education community.

3. Develop accessible learning resources for all students.
4. Develop practices that demonstrate that parents are respected as important members of the Learning Team.
5. Implement a province-wide expectation that school-based expertise will be in place to support teachers.
6. Develop a set of standards so that instructional excellence in inclusive education practices becomes the norm.
7. Increase access to technologies to support the learning of all students.
8. Develop a provincial service delivery model for specialized supports and services.
9. Develop and support a seamless Alberta-wide wraparound service approach.
10. Develop and implement a model of support for young children who experience at-risk factors.

- Province-wide
 - Across all schools
 - For every student
- Provide all students access to comparable learning opportunities to maximize their potential.
- Expect provision of appropriate, high quality services in accord with resource guidelines.
- Design the evaluation system to support continuous program improvement.
- Use individual school and school authority indicators of success to determine where success is occurring for students overall and by selected sub-population; what can be learned from this success to improve the system and to determine the school authorities and schools where additional support appears needed.
- Design and administer the system based on mutual support, accountability and respect.

Develop census based funding model using geographic and demographic data, along with resource guideline data.

Consider geographic banding by school authority size and population to determine equitable resource allocation.

Multiply the resulting amount per student by overall enrollment to derive specialized supports and services funding for all schools (public, separate, private and charter schools).

Develop extraordinary high cost funding model. School authorities can apply for partial supplementary support in documented extraordinary high cost situations.

Indicators of Success:

- Standardized achievement
- Grade level of achievement
- Alternative achievement assessment based on a modified curriculum
- Early childhood indicators: EDI (school readiness data)
- Response to instruction (RTI) strategies
- Placement in typical learning environments
- Testing participation rates
- Student/parent perceptions of:
 - Self
 - Learning climate
 - School as community

- Educator's perception of success of inclusion
- Transition Data
 - Completion rates
 - Graduation rates
 - Post-school completion data
 - School readiness of students receiving early intervention supports and services
- Parent involvement
- Professional development and teacher/ assistant preparedness
- School/community/interagency relations and support

Identify Best Practices (Alberta and beyond) for Continuous Improvement:

- Based on indicators of success, identify schools and school authorities with much stronger than predicted system indicator results.
- Compile information on factors contributing to success (source information from cross-ministry data mining)
- Determine applicability for system-wide implementation.
- Develop and facilitate strategies for effective knowledge transfer across schools/school authorities.
- In the spirit of shared responsibility, provide augmented support and assistance in areas of need to strengthen system indicators of success.



