



# The Alberta Teachers' Association

## Responding to the 2020 Draft Ministerial Order on Student Learning

The following comments reflect key aspects of the Alberta Teachers' Association's response to the Government of Alberta's Ministerial Order on Student Learning, found at [www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/educ-draft-ministerial-order.pdf](http://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/educ-draft-ministerial-order.pdf).

These responses align with the major sections of the draft Ministerial Order, including About Student Learning, Vision for Student Learning, Foundations for Learning and Outcomes for Student Learning. The Government of Alberta is seeking input on the Ministerial Order on Student Learning here: [www.learnalberta.ca/content/survey2020/index.html](http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/survey2020/index.html). The survey is similarly organized around the sections of the order, and the related survey question numbers have been included in each section below.

### General Comments About Student Learning (Related to Questions 16, 17, 18 and 19)

- The education system in Alberta must be fully funded and resourced to ensure equity of opportunity.
- Student learning must be provided through fair and equitable access for students from all backgrounds with a broad range of learning experiences in order to discover and develop their potential, their passions and their gifts, allowing them to make significant contributions to their communities.
- Student learning must be facilitated by certificated, highly skilled and knowledgeable teachers.
- It is not the responsibility of Alberta Education and schools to teach children about family responsibilities and obligations; it is the role of families.
- The fundamental objective of universal public education in democratic societies is to prepare students to take their role as active citizens; while the order includes the objective of students understanding the “rights and benefits of democratic citizenship,” it is important that students learn democratic attitudes and develop a personal commitment to identify and act as citizens.
- Further, an integral part of citizenship is a knowledge of and a commitment to the principles set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The order should make explicit reference to this foundational document.
- Finally, Alberta students, whatever their ethnicity or family history, should be brought to an understanding of their identity as “Treaty People” who are bound by the numbered treaties and other covenants entered into with the Indigenous people who occupied this territory from time immemorial.

## **Vision for Student Learning (Related to Questions 9 and 10)**

- The vision articulated is inadequate. It suggests a narrow view of the purpose of education, with a focus on jobs, careers and work ethic, from which students are expected to derive “fulfillment” and “make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world.” The vision should articulate a broader purpose for education, including the development of the capacity for innovative, critical and creative thought essential for developing tomorrow’s Alberta.
- The vision must be shared by all Albertans and recognized as a responsibility of all Albertans.
- The role of the government is to ensure the provision of educational programs and services appropriate to the needs of all students, based on principles of universal design for learning and equity.
- It is the responsibility of teachers to guide students through the curriculum, and it is the responsibility of government and school boards to support teachers in their efforts to do so.
- The vision should recognize that the education system must be appropriately funded and supported through legislation, regulation and policy to ensure that every child learns and succeeds.

## **Foundations for Learning (Related to Question 11)**

- Literacy and numeracy have always been foundational to curriculum; the existing draft K–4 programs of study are anchored in literacy and numeracy, so this is not a change.
- A vision of public education must continue to focus on developing the whole child through a variety of coursework including the fine arts and physical education. Teachers are experts in the design of curriculum and the pedagogy essential for its effective delivery. The order should therefore recognize the role of the profession and teachers individually as foundational to achieving student learning.
- To best support the foundations for learning, teachers require long-term professional learning opportunities and high-quality current and context-specific resources.

## **Outcomes for Learning (Related to Question 12)**

### **a) *Knowledge Development (Related to Question 13)***

- As curriculum and pedagogy experts, teachers are in the best position to facilitate student knowledge development.
- Business has a legitimate contribution to make, but student learning outcomes must address much more than short-term economic objectives. Indeed, efforts to plan curriculum should reflect the need to prepare students for an uncertain future by equipping them with a diverse, broadly applicable education that prepares them to respond to change.
- Assessment must be developmentally appropriate and consistent with the curriculum. It must respect the professional judgment of teachers, who know their students well.
- Content and processes must be developmentally and age appropriate for students; curriculum must be structured and articulated to provide for student cognitive, ethical and physical development throughout their years of schooling.

- Knowledge is not the same as simply memorizing facts.

**b) *Character Development (Related to Question 14)***

- Goals for learning include respect for self and others and a sense of social responsibility, including the capacity to live, learn and work with others in a diverse and inclusive society.
- Learning must assist students to acquire not only knowledge but also attitudes that contribute to lifelong learning, social awareness, responsible citizenship and personal well-being.
- Character development includes understanding the responsibility of students and citizens to contribute to inclusive and welcoming spaces for all people from diverse backgrounds.

**c) *Community Engagement (Related to Question 15)***

- Outcomes must allow room for inclusion, local innovation and adaptation, not simply developing workers for the workplace.
- Outcomes must be forward thinking and address the growing diversity and complexity of classrooms and communities.
- Reference is made to “the importance of world histories and the contribution of previous generations”; however, the Ministerial Order should make clear that the study of history, either as a distinct subject or incorporated with other learning, should reflect aspects of social and cultural history and endeavour to give voice to perspectives and peoples that have been suppressed or underrepresented in traditional narratives. Understanding multiple perspectives, such as francophone and Indigenous ways of knowing, is critical for students to better appreciate the needs of their own communities.