



cutting through complexity

Alberta Education

Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right

Final Report on Public Engagement

January 27, 2012

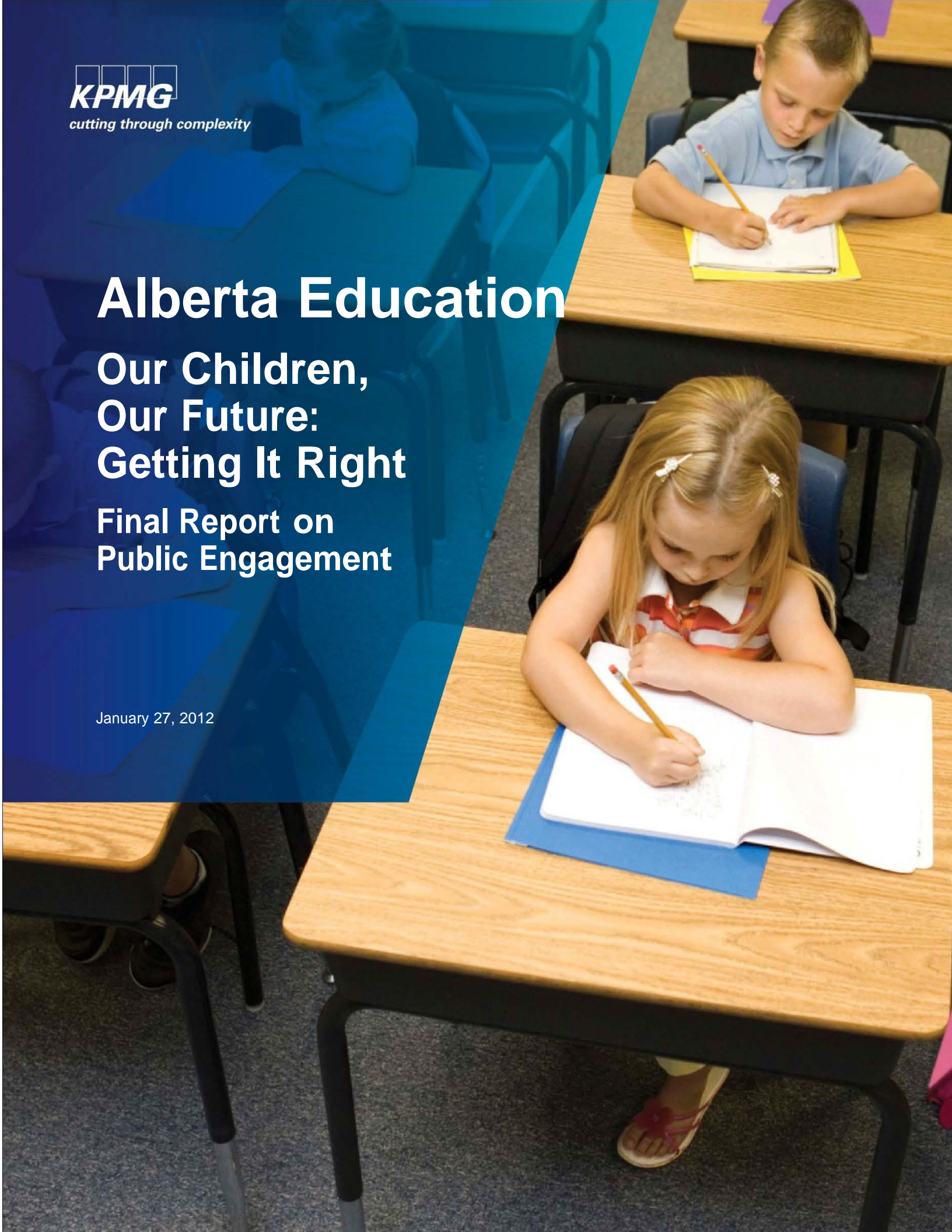




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DISCLAIMER:

The following report presents the majority views expressed by Albertans, based on the data provided to KPMG. This report does not represent the views of KPMG or the Ministry of Education.

Introduction

Over the past three years, government has undertaken several province-wide engagement initiatives – *Inspiring Education*, *Inspiring Action*, *Speak Out* and *Setting the Direction*, to help shape Alberta’s vision for education. Each of these initiatives has contributed to the ongoing renewal of Alberta’s education system and influenced the proposed new education legislation. The proposed Act is designed to enable the transformation of Alberta’s education system by providing a foundation and expectations for educational excellence.

Albertans were invited to participate in the process by expressing their views in community meetings, in writing, or through social media (see consultation methods below). All of the thoughts and suggestions Albertans provided are being considered during the drafting of new legislation to govern Alberta’s education system, which will be introduced in the Legislature in spring 2012.

This report is a synthesis of all the comments and suggestions expressed by Albertans during the public engagement process.

Consultation methods

Since November 22, 2011 students, parents, teachers and other members of the public have been encouraged to provide input on the new education legislation and how to improve Alberta’s education system through the *Our Children, Our Future: Getting it Right* public engagement process.

Albertans were invited to provide their ideas on Alberta’s education legislation through a number of channels (noted below). In total more than 5,000 submissions were provided by Albertans.

- *Community meetings* – Seven full-day community meetings were held across the province between November 26 and December 9, 2011. Participants included parents, teachers, students and other members of the public. In addition to these sessions, *Speak Out* sessions were held with students in five high schools over the same period. Together these sessions involved 1,300 Albertans.¹
- *Online* – Through the Ministry’s Engage website, stakeholders were asked to provide comments through discussion boards.
- *Email* – Emails were directed either to the dedicated consultation address or to the Minister.
- *Mail* – Written submissions were directed to the Minister.
- *Facebook* – Comments and posts were made on the Alberta Education Facebook page.

¹ Sessions were held in Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Bonnyville, Lethbridge, Fort McMurray and Peace River.



- *Twitter* – Comments were posted to Twitter using the #abed hash tag.

School Boards and Associations (including the Alberta Teachers' Association) were asked to provide specific feedback on the proposed new legislation, using the lens of the student as their viewpoint for comments. These comments were provided by email.

School Councils, represented by parents, were asked to provide feedback on the changes to the proposed new legislation following a conference call with the Minister. These comments were provided by email.

Finally, all of Alberta's 600,000 students (Kindergarten to Grade 12) were invited by the Minister to provide their own individual input. While this was not the only channel through which students expressed their views, it was a specific request made to students from the Minister and was felt to warrant a separate analysis. Themes from these responses are included in Appendix 1.

Overall, the level of interest from Albertans to participate in this process was overwhelming and reflects the strong public interest and support for the initiative being undertaken by Alberta Education.

Synthesizing the Responses

KPMG used the following approach to synthesize the themes based on the thousands of comments and suggestions stakeholders provided over that past few months. Critical to the process was ensuring that all voices were heard and reflected in the final analysis. The approach synthesized the responses into themes as noted in detail below.

The final themes are intended to provide a concise and succinct viewpoint expressed by stakeholders.

1. Reviewed the Our Children Our Future: Community Meeting table transcripts

Our initial underlying assumption in developing the general themes for this report was that the community meeting data would contain the highest quality responses given that the discussions were facilitated and structured. This also encouraged people to build on each others' ideas.

We reviewed the table discussion transcriptions from each of the seven community meetings and reviewed the 'placemats' that were used at these sessions to capture the particular viewpoints of students who attended the sessions.

2. Documented discussion points

We organized the common discussion points along the four key areas that were discussed during the sessions: Creating Caring, Respectful and Safe Schools; Making Learning Relevant for All Students; Keeping Students Engaged in Learning; and Setting Students Up for Success in Life.

3. Grouped similar discussion points together

Using the detailed discussion points we grouped similar discussion points together using key sentiments (e.g. welcoming, bullying, technology, etc.). Following this the analysis from each session was combined together to build the themes.

4. Developed a high-level theme

For each key sentiment we developed themes. There were 65 themes documented at the conclusion of this activity.

We validated the themes by comparing them to the frequency with which keywords were expressed within a group of similar discussion points to ensure that we had adequately captured the views of the stakeholders. We then refined the themes to remove duplication and overlap between similar themes.



5. Reviewed remainder of data

We conducted a review of the remainder of the data (e-mails, mail, School Board and Stakeholder Association feedback, School Council feedback, Twitter, Facebook), to further refine the themes and arrive at the final themes presented in this report.

Theme consistency

Generally, themes were consistent between the community meetings and other channels. Specifically, comments expressed by School Boards, Stakeholder Associations and the Alberta Teachers' Association were more technical and often related to specific sections of the Act, while other channels provided broader feedback or 'outside the box' ideas.

Themes

Themes arising from the public engagement process are organized under the following categories:

- **Creating Caring, Respectful and Safe Schools**

Themes in this category relate to how an inclusive education system should be developed, including addressing bullying, and creating an environment where all students feel that they belong.

- **Making Learning Relevant for All Students**

Themes in this category relate to making changes that allow the education system to move towards meeting the needs of learners in the 21st century.

- **Keeping Students Engaged in Learning**

Themes in this category relate to teachers, learning and research and how the education system needs to use evidence-based approaches to engage students in their learning.

- **Setting Students Up for Success in Life**

Themes in this category relate to the roles, responsibilities, communication and collaboration of stakeholders so that all students can experience success in the education system.

- **Education Funding**

The theme presented in this category is based on the views expressed by stakeholders on education funding.

Creating Caring, Respectful and Safe Schools

A warm, welcoming and safe school environment should be created. This environment should help students feel secure and comfortable so that they can focus on learning.

- The culture of schools should reflect a sense of family / community for students and provide an environment that is positive and comfortable to better enable learning. Both the physical space, as well as staff who work inside the schools should be welcoming.
- Values should be defined, communicated and understood by teachers, administrators, parents and students and lead towards developing warm, welcoming and safe attitudes. Values may include: honesty, friendliness, respect and compassion. All stakeholders need to be able to take ownership in bringing these values to life.
- The focus on safety should be more than just being about the physical environment. It is also the ability for students to make mistakes and grow and learn, to speak up without intimidation, and to be respectful of cultural backgrounds and uniqueness.

“Safe and caring schools make safe and caring communities.”

Students echoed this theme in their comments. They generally noted that they wanted an environment where they felt welcome and were happy and eager to learn. Further to this they noted that they learned best when their classroom was motivating / energizing and respectful.

Teachers and school administrators should be mentors and build positive relationships with students so that they feel listened to, valued and respected.

- A more student centred approach to the education system should be adopted so that students feel valued.
- Mentorship should come from teachers and staff taking the time to connect with students, who are more engaged due to the positive relationships being formed.
- Students should be listened to and heard so that they feel valued and respected. Teachers who show they care have a more profound impact on students. At the same time, teachers and staff should be treated with respect by students.
- Teachers and staff should recognize student strengths and abilities and use these to develop students and build their self-esteem.

“Teachers care. We need to get out of their way so they can make connections with students.”

- Principals, teachers and staff should know the students in their school and have a visible presence. They should build rapport and know student names – no student should feel anonymous.
- Mentorship should not be limited to relationships between teachers / staff and students. Students should know others in the student population and they should act as mentors to each other – e.g. use of peer support groups in schools.

Students suggested that there was a need for better relationships between teachers / staff and students. Teachers should be happy to see students and demonstrate an attitude of ‘fun’ while teaching.

At the same time students also suggested that healthy and respectful relationships between students were important. It was suggested that students be paired up (e.g. buddy system) to encourage questions and to practice relationship building skills.

Students should be free from bullying and harassment when they are at school so they can focus on learning.

- Bullying needs to be specifically addressed within schools. There is a need for students, parents, teachers and others to be better educated on what bullying is.
- There needs to be a definition on what bullying is and what it is not. Too often it is unclear what constitutes bullying and as a result bullying occurs on a daily basis in our society without an understanding of what it is.
- Bullying is broader than just physical or verbal actions by students at school; it has become ‘modernized’ and broadened by technology.
- Schools need to be proactive in their response to bullying, rather than taking action after it has occurred (i.e. prevention versus punishment) – this may include early identification and constructive / appropriate interventions. To be proactive there should be clear and defined mechanisms that create an environment free from bullying and harassment.
- The range of actions which can be taken against bullying need to be clearly defined and consistent between all schools and districts (including public, separate and charter).
- The new legislation should not restrict schools’ abilities to deal with bullying as they see appropriate.

“Schools shouldn’t be places that are feared.”

Students felt that in order for bullying and other safety issues to be addressed, school policies, structures and disciplines that are in place need to be enforced and not just talked about. In addition, more proactive approaches should be taken, including educating students to foster a safer learning environment.

Parents noted that students need to be protected from harassment and discrimination as part of a school's approach to dealing with bullying. At the same time it was unclear to parents how bullying outside of the school would be handled.

School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) felt that the ability of school administrators to address student behavior outside of school (as per the legislation) will hold students accountable for their behavior regardless of where it occurs. However, this may provide an excuse for other parties who should also be responsible (e.g. parents).

Students should feel included and diversity should be supported at school.

- There needs to be a clear definition of inclusion (including physical, curricular, socio-economic), and how schools are structured should reflect this definition. Currently, the manner in which students are segregated (e.g. culture, religion, special needs) is counterintuitive to an inclusive approach.
- The diverse backgrounds of students need to be respected and supported within school environments. Differences should be acknowledged, celebrated and embraced. One suggestion was to ask for input from different cultural groups to assist with defining an approach and rolling this out to schools.
- For students to feel included there should be a non-judgmental environment that recognizes the differences in learning styles of each student. For this to occur, teachers and staff need to be knowledgeable about the different styles of learning.
- All children should be treated equitably by teachers and staff and should not be labeled (e.g. slow learner).
- Students should be exposed to diversity to encourage them to be understanding / accepting of others. They should also be taught how to be open-minded citizens (e.g. understanding individual and societal viewpoints).
- Schools need to have supports in place (including technology) to assist students with special needs in reaching their full potential.

“Schools should promote the acceptance of everyone.”

School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) felt that inclusion should be more broadly defined to address all students. From their point of view, inclusion is how a community is engaged to develop children; how educational programs are created and provided; and how learning opportunities for each child promotes engagement and inspiration.

Making Learning Relevant for All Students

In addition to gaining basic competencies, students should learn important life skills to reach their full potential.

- Basic competencies should include literacy (including financial), numeracy and technology. As a part of technology, teachers need to be educated on how technology is used in today's world.
- Life skills should include critical thinking, conflict resolution, interpersonal communications, problem solving, teamwork and relationship building. It was suggested that this could also include teaching students vocation-specific skills (specifically at the high school level) which reflect specific trades or occupations that are in-demand in Alberta. This could also include providing students with opportunities to explore a variety of career options earlier in their life.
- How a curriculum is broken down and taught needs to be revisited – it should be less about the content / academic concepts, and more about the necessary skills in the real world.
- Students should be encouraged to explore their own abilities and develop critical thinking, analytical and problem solving skills. As a result, this should help to foster creativity and innovation.
- Students need to be developed into critical thinkers – they should be able to filter information for real knowledge and to think more deeply.

“We need to spend more time teaching skills not just the facts.”

Students suggested that there are life skills that they should be taught in schools. These include financial literacy (i.e. how to handle money), decision-making skills, life skills (e.g. how to buy a house, car), time management and general social skills.

Students also identified the need to be provided with opportunities to understand what the various options are for their future education and careers. This could be done by providing counseling for students to discuss their future and make them aware of tools that could be used to explore their options.

Parents also reinforced this theme, noting that teaching should focus on real world skills such as critical thinking and financial literacy. In addition parents felt that students should be engaged thinkers, collaborators and ethical citizens.

School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) noted that successful students are the ones who are problem solvers, risk takers, creative thinkers, multi-skilled, multi-faceted, global and lifelong learners. As a result, the education system needs to encourage the development of these skills.

Students should be exposed to real-life, hands-on experiences as part of their education as this helps to make learning more meaningful.

- Connecting learning to real-life, hands-on experiences helps students understand how knowledge can be applied in a practical setting and it assists in bringing the curriculum to life.
- Learning is more than just what happens in the classroom – it should also take place outside of the classroom (i.e. through field trips to businesses, NGOs, hospitals and around the world either digitally or physically).
- Teachers who connected ideas with a hands-on experience (e.g. project, lab) are seen as being more successful educators.
- Early in education (i.e. elementary school) students need experiential learning to help them develop their basic skills and understanding.

“There is an infusion of competencies through educational experiences.”

Students shared similar viewpoints to the community meetings. Students felt that the education process should incorporate more hands-on projects, activities and experiences which as a result would engage them more. It was also noted that students learn best by ‘doing’ rather than by being told.

Students should be involved in their community and connected globally.

- Giving back to the community is an important concept that should be taught to students. It was suggested that there could be mandatory community service requirements for students; that community partners could be invited into schools to do presentations; and that volunteering could be credited towards a high school diploma. Encouraging the spirit of volunteerism will assist in establishing responsible citizens.
- Students should be engaged outside of the classroom by schools through extra-curricular activities, peer groups and volunteer opportunities. These types of opportunities will likely reinforce a sense of community amongst students and will contribute to a safer school environment.
- To be connected globally, students need to understand world economics, world events / situations and global perspectives. There should be regular and ongoing discussions of global issues and current events as part of the curriculum. It was suggested that travel to other countries could be offered by schools to expand the knowledge base of students in this regard.

“Larger elements of the world need to come into the classroom.”

Students felt that having various extracurricular activities and clubs in schools would encourage all students to participate in valuable and safe activities and that this would also increase school spirit and foster a sense of community.

Parents also felt that a successful education system is one that involves the greater community.

Building on this, School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) noted that schools are not just traditional brick and mortar buildings. The scope of the education system should be defined broader. For example, communities provide options for students that may look different than the traditional school model.

The method of assessing student competencies through standardized testing (i.e. Provincial Achievement Tests) should be re-evaluated.

- Provincial Achievement Tests may not be worthwhile as they are not perceived to reflect how students learn. Stakeholders feel that tests are not designed to measure and assess whether students have achieved the desired competencies. As a result, their weighting could be reduced; the exam could be removed altogether; or the exam could be changed to measure skills rather than knowledge.
- Testing practices for students should reflect student learning and should meet the goals outlined in the framework for student learning.
- New assessment tools should be developed to help measure student competencies.

Some parent (and School Council) responses from other channels noted that while Provincial Achievement Tests were beneficial to students, parents and teachers, there were aspects that could be adjusted – such as removing the story writing portion from the Grade 3 exam. Other parent responses noted that these tests may not be the best measure of whether students are learning.

Students were consistently opposed to Provincial Achievement Tests; with many noting the anxiety that these tests create for them.

Curriculum should incorporate flexibility and choice.

- A flexible curriculum is one that it is able to accommodate the diverse needs of students and offer a variety of learning options and alternative learning approaches. Teachers need to be supported with flexibility in the classroom and not pressured to meet the requirements of the curriculum.
- Learning must be personally relevant otherwise it is not retained – students should be supported to find their passion. In order to make learning personally relevant it is not possible to give identical tasks to everyone; the curriculum must be designed to recognize individual

interests and needs. As well, the system needs to be flexible enough so that students can individualize their learning experiences to meet their specific needs.

- Curriculum should be balanced; it should be broad enough to recognize all the different dimensions of a student (i.e. mind, body and spirit) and dimensions of learning (i.e. subjects, time, and activities).
- Curriculum needs to be kept relevant and current – both in content and how it is delivered (e.g. traditional classroom, online, video).

“We should be meeting the learning needs of every child, every day. No exceptions.”

Students noted their desire for greater choices in their learning opportunities, including more options for art programs and for courses that teach practical skills. At the same time, students also wanted the ability to choose courses that would align with potential career paths.

Students also felt that the subjects of math, social studies and physical education do not currently have enough classroom time devoted to them.

Students felt that being flexible in the method of delivering the curriculum meant adapting to a student’s learning abilities and needs. Students noted that they were more motivated to learn when they were personally interested in the subject and found that it provided value and meaning to them.

Classrooms should be appropriately resourced with educational tools, technologies and teacher support.

- There needs to be a renewal and continual refreshment of existing education resources (e.g. textbooks) and technologies used by schools. As part of this, adequate funding should be provided for integrating technology into the classroom – this will ensure that there is equitable access to the appropriate technologies for all students.
- Students should have access to a multi-disciplinary team of supports to address their diverse learning needs (e.g. speech, language, nutrition, academic, mental and physical). This also includes programming and supports in place that allows for improved integration of special needs students.
- Teachers are the catalyst for learning and need to be supported to be able to assist students to reach their full potential. Teachers should have adequate preparation time and have access to appropriate supports such as learning counselors / coaches, teaching / education assistants, community resources, support groups, materials, technology and supplies. As part of this, there should be predictable and sustainable funding in place to provide teacher supports.

“Kids with disabilities need to be included in the school system so they can be successful in their future work / personal life.”



- School administrators need to be able to recognize where teachers need help, creating an environment where teachers are not afraid to ask other teachers for support. It was suggested that schools should support the mentorship of new teachers in a more structured manner.

Parents noted that learning should incorporate technologies, including, as an example, the use of online education tools.

Students were also generally supportive of more technology in their schools to enable learning. Technology identified included computers, Smart Boards, netbooks, laptops, web conferencing capabilities, MacBooks and iPads. Students also noted that this was a more environmentally-friendly approach than the current reliance on paper and pencils in the classroom.

School Councils felt that additional consideration was required by the Ministry and School Boards to better match the offerings within schools to the demographics of a specific area – specifically for those students with special needs. It was suggested that special needs programs be offered in schools close to where students reside rather than having them travel distances to access programs.

Keeping Students Engaged in Learning

Students should be active participants in their learning.

- Students should be engaged and want to go to school. Schools should be environments that enable active learning and encourage students to share their ideas and thoughts.
- Students should be challenged to reach their full potential (e.g. taking an idea further); this will help students to feel confident and empowered to take ownership of their learning and pursue their interests.
- Students have to be accountable for their actions and respectful and proactive with their behaviours. If students assess themselves on an ongoing basis and see growth / progress they will become more engaged in learning.
- Positive feedback needs to be provided on a regular basis to students to encourage them.

“We need to inspire kids in what they are really good at.”

Students felt that in order to be active participants they needed to be given the chance to participate through discussions, question and answer opportunities, structured debates and more collaborative and interactive activities in the classroom.

School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) noted that in order to put more ownership on students for their own learning, student responsibilities must be identified and should reflect the values of our society. This will ultimately lead to higher student outcomes.

Class sizes should be smaller.

- Smaller class sizes should allow teachers to build relationships with students and accommodate their diverse learning needs.
- Smaller class sizes will allow students with special needs or health issues to have access to the appropriate supports.

Parents (including School Councils) and students shared similar view points on smaller class sizes. They noted that smaller class sizes maximize the value that each student receives from their teacher. It was suggested that limits on class size are especially important for students in grades 1 to 6.

Where there are larger class sizes, parents noted that teachers need additional support (e.g. teaching assistants) in the classroom.

Parents should be supported and included in their children's education.

- Parents should have a better understanding of their role and how they contribute to and are accountable for student successes. At the same time, it should be recognized that parents know what is best for their children.
- Parents should be included in the key decisions affecting the education of their children – they should have the opportunity to meet and work together with teachers and staff to understand and resolve issues.
- Much like students, parents need to know that they are welcome at schools and that their ideas are heard – they have an important role to play in the education system. When parents are engaged they can bring their skills to the table, where appropriate.

School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) recognize the importance of parents in the education system – through necessary collaboration between parents and teachers. Parents should be able to decide what kind of education is provided to their children and what is appropriate for their children's needs. However, they also noted that the change in residency requirements for students, from where a parent resides to where the student resides, will create challenges in building and maintaining this relationship.

Teachers should use their passion, energy and enthusiasm to inspire and motivate students as this will set the foundation for lifelong learning.

- Students should be exposed to teachers who are:
 - *Passionate, engaging and inspirational* – teachers who are able to relay their passion in a subject area to students;
 - *Visionary and driven* – teachers who are committed to overcoming obstacles and are able to challenge students to achieve excellence;
 - *Ethical* – teachers who do what is right and recognize when something is wrong;
 - *Compassionate and caring* – teachers who are involved with, and give back to, their community because they want to make a difference;
 - *Positive role models* – teachers who are strong mentors and leaders and take an interest in their students' future;
 - *Entrepreneurial and creative* – teachers who are open to ideas, encourage innovation and think 'outside the box'.

“As a parent, there is relief and excitement to see a teacher has inspired my child.”

- Students should be around a teacher who makes them want to do better and supports them in this. Encouraging and engaging students starts with an excellent teacher.
- Teachers should create a passion in students to want to learn beyond the classroom – they need to tap into their curiosity.

Students noted that they often learn better with a teacher who is creative, encouraging, respectful, and sets a healthy learning environment in the classroom and school.

Assessing teacher competencies and their ability to meet quality standards are important to ensuring the success of students.

- Fundamental teacher competencies and quality standards should be defined. It was suggested that a College of Teachers could be formed to govern teachers and ensure that they are doing the right job.
- Teachers should be held accountable to the established standards through regular assessments and evaluations. A common, province-wide evaluative tool to measure teacher competencies and make improvements should be in place.
- Teachers should be required to re-certify on a periodic basis (e.g. every five years) to ensure that the right teachers are teaching the right courses to students. This should also allow for schools to be able to effectively deal with ineffective teachers.
- Ongoing training and professional development of teachers and teaching assistants should be supported. Training could include new teaching methods, building expertise / knowledge on a specific subject matter or learning new technologies.

“To engage our students we need to prepare our teachers to teach in new and different ways.”

School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) felt that quality teachers are critical to student success. Teachers should be provided with the necessary training, tools (including technology, teaching strategies, etc.) and professional development resources, as necessary.

Creativity and innovation in the education system should be encouraged and supported.

- Students need to be encouraged to explore their own abilities and learn to think creatively. As a result they will be more engaged in learning.
- Learning needs to incorporate activities that allow students to make discoveries and experience the thrill of success. Students should embrace the nature of discovery.
- Students need to be different and innovative in their ideas – thinking outside the box. Schools and teachers should encourage students to be risk takers and foster a willingness to try new things, with the ability for them to make mistakes. As part of this there should be a focus on entrepreneurship.

“Students need opportunities to persevere, opportunities to fail, and opportunities to look at what isn’t ordinary.”

Setting Students Up for Success in Life

Teachers and schools administrators should create a positive tone at the top through strong leadership and by being role models.

- Teachers and administrators must be role models, as they are responsible for creating a positive atmosphere in all aspects of education, from the way they discipline, to the way they praise and teach students. They should demonstrate the behaviours that are important for students to see and emulate.
- There should be a consistent tone of respect and care at the top – this should be modeled by interactions between teachers, administrators, staff, parents and the community.

The roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of all stakeholders in the education system need to be clear and understood to ensure student success.

- Stakeholders include students, parents, teachers, administrators, Boards and the Ministry.
- There should be a consistent definition of the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of these stakeholders. This will help to set clear expectations and clarify obligations for student success.
- There should be consequences for stakeholders not fulfilling their roles and responsibilities; these need to be clear, understood and enforceable by the appropriate authority.
- Students need to take responsibility for their behaviours and the consequences that may result. Student behaviours should be managed by schools through positive reinforcement, ongoing monitoring and effective responses to disrespectful behaviour.
- School attendance is one specific area where there should be more clearly defined requirements and consequences for not meeting them.

“Everyone has responsibility and accountability for student success.”

School Councils noted that parents need an avenue to report unsatisfactory school board performance as a manner of holding boards accountable. As well, another accountability mechanism suggested included an ‘exit interview process’ allowing students who move from one school to another in the same area to provide direct feedback on the perceived value of education received at the school.

School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) identified school attendance, through their comments, as a priority area that is a shared responsibility between the student, parents and

schools. Each of these stakeholders needs to clearly understand its roles and responsibilities for this requirement.

One specific issue identified by School Councils, School Boards and Stakeholder Associations was that of transportation. These stakeholders recognized the transportation / busing issues created by the proposed legislation and the impacts that will exist, including limitations of service and the amount of time students spend in transit. School Boards specifically noted that the removal of the transportation distance / walk limit creates pressure on boards to dedicate funding for busing, develop local parameters, and manage the expectations of parents in their district.

Communication and collaboration between various stakeholders in the education system should be enhanced.

- Teachers should be encouraged to share ideas and plan with each other in a more collaborative and open environment.
- Parents, schools, communities and service providers should communicate regularly to address the key issues facing students. Schools are part of the broader community and should have linkages with community resources and supports. There should be programs and services offered in the community which help students to develop to their full potential.
- Ministries (e.g. Education, Health and Wellness, Human Services, Justice and Attorney General, Solicitor General and Public Security) should collaborate to ensure that students are supported for success and that their needs are met. This could be accomplished through the provision of wrap-around services.
- All of the stakeholders in a student's life should be involved in communicating and collaborating to improve the educational experience.
- Stakeholder feedback should always be solicited when any changes to the education system are being proposed. In addition, these changes need to be well communicated in advance.

“Openness, a willingness to communicate and sharing information and knowledge will ensure success.”

School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) recognize the importance of communication and collaboration. One specific example, noted by Boards, was when there is a potential decision to establish a separate school division. This type of change impacts all members of the community, not just those belonging to the minority faith, and requires communication. It was felt by those who commented that community engagement in the establishment process was critical to managing the impacts; especially in small, rural school divisions where limited resources and instructional supports can become further splintered.

School Boards also noted that Alberta requires more specialized supports and services in its classrooms and this will require additional partnerships to be developed and formalized between Ministries.

Parents and School Councils also recognized that there is a need for collaboration to ensure that all communities (new, mature, rural and urban) benefit equally from educational opportunities and programs offered. Currently, educational services may only exist in large urban centres. These opportunities should also be made available to students at small, rural schools.

Creating the conditions for student success early on promotes lifelong learning helps to create citizens who are productive and contributing members of society.

- Students deserve the appropriate learning experiences to ensure they are successful. Student success creates lifelong learning, resiliency, empathy and compassion.
- Supports should be in place for early learning and education to set students up for success. Early childhood education is important – adequate early learning and education opportunities should be made available (e.g. preschool, kindergarten). There were divergent views expressed by stakeholders on whether kindergarten should be made a mandatory full-day.
- Student high-school graduation rates need to be addressed; all Alberta students should be encouraged and given the opportunity to graduate. To address this, students should be able to take courses that they feel are relevant to them.

Students felt that it needs to be made harder for students to drop out and easier for them to remain at school. For example, a more flexible / manageable school schedule could be introduced / encouraged. Where students have dropped out, students felt that schools should provide guidance and alternative options to these individuals.

School Councils recognized that student success should be defined based on each student and his / her abilities. They also noted the importance of early childhood education (e.g. kindergarten), but were divided on their views about how this should be addressed by the system (similar to the community meetings). School Boards felt that early childhood learning should focus on development as opposed to school readiness.

Both students and School Councils also noted that school times could be reconsidered as these have an impact on several stakeholders and ultimately on student success. Parents are impacted because in many instances they have to handle before and after school care; teachers are impacted because they have less preparation time; and students are impacted because early start times reduce the amount of rest time (which can result in less focused students).

School Boards (and Stakeholder Associations) noted that raising the compulsory age of education in the new legislation will help to promote the importance of education and will encourage the completion of high school. This will impact: students whose background and beliefs do not align with this direction; existing learning materials and environments that are currently designed to assist adolescents in developing adult skills; programming for students who are in a severe / special needs population; and how urban and rural boards will meet the needs of older students.

Education Funding

Education funding should be predictable, stable and specific amounts should be targeted.

- Targeted funding should address:
 - Diverse and inclusive classrooms, including resources for students with special needs
 - Technology (e.g. Smart Boards)
 - Teacher professional development
 - Alternative program delivery within public and separate schools, and
 - Specific needs of small rural schools.
- At the same time, actions should be taken to address school fees charged and services provided and the inequity that currently exists between boards and schools. It was also suggested that school fees could be dropped or these costs could be covered by other mechanisms (e.g. increasing education taxation).

Students favoured that school fees be removed altogether; however some students noted that the government could also consider subsidizing these fees (it was suggested that there be a maximum of \$50 per year, per student, required to be paid out of pocket).

School Councils noted that current educational funding commitments should be reconsidered. This includes how to address long term funding; potential tax increases to improve sustainability; and providing additional funding for gifted students.

Appendix 1 – Key Themes Arising from Student Input

The following appendix summarizes the student letters that were received by the Ministry in response to the Minister's letter asking all Alberta students to provide their thoughts on what is important to include in the new legislation.

It is important to note that this was not the only time student views were collected / solicited as part of the overall consultation process. Students also expressed their views through Speak Out sessions, the Speak-Out website, community sessions, e-mails, phone calls and the Engage website. This feedback has been incorporated into the general themes noted in the report.

However, given the unique nature of the process initiated by the Minister's letter to students, it was felt that this feedback should be recognized separately.

The following key themes were identified from this input:

- Students believe that **learning would be more efficient and more interesting for them if they were taught with hand-on projects** including experiments, the use of scrapbooks, debates, etc. They want to experience something even if it is a simple concept as a way to reinforce their learning. Students believe that field trips are one way to provide this, and schools should be given additional funds to allow for this.
- Students would like to see their **class sizes reduced** as they believe that they learn best in smaller groups. They frequently noted that there are too many students in class and as a result their one-on-one interaction with teachers was minimal.
- Students believe that there are a number of **improvements to the physical school environment** that should be made. These include: better classroom chairs, more sports fields and better playground equipment. Students also want the **cleanliness of their schools** to be addressed.
- Students want to have **more technology (e.g. computers / laptops, Wi-Fi, Smart Boards) in their schools as a way to improve their learning experience**. They specifically noted Apple iPads as a preferred technology that they would like to be able to use. Students also asked that they be allowed to take laptops and iPads home with them to assist in completing their homework.
- Students would like all **schools to have a cafeteria that offers healthy lunches and snacks**. Specific attention was paid to the idea of a **free hot lunch program** accessible to all students through these cafeterias.
- Students enjoy their **recess time and want it to be extended** or have additional recesses offered during the school day.

- Students enjoy **physical education classes** and believe that **there should be more school time devoted to this**. Students also believe that the existing gym equipment in their schools needs replacing.
- Students noted that **art and music programs are no longer offered** by many of their schools. Students enjoy these programs and believe that **they should be offered by every school to encourage creativity and imagination**. Students would also like to have drama classes offered within schools.
- Students believe that they should be **given the option to take skill-based classes** such as sewing, cooking, welding, woodworking, mechanics, farming, cosmetology, etc.
- Many students believe that the **amount of time devoted to math in their schools was not enough** – they want more hours focused on math.
- Students believe that there **should be classes offered that go into detail about the different careers available to them** – this was because they felt that “career days” did not provide them with enough information. At the same time, students want the **opportunity to have the chance to work or volunteer (e.g. job shadowing) with someone** working in a profession they might wish to pursue.
- Students believe that **Provincial Achievement Tests should be removed**. They felt that these tests made them anxious and nervous.
- Students enjoy the opportunities that they are given to read in their classrooms. They want to be **given more reading time (e.g. the “Drop Everything and Read” Program)**. They also want a greater selection of books in their schools.
- While students have different views on whether bullying existed in their schools, there was a common sentiment that there should be **more bullying awareness programs** at schools as students that are bullied do not enjoy attending school.