



# Off-Campus Education in Alberta: Current Realities and Future Prospects





## The Alberta Teachers' Association

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## Off-Campus Education in Alberta: Current Realities and Future Prospects

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## Foreword

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*Off-Campus Education in Alberta: Current Realities and Future Prospects* documents the results of a 2016 study initiated by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). This study explores select off-campus coordinators' (OCCs) responses to questions about their employment experiences, administrative responsibilities and working conditions. The report raises awareness about the important role of OCCs and emphasizes their often inconsistent and nonformalized positions in Alberta schools. As the voice of the teaching profession, the ATA has grounds for legitimate concerns that stem from this study: these include lack of mentoring and professional development for OCCs, minimal scheduled time in their workday to initiate and maintain placements and student-learning evaluations, and difficulties to fulfill cumbersome and time-consuming administrative tasks.

The main source of information and policy guidance for the OCC is Alberta Education's *Off-Campus Education Handbook* (2010). This handbook outlines the processes and procedures for high school youth to engage in off-campus education opportunities, for example, Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), Green Certificate, Work Experience and Work Study. The OCC job description is gleaned from an interpretation of the *Off-Campus Education Handbook*—interpretations that are often influenced by the particular historical expectations and contexts of a given school district, school cultures and local community characteristics. The result can be inconsistencies in terms of the vision and support needed to sustain these important programs.

As teachers first, OCCs are tasked with responsibilities that support the coordination of student placements with community members and employers. These multiple roles and responsibilities include supervision time assigned for site visits in the community for both RAP and Work Experience students as well as—all too often—taking on other responsibilities in the school itself. Student placements are firmly located in the vocational education and training (VET) realm and often adhere to Alberta Education's Career and Technology Studies (CTS) program of studies. Practitioners in these areas often work with OCCs or become OCCs because of their relationship with the VET and CTS curricula.

The nonformalized role of the OCC leaves the position frequently precariously resourced and subject to shifting budget priorities, even though the OCCs in this study reported that they felt valued and recognized by their school (85 per cent), their school district (82 per cent, and their colleagues (60 per cent). Yet it surprised me that the study respondents in some cases did not know if there were clauses in their collective agreement that recognizes the OCC position. The concern I raise here is about the sometimes unregulated and laissez-faire approach to the OCC role in the overall school system.

The Alberta Education off-campus education policy is a curious set of guidelines to examine. From my experience and observation, off-campus education continues to be located rather awkwardly in the broader school curriculum. I read the study results and recommendations and I am presented with the mixed messages. There is recognition for broad definitions of what it means to be successful in school, the benefits of inclusive education, the need to sustain and promote the profession through teachers' professional development and the desire to build connections with community. Yet I see in the study's analysis and recommendations that the importance of off-campus education experiences continues to be undervalued by many. For example, it is distressing that there is a common belief that work-based occupations and skilled trades are low on the occupational hierarchy, which places off-campus education in a marginalized state. This unquestioned acceptance transmits to high school work-based experiences. Most would agree that off-campus education is valuable and worthwhile for students—but only for a select group of students, not all students.

Off-campus education that is work based is intended to promote attachments to the labour force and advance experiential learning opportunities and, as noted above, seemingly only for a select group of students. These experiences have the potential to improve high school completion, especially for those who are at risk of leaving, because direct links can be made between paid work, school and youth. Yet these same students and VET generally may be further stigmatized when work-based learning opportunities are not widely valued and widely offered to all students.

Better linkages between in-class and off-campus learning are critical to achieving more equitable VET opportunities. OCCs are in an ideal position to work with the school administration and school staff to unite off-campus education learning to in-class curricular objectives. At present, there are minimal connections with the in-school curriculum in other subject areas.

Creating cross-curricular and interdisciplinary learning and reducing isolated content teaching practices reside with teachers and OCCs responsibilities. Rich and long-lasting learning occurs when students' bodies and minds are connected and engaged. Off-campus education experiences combined with in-class learning will make this happen and will contribute to the success of Alberta's current curriculum redevelopment efforts.

Curricula have a two-fold purpose: upholding the value and integrity of vocational education and building curricular links for youth. One goal of the ATA is to ensure that structural and systematic sources of inequality are not perpetuated. Strong school administrative and collegial buy-in and professional development to expose pedagogical strategies that bridge learning off-campus to in-class and vice versa, will reduce existing systemic prejudices and enhance equity for all students.



Providing quality work-based learning and VET requires the dedicated efforts of schools, school districts and communities. This important study shows that highly qualified and knowledgeable OCCs are the lynchpin of such efforts. OCCs need resources and ongoing professional development to fulfill this role. The study also shows that OCCs are advocating for a stronger place for VET and work-based learning as part of a more equitable and broad-based secondary education experience for youth. Because they work with youth and employers regularly, they have unique perspectives on aspects of public education that are often neglected in the imaginations of its architects.

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for Teacher Education and Development Education,  
University of Alberta*

## Preface

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For the past several years, Albertans have been promised significant renewal of critical aspects of our K–12 basic education system. This includes the renewal of curriculum, support for inclusion and the growing complexity of student populations, as well as the redesigning of the high school experience—all supported by new approaches to instilling public confidence through public assurance.

As one part of the teaching profession’s ongoing commitment to support these efforts, the Association continues to undertake research that will inform appropriate policies and practices. This study, *Off-Campus Education in Alberta: Current Realities and Future Prospects*, is part of this ongoing effort. The study follows up on the results of a 2016 survey that explores the experiences of off-campus coordinators (OCCs), as these relate to their roles and responsibilities in the context of current teaching and learning conditions and the programs outlined in Alberta Education’s *Off-Campus Education Handbook* (2010). As well as documenting the experiences of Alberta’s off-campus educators, the report offers important insights regarding their work and their programs in the context of global influences on educational development. These include increasing expectations for K–12 programming often accompanied by passionate public policy discussions about what should define success upon graduation from high school. The study concludes that, while more attention must be paid to the critical role of off-campus education in the policy discussions moving forward, too often the ambitious expectations for off-campus education are met with ambiguity and ambivalence when it comes to defining its role and purpose, and providing sustained support and resources.

As with all Association research initiatives, a significant team effort brought this project to completion. Oversight for the project was provided by a working group of expert practitioners led by Glenn Reece (off-campus coordinator, Cochrane and Bow Valley High Schools); Andrew Krul (off-campus education facilitator, Lethbridge School District); Kent Lorenz (vice-principal, Olds High School); Don Middleton (Calgary Board of Education); and Mary Lee Judah (off-campus coordinator, Chestermere High School). The study design and analysis was led by Laura Servage, an independent consultant who has undertaken a number of national studies for government agencies and the Association. Bonnie Watt, professor and director of the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta, reviewed the final report and provided important insights, offered in the Foreword to this publication. J-C Couture, who oversees the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s research, and administrative officer Lindsay Yakimyshyn managed the production of the final publication.

None of this work would have been possible without the teachers who participated in the survey and offered their perspectives on the state of off-campus education in Alberta. Their insight coupled with the research analysis offered in this report will inform the important work ahead of ensuring that the Alberta high school experience is one that is rich and meaningful for all students.

*Gordon R Thomas  
Executive Secretary  
Alberta Teachers' Association*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This monograph presents the findings of a survey of Alberta school off-campus coordinators (OCCs) conducted in spring 2016. The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) initiated this study based on growing concerns from the field that OCCs are finding it difficult to fulfill their responsibilities in this role. While off-campus travel and the administrative requirements of the role are central concerns for OCCs, conditions of practice for this group of teachers are only one part of a larger conversation about the present and future roles of off-campus teaching and learning in Alberta schools.

## STUDY DESCRIPTION

The study was initiated in spring 2016 and was led by an advisory group of Alberta teachers involved in OCC programs. The scope of the study, including the survey design, and the involvement of a lead researcher was finalized in May 2016. Approximately 300 OCCs were subsequently invited to participate in the study, garnering 113 survey responses (a response rate of 38 per cent). The invitations were sent to individuals identified on school or school authority websites as OCCs and to those who had attended in the previous year professional development events tied to off-campus education programming. Given the potential inaccuracies related to this information (turnover, obsolete e-mail addresses), the response rate is at best an estimate.

The survey contained demographic, open-response and closed-response questions. The full survey instrument is in Appendix A.

## FINDINGS

The survey findings show that OCCs' roles vary considerably. Factors shaping the working conditions and effectiveness of OCCs include the following:

- availability of professional development and training;
- school- and district-level decisions about teaching assignments, which shape the ability of the OCC to work in the community with students and employers (eg, part-time versus full-time OCC roles);
- number of students and characteristics of those students (eg, whether the OCC is supporting students labelled *at risk*);
- complement of supported off-campus assignments (eg, variations in number of students completing a Registered Apprenticeship Program, Green Certificate or work experience; whether the district has dual credentialing initiatives);

- economic conditions, key industries and geographies of the school jurisdiction;
- the extent to which off-campus learning is actively valued and supported by schools, communities, school jurisdictions and employers;
- supports provided by government and third-party stakeholders (eg, Careers: The Next Generation);
- management of administrative requirements; and
- years of teaching experience in general and years of experience in the off-campus role in particular.

At one end of the spectrum, OCCs might occupy this role full-time, with support to manage paperwork and other additional assistance (eg, from guidance counsellors). Well-supported OCCs have professional development facilitated by their district, including opportunities to share best practices and knowledge with other OCCs in the district.

At the other end of the spectrum, OCCs with fewer resources might occupy this role as one-quarter of their teaching assignment, with insufficient time to complete off-campus visits and no compensation for mileage. Unsupported OCCs may feel isolated or marginalized in their schools, with few opportunities to connect with other coordinators. Without support or leadership in the district, OCCs may also be unsure whether they are meeting the legal and professional requirements of the role.

Researchers saw evidence of both extremes in respondents' accounts of their experiences as OCCs.

## KEY THEMES

Although the experiences of OCCs vary widely, the following issues appeared throughout the responses:

*Positive feelings about the value of the OCC role:* OCCs are fulfilled by their work and believe they are offering important learning opportunities, especially for students who are not thriving in academic classes. OCCs believe in the value of off-campus education and advocate for its place in public education.

*Reduced funding and increased workloads:* The reduced funding of work experience credit enrolment units has increased OCCs' workloads and, in some cases, reduced previously available supports for the OCC role. OCCs are asked to manage more students with less time to do so. These challenges are especially notable in the context of workplace safety issues outside the purview of off-campus education programs. Research demonstrates that "widespread injury and illegality in teen employment reflects that Alberta does not effectively enforce the employment laws that are supposed to protect teen workers, including the Employment Standards Code and the Occupational Health and Safety Act" (Barnetson 2015, 1).

*Insufficient training and professional development:* Respondents have few resources beyond the expertise of experienced colleagues and the *Off-Campus Education Handbook* provided by Alberta Education (2010). The OCCs in this study cited such issues as lack of opportunities at the district level, few or no offerings at teachers' conventions, and scant support and communication at the provincial level.

*Complex administrative requirements:* Some OCCs struggle to keep pace with the volume and complexity of documentation required for student placements. Respondents see room for substantial improvements in this area. Requirements vary widely as districts and schools intervene with their own administrative requirements, which may or may not align clearly with requirements at the provincial level. In some cases, this results in duplication of effort.

*Insufficient time for site visits and employer contact:* Some OCCs are unable to meet the recommended number of student and worksite visits (the *Off-Campus Education Handbook* [2010, 28] suggests a "monitoring ratio of one visit or contact with the student and the employer for every 25 hours that a student is at an off-campus location"). When OCCs' workloads are excessive and/or the OCCs lack the flexibility to leave school during the day, site visits are the most likely component to be neglected. Some OCCs substitute site visits with phone calls or e-mails with employers. Some OCCs question the value of in-person visits, particularly if they appear to be a burden to the employer and are only perfunctory meetings to satisfy administrative requirements.

*Marginalization of off-campus learning:* Although many OCCs feel that off-campus learning is promoted and valued within schools and districts, a notable minority believe that colleagues and leadership do not consider off-campus learning as being on par with academic streams of learning. Such attitudes might align with broader societal attitudes toward learning and occupations oriented to the vocations.

*Lack of communication and leadership at the provincial level:* Off-campus coordinators do not feel that they receive sufficient support and guidance from the province, and see the *Off-Campus Education Handbook* as outdated and inadequate. Overall, there appears to be a lack of vision when it comes to the wider purposes of off-campus education and other forms of experiential learning. In other words, how do these forms of learning contribute to an equitable public education system?

*School jurisdictions as key players:* Some school jurisdictions actively promote off-campus education and provide important collaborative learning opportunities for OCCs. School jurisdictions play a role in interpreting, mediating and managing the administrative requirements of the OCC role, albeit with varying degrees of commitment and success. Some respondents were critical of district-level support, but positive comments about district support outweighed negative comments.

## CURRICULUM: THE MISSING PIECE

The questions in this study's survey focused on policy contexts, administrative requirements and working conditions for OCCs. As a result, the findings cannot fully indicate how OCCs articulate, value and assess student learning in work-based settings. Yet, OCCs would have the expertise and experience to speak to these subjects, particularly as Alberta Education implements competency focused curriculum and embarks on a wholesale revision of provincial school curricula.

Curricular issues related to off-campus learning demand further investigation as part of broader research on the work and professional leadership of OCCs. Beyond a handful of exemplars in the *Off-Campus Education Handbook* and general descriptions of competencies provided in Alberta Education's (2011) *Framework for Student Learning*, OCCs have little or no guidance with respect to structuring student work experience as a pedagogically sound and structured learning experience.

This report aims to frame the desired learning outcomes for off-campus education in terms of a larger conversation about the purposes of education, which are not well articulated in the current curriculum reform efforts in the province. Such framing includes the need to recognize that "plurality is our state of affairs globally, and good education will provide the freedom to explore that diversity and our potential for change here in Alberta" (ATA 2015, 6). In this context, Alberta's teaching profession believes that vocationalism, human development and citizenship are three possible, valued outcomes of any endeavour in public education. The key question is not about the prioritization of these outcomes. Rather, the question is how can these outcomes coexist, particularly when they are not always seen as complementary and may in fact compete with one another in the popular media and for international rankings (Sellar, Thompson and Rutkowski 2017).

## NEXT STEPS

The report concludes with a set of questions to guide future efforts to improve the professional capacity of OCCs. These questions prompt examination of the administrative burdens of setting up and monitoring off-campus education, as well as steps the ATA can take to advocate for OCCs. An additional set of questions, tied to the policy issues explored in the Policy Contexts and Policy Background sections of this report, guide the next steps in developing and refining a meaningful and inclusive curriculum for off-campus, vocational and experiential learning.

## INTRODUCTION

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The study that follows reports on the work experiences and observations of Alberta off-campus coordinators (OCCs). The central role of the OCC is to liaise with community employers to offer Alberta's secondary high school students work experience (or work-based learning) opportunities for which students receive high school credits. OCCs, alongside school-based practitioners who teach Alberta's Career and Technology programs, are responsible for the streams of high school courses that have traditionally been described as vocational education, or vocational education and training (VET).

Across North America, VET has a history of marginalization in secondary schools (Schuetze 2003; Taylor 2016). Hyslop-Margison (2000, 26) traces this back to a Western philosophical tradition of mind-body dualism, in which the body is cast as a “source of irrational appetite, sensory error and moral instability.” In contrast, training the mind is thought to lead to truth and nobility of character. Academic subjects have thus always enjoyed higher status in schooling. The source of this marginalization is not limited to philosophy, however. The work of the physical body—all forms of manual labour, that is—has historically been associated with lower social status. Occupations accessed through university degrees, on the other hand, have historically carried greater monetary and status rewards. Therefore, the vocational education that is marginalized in school settings maps onto larger patterns of social stratification by occupation. More recently, this subject has been addressed by cultural philosopher Matthew Crawford (2009) whose book, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, has helped to broaden the definition of success in school.

To study the experiences of Alberta's OCCs, then, is also to peer into the role of schooling in social stratification. The investigation of such relationships comes at a critical time. Canada, like other developed postindustrial countries, including many members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), continues to place its faith in education to promote economic development. Greater emphasis on trades, technology and midskill occupations are part of policy platforms that seek stronger linkages between schooling and employer needs (Taylor 2016). At the same time, youth are struggling to transition to established positions within the labour market—a global phenomenon that has been exacerbated since the recessionary downturn of 2008/09 (OECD 2009; International Labour Organization 2012).

The sample for the survey on which this report is based is not large, but the findings are rich enough to contribute to this timely discussion. From a policy perspective, the province's Career and Technology Studies (CTS) and Off-Campus Learning programs are poised to play a much more significant role in the lives of Alberta's youth. The province has declared an emphasis on equity in public education. To deliver on this policy aim, forthcoming curriculum changes will have to maximize opportunities for all students to explore and develop their gifts, talents and interests. This cannot be achieved with a narrow



focus on academic achievement (Biesta 2015) or through some ill-defined policy borrowing from the OECD focused on 21st-century competencies (ATA 2015). In Alberta, off-campus education, CTS, place-based education, community service and other experientially oriented learning can play a vital role in curriculum changes designed to better fulfill the potential of all students. The challenge is to take an integrated approach to educational development that considers the linkage between our aspirations for student learning, teachers' conditions of practice and the public's understanding of how we define success in a school (ATA 2015, 14–16).

## POLICY CONTEXTS

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As practitioners are well aware, the policy contexts for youth school-to-work transitions are complex. Front-line teachers are most directly affected by jurisdictional and provincial policies. However, these immediate relationships are influenced by multiple stakeholders. Youth transitions involve local businesses, trade and professional associations, nongovernmental organizations, public-private partnerships, and postsecondary institutions.

These relationships are shaped in turn by policy, economic and social conditions that are national and international in scope. Many of these conditions will be familiar to readers: globalized labour and education markets, neoliberalism, new managerialism in the public sector, accountability, the ascent of the “knowledge economy,” and the decline of unionized labour (Ball 2012; Rizvi and Lingard 2006). For young adults, regardless of the pathways chosen, these conditions add up to uncertain labour markets and later entry into career positions (Bell and Benes 2012; International Labour Organization [ILO] 2012). Today’s youth have grown up with the message that they will have to train and change jobs several times over their adult lives (Taylor 2016).

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) IN CANADA

Compared to other countries with advanced economies, Canada, along with the United States, is characterized by a weak coupling between education and labour markets (Davies and Hammack 2005; Graham, Shier and Eisenstat 2014). This means that employers and the tertiary education institutions do not coordinate their efforts toward educational outcomes that match (at least approximately) the needs of the labour market (Schuetze 2003; Watt-Malcolm 2011). Improved data collection and career guidance are among the strategies that have been proposed to redress the problem of mismatches between educational attainment and labour market needs (Alexander 2016; Lerman 2014).

Canada is also characterized by persistent marginalization of its trades occupations, despite ongoing demand for skilled trades in the labour market (Graham, Shier and Eisenstat 2014; Lehmann, Taylor and Wright 2014; Molgat, Deschenaux and LeBlanc 2011). The low regard for trades is cited as a barrier to youth exploring and entering VET (Schuetze 2003; Taylor 2016). As Taylor (2016) details, Canada has historically relied on immigration rather than training for skilled labour. Canada’s education system also has a long history of favouring general, academically oriented education over streaming. Canada does not have a tradition of employer engagement in VET and, currently, Canada is one of the lowest ranked OECD countries in terms of employer investment in workforce training (Connelly, Blair and Ko 2013; Munro 2014). This has consequences for the availability of work experience and apprenticing opportunities for VET-oriented youth (Lerman 2014).

Scholars have contrasted Canada with other countries like Germany, Norway and Switzerland, where many more students pursue a vocational route coming out of high school (Lerman 2014). These countries also have lower youth unemployment rates than Canada (Lerman 2014; Taylor 2016). Although Canadian provinces have many initiatives modelled on the successes of other countries, these initiatives tend to be regional and are not scaled to consistent levels either provincially or nationally. Connelly, Blair and Ko (2013) describe a “patchwork” of initiatives, with little meaningful communication across provinces. Echoing the conclusions of prior policy analysis, the authors observe that advances in Canadian education are hindered by lack of data, and lack of national-level institutions that could facilitate better communication across provincial borders (Connelly, Blair and Ko 2014; Alexander 2016).

Because of these weaknesses, progress toward improved school-to-work transitions for youth has been, at best, slow. In 2007, Alison Taylor identified several trends in Canadian youth transitions: mandatory career planning and/or career education in high school; increased emphasis on experiential learning (including work experience, service learning, internships and cooperative education); and decentralized planning and preferences for locally developed, multistakeholder partnerships. Taylor also found challenges associated with keeping CTS curriculum current, as well as obtaining and using outcomes data. In the almost 10 years since Taylor’s report for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, it appears that little has changed. Connelly, Blair and Ko’s (2013) national-level policy scan suggests that most of the concerns identified by Taylor have yet to be resolved. Participation and investment in VET for youth remains suboptimal. Lack of data on outcomes makes it difficult to assess the outcomes of programs aimed to improve the reach and effectiveness of VET.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) IN ALBERTA

Until the May 2015 election of a New Democratic Party (NDP) government, education policy in Alberta had been grounded in three pillars that defined school success in an economic trajectory.<sup>1</sup> The *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12—2015/16* (Alberta Education 2015, 3) states,

The fundamental goal of education in Alberta is to inspire all students to achieve success and fulfillment, and reach their full potential by developing the competencies of Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens with an Entrepreneurial Spirit, who contribute to a strong and prosperous economy and society.

As policy pillars, the “three Es”—engaged learners, ethical citizens and entrepreneurial spirit—invite further analysis, in that they may be interpreted as aligning with different and potentially conflicting value systems. As a key example, “entrepreneurialism” calls for economic initiative fuelling the expansion and diversification of capitalism, whereas “engagement” and “ethical citizenship” are more likely to be associated with the noneconomic aspects of individual and collective well-being. Balancing economic and social goals of education—a perennial dilemma in public education—poses compelling challenges for present and future curriculum development in Alberta, particularly for off-campus education, CTS and other vocation-oriented initiatives that place the worlds of education and work in very close proximity.

While these three pillars are not profiled in recent government publications, an ambiguously defined vision for curriculum reform positions preparation for work and economic integration as key to the province’s educational development:

Students’ worlds are increasingly being shaped by their abilities to use digital technologies to meet the evolving demands of social relationships, the workplace and a diversified economy. Alberta’s economic diversification requires a skilled workforce that is capable of contributing and adjusting to technological change and evolving workplace requirements for innovative and highly developed skills (Alberta Education 2017, 17).

The shift in government’s focus from an explicit commitment to an economic visioning of education reform—articulated in the “three Es”—to a broader, socially progressive agenda was embedded in the announcement of an ambitious \$60 million curriculum renewal project to be conducted over six years. In a detailed analysis of the contradictory impulses of the government’s reform agenda, Stiles (2017) examined the Future Ready program, announced in June 2016, for which “material will be

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, many of the policy documents generated by the Conservative government have not been altered or removed from active websites. *Inspiring Action on Education* and the “three Es” may or may not, in their present forms, continue to reflect NDP policy priorities. The document does not, as of April 2017, appear to have a direct link on Alberta Education websites. Despite efforts to clarify the status of the “three Es,” their position with respect to curriculum reform remains unclear.

developed to teach students financial literacy, climate change, the history of indigenous people and residential schools, and gender identity” (CBC News 2016a).

Revealing even more of the government’s ambitious vision, Stiles (2017) discusses how, in announcing this program, the minister of education promised that “the department is looking at teaching computer coding to students” (CBC News 2016a). Later that fall, the government’s investment in Future Ready was further indicated when the environment minister addressed education students at the University of Lethbridge, stating, “Certainly among teachers and those who teach teachers there’s an appetite to see good constructive changes that are going to make sure that the province is ready for the future” (CBC News 2016b). The minister’s rationale for the curriculum changes enthusiastically focused on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics):

The workforce has changed a lot, society has changed a lot, and the economy has changed a lot in the last 30 years.... Our school curriculum and the tools that teachers have to deliver content have to change as well.... We need to make sure that students have the right skills in math, science and technology so that they’re ready for the innovative, creative economy that we know is going to require some of those really technological skills. (CBC News 2016b)

Such policy pronouncements are not unique to Alberta. Generally, Alberta’s public education policies are similar in thrust to those in Canada’s postsecondary education and training sector, and attempt to address the complexities of education reform in the context of uncertain domestic economic circumstances driven by global forces. These policies

- aim to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of learners;
- encourage public institutions to partner with industry and nongovernmental organizations to identify areas of need and to design and deliver effective education and work experience programs; and
- are designed to allow schools, industry and other stakeholders the flexibility to grow and change in response to local social and economic conditions.

These strategies also reflect broader policy approaches being taken by OECD countries in both public and tertiary education sectors.

## ALBERTA'S CTS CURRICULUM—A NEW VOCATIONALISM

CTS was introduced by Alberta Learning in 1998 in response to a failing and outdated vocational education system that was attracting fewer and fewer students (Taylor 2007; Williamson 2004). CTS was one version of the “new vocationalism,” which was intended to create stronger connections between technical and general education, and to redress criticisms that vocational education was focused too narrowly on technical skills (Lerman 2014; Taylor 2016). In subsequent years, allowable work experience credits expanded (Williamson 2004). CTS curriculum and programs also expanded. Now CTS is a complex constellation of modularized courses covering 28 “occupational areas.” “Credentialized pathways” are a subset of CTS curricula that lead students, through various program mechanisms, toward credentials recognized by outside institutions.

## OFF-CAMPUS EDUCATION

The *Off-Campus Education Handbook* (Alberta Education 2010), which outlines the off-campus programs that a school jurisdiction can offer, both defines and guides implementation of off-campus education.

With a pedagogical philosophy centred on experiential learning, off-campus education consists of, according to Alberta Education (2010, 1), programs that “allow senior high school students to gain practical experience as they apply and expand their knowledge, skills and attitudes in contexts that will assist them in making wise decisions regarding their future education, training and employment on leaving senior high school and allow for the smooth transition from school to work and/or post-secondary institutions.” Further touted as “a set of planned educational experiences designed to enable students to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes related to work and other life roles” (Alberta Education 2010, 1), Alberta Education’s definition reflects the exploratory and investigative aims of off-campus education (Watts et al 1996 [see Appendix B]).

In outlining the implementation of off-campus education, the *Off-Campus Education Handbook* describes the responsibilities of jurisdictions, school administrators and OCCs. The handbook makes evident that OCCs must manage an important subset of professional skills for which they may be more or less trained and prepared. The complexity of the OCC’s role is reflected in the size of the *Off-Campus Education Handbook*, which is 200 pages long and incorporates guidelines for practices as diverse as curriculum development for undefined placements, outreach and management of relationships with local employers, career counselling, program evaluation and student assessments.

## POLICY BACKGROUND: THE ROLE OF OFF-CAMPUS EDUCATION IN ALBERTA'S SCHOOLS

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Canada has one of the best educated populations among OECD countries in terms of college diploma and university degree attainment. However, these successes are not matched in trades and vocational sectors. There are two key ways of thinking about the causes and consequences of this state of affairs.

### HUMAN CAPITAL: SCHOOLING FOR WORK

The weaker position of vocational education and training (VET) relative to academic streams has been framed as a problem of matching skills to labour market needs. In policy, this is the primary argument for raising the profile of learning for trades and midskill careers: the goal is to effectively “match” youth learning trajectories and transitions to work with high-needs labour market sectors.

There are indeed some indications that educational attainment in Canada is misaligned with labour market needs (Miner 2014). While industry continues to predict skilled trades shortages (Miner 2014), there is growing consensus that the underemployment of academic graduates is a substantial problem (Alexander 2016; Bell and Benes 2012). Overcoming “barriers to success” for Canadian youth is among four key policy recommendations offered in a recent report from the CD Howe Institute (Alexander 2016). Increased cooperative education and apprenticeships in skilled trades are among the recommended strategies to educate youth about and for future career opportunities in higher-needs sectors.

Federal and provincial governments, aware of these concerns, have attempted to boost youth enrolments in vocational education and training (VET). Canada’s federal government has committed funding to develop and expand preapprenticeship program for youth (Liberal Party of Canada 2016). In Alberta, the downturn of oil prices and resulting recession has amplified the imperative to diversify the province’s economy and workforce, and the provincial government has declared economic diversification a priority (Alberta’s NDP 2016). However, efforts continue to be hindered by an uninterrupted historical stigmatization of trades as undignified and “dirty” work (Schuetze 2003; Taylor 2016). In the face of these concerns, the policy challenge for provincial governments is to overcome the stigmatization of trades and to present midskill vocations, technical work and trades as valid and worthy career options for all students.

### HOLISTIC EDUCATION: SCHOOLING FOR HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

An alternative perspective would position work-based and experiential learning opportunities as critical complements to classroom-based learning for all students. Support for this approach, more generally under the rubric of “experiential education,” appears in the educational philosophy of John Dewey (1938), who argued that active inquiry and experimentation with “real world” applications was

essential to developing all young people into capable, adaptive adults. Critically, Dewey understood education as, first and foremost, preparation for democratic citizenship, developing the self for life in a democratic society (Innes 2004; Schecter 2011). Dewey’s educational philosophy contrasts with human capital theory, in which experience primarily serves to develop knowledge and skills for employability.

From this holistic perspective, the kinds of learning that currently are “siloe” in vocational learning streams are important learning experiences from which all students can and should benefit. Rather than pertaining to “skills training” that is perceived as an inferior alternative to academic routes of study, “vocational education” becomes a means of expanding and integrating aesthetic, embodied and cognitive dimensions of learning (Hyslop-Margison 2000). For Dewey, a more holistic understanding of vocationalism could contribute to an explicit agenda to break down social stratification, prominently demarcated by occupational classes. Hyslop-Margison (2000, para 18) summarizes, “Dewey envisioned vocational education as providing all learners with the critical spirit and intellectual capacity to transform an industrial and educational structure designed to reproduce class divisions.”

## THE ALBERTA TEACHERS’ ASSOCIATION: PERSPECTIVES ON ALBERTA’S SCHOOLS

The ATA’s vision for curriculum renewal in Alberta’s schools—outlined in *Renewing Alberta’s Promise: A Great School for All*—builds in part on Biesta’s (2015) proposition that the purposes of education derive from three essential domains: qualification, socialization and subjectification. Biesta’s “qualification” domain is roughly synonymous with the vocationalism described above, that is, education for the purpose of employment or “employability.” Socialization describes the role of education in socializing children and youth into norms, values, and cultural knowledge and practices within a given society. Biesta’s “socialization” domain corresponds with Dewey’s notion of “education for citizenship” described above. Finally, Biesta (2015, 77) proposes education for “subjectification,” which he describes as “the way in which children and young people come to exist as subjects of initiative and responsibility rather than as objects of the actions of others.” Whereas qualifications and socialization develop the young person as a member of society, subjectification corresponds roughly to the humanist aim of self-actualization.

The ATA’s approach to CTS and Off-Campus education aligns with the principles outlined in *Renewing Alberta’s Promise: A Great School for All*. The systemic changes proposed by the ATA aim to make equity the core driver of educational change in Alberta. Such change has been modelled in international partnerships linking high schools in Alberta, Finland and Norway, based on a broad framework for educational development articulated in *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta* (ATA 2012). Informed by the international network that examined the bias in Alberta schools toward a narrow “academic” definition of success, the ATA called for curriculum reform that developed consensus on “the desired purposes of school, and the attributes of a graduate of elementary, junior high and high school” (ATA 2015, 12). An equitable school system is one that broadens the definitions of school success and is grounded in the recognition that not all students come to school with



the supports they need to succeed. What is necessary, therefore, is an effort to allocate public resources to integrate and balance the qualification, subjectification and socialization domains of schooling.

Equity goals are also clearly articulated in Alberta's *Inspiring Action on Education*, a policy framework launched by the Alberta government following extensive public consultation about desired futures for public education (Government of Alberta 2010). In particular, *Inspiring Action* was a significant departure from previous policy work, which focused almost exclusively on human capital development and economic competitiveness as the goals of public education—Biesta's qualification domain. The front matter of *Inspiring Action* still proposes economic development as an important educational outcome, but also emphasizes the development of "citizens who share common democratic values of freedom, equality, compassion and respect for diversity" (Government of Alberta 2010, 1).

The general policy position of *Inspiring Action* thus aligns with many of the major points articulated by the ATA's (2015) framework, suggesting that there is potential to find and move toward a system that nurtures the capabilities of all children and youth (Biesta 2015; Nussbaum 2011; Walker 2012). However, the ATA (2015) asserts that, in the wake of *Inspiring Action*, Alberta's government has "produced few concrete changes in schools outside of the network of high schools engaged in flexibility projects" (p 18) grounded on the principle of excellence through equity.

A policy framework released by Alberta Education in 2011 proposes competencies as a basis for future educational change in the province. The *Framework for Student Learning* (Alberta Education 2011) aims to assist in the development of curriculum and the articulation of learning outcomes that reflect the goals of *Inspiring Action*. The competency-focused *Framework for Student Learning* places literacy and numeracy at the core of student outcomes, with additional competencies accompanying these foundations.

The ATA takes issue less with the content of these proposed competencies than with the potential for them to be interpreted and implemented in ways that simply perpetuate existing systemic problems. In particular, these problems include an excessive focus on standardized testing, as well as an overspecified curriculum that leaves teachers with insufficient time and latitude to focus on learning processes. The *Framework for Student Learning* was largely aspirational, with few details of how competencies would be woven into curriculum and assessed. Thoughtful attention to establishing a more inclusive and holistic approach to learning is necessary to prevent competencies from being reduced to a layer of new expectations for school success (which might result in more standardized and technocratic measurements). The weight that the province presently places on standardized testing and core academic subjects conflicts with the very flexibility and equity that the Alberta government claims to value.

As an alternative to standardized testing regimes, the ATA proposes that the best route to a responsive and equitable public education system is one that develops the professional capital of teachers and builds local capacity, in schools and communities, to offer students rich, interdisciplinary learning. This vision for education can be furthered by more flexible curriculum, lower student-teacher ratios, and assessment practices that focus on learning processes.

## STUDY DESCRIPTION

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The Alberta Teachers' Association launched this study of the province's OCCs in response to anecdotes from the field suggesting that OCCs face challenges meeting the requirements of their roles. In particular, concerns emerged regarding OCCs receiving insufficient professional development or scheduled time to properly monitor and evaluate students' off-campus learning.

To address such concerns, in the spring of 2016, a survey containing demographic questions, 36 closed-response questions and 4 open-response questions was designed by a working group consisting of four off-campus teachers. Researchers obtained a list of approximately 300 OCCs who were then invited to participate in the online survey. The invitations were sent to individuals identified on school or school authority websites as OCCs and to those who had attended professional development events in the previous year tied to off-campus education programming.

Researchers compiled descriptive statistics and coded open-response questions. From May to June 2016, researchers received 113 responses for a response rate of 38 per cent. This response rate is, at best, an estimate given the potential inaccuracy of e-mail addresses and the turnover of OCCs.

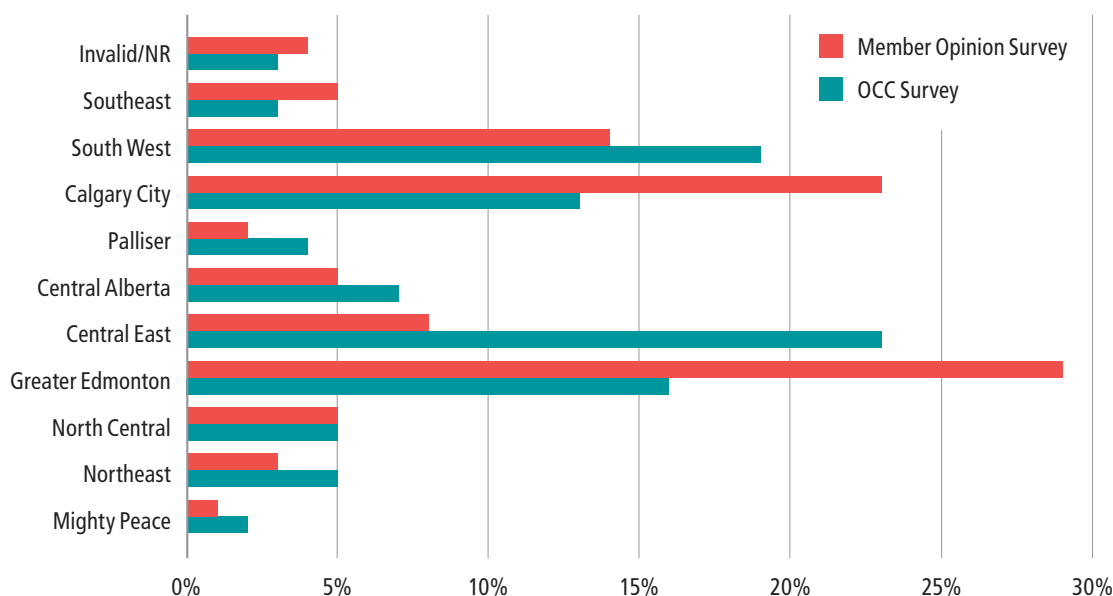
## FINDINGS

### I. SAMPLE POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

There are a number of challenges associated with determining the representativeness of the sample. In particular, there is no comprehensive provincial database of OCCs; therefore, determining the demographics of that cohort of Alberta teachers is difficult. The general characteristics of the Alberta teaching population are known from ATA databases and previous surveys. The following information is intended to provide some insight, though limited, into the sample population.

As Figure 1 suggests, the two large urban areas, Calgary and Edmonton, are underrepresented in the sample population. Without a provincial database of OCCs, it is difficult to determine the degree to which the cohort of OCCs represents the general profile of Alberta's teaching force. For example, there may in fact be higher proportions of OCCs in smaller centres.

*Figure 1: Response by Convention Area*

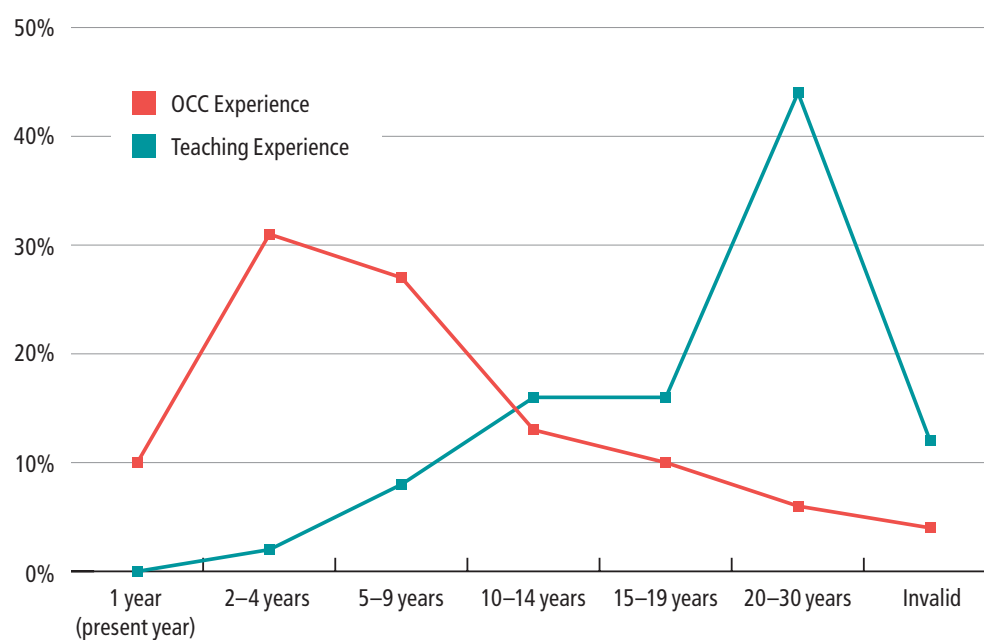


For the survey, 51 per cent of respondents were male, 44 per cent were female and 4 per cent chose not to provide their gender. If the OCC cohort aligns with the general teaching population (which is only 22 per cent male), then males are significantly overrepresented in this sample.

Survey respondents were more likely than the general teaching population to have 20 or more years of teaching experience. The median range of off-campus experience was 2–4 years (31 per cent of the sample), closely followed by 5–9 years of experience (27 per cent).

These figures suggest that OCCs are likely to be experienced male teachers who move into off-campus positions at mid-career stages.

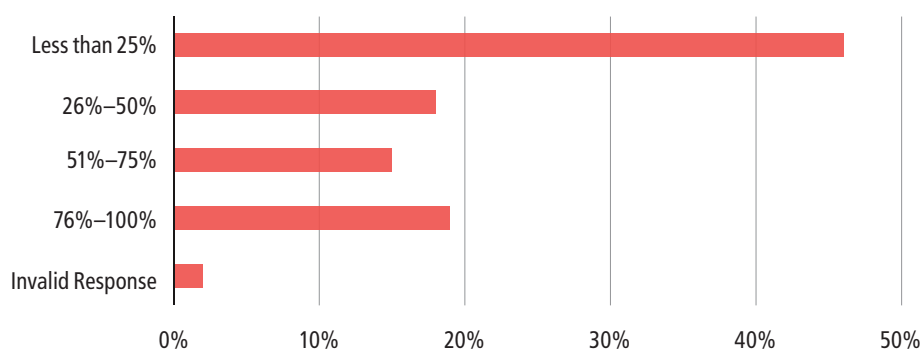
*Figure 2: Teaching Experience and Off-Campus Experience*



### Off-Campus Teaching Assignments

Only 19 per cent of the respondents reported being full-time OCCs (ie, more than three-quarters of their overall teaching assignment). The largest group—46 per cent of the sample—were teachers whose off-campus work constituted less than one-quarter of their overall teaching assignment. Most teachers in the sample, then, are juggling their off-campus duties with school-based teaching or other school-based duties.

*Figure 3: Percentage of Assignment Allocated to Off-Campus Position*



The majority of respondents (81 per cent) are responsible for students in only one school, while others (11 per cent) supervise students at two or more schools. The remaining teachers are responsible for whole districts, either as OCCs (3 per cent) or district coordinators who work with OCCs (3 per cent). Several respondents commented that their regular assignments took different forms over summer months, mostly in the form of contracts to monitor work experience at the district level. Coordinators may also be charged with specialization areas, such as the Green Certificate.

Giving [students] the opportunity in dual-credit programs to see what future lies beyond high school is a valuable opportunity that helps re-engage in high school with new hope for the future.

~Study participant

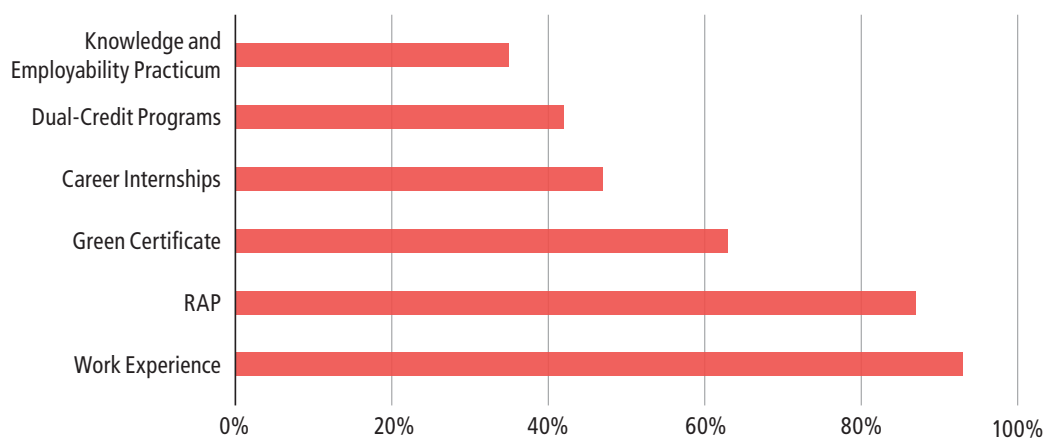
Supervision of RAP (87 per cent) and work experience (93 per cent) make up the bulk of OCCs' work related to this role. Whereas RAP, Green Certificate and dual-credit programs are well defined in terms of curriculum and learning outcomes, work experience placements often require OCCs to play a more hands-on role in creating, monitoring and evaluating learning objectives. OCCs are more likely to successfully execute this role if they have established relationships with employers and become familiar with the particularities of the employment sector. Again, a recurring theme emerges

in the field related to the centrality of sustaining a positive relationship with employers in the context of limited time and resources, as well as the growing complexity of student populations.

It would be helpful to have more time to meet with employers and interact with students. As well, to address some unique learning opportunities for specific individual students, time to meet with them and assist them with applications, etc would be greatly appreciated. Teaching a full schedule with Work Experience being allotted 1 class period and 100 students enrolled is not manageable.

~Study participant

Figure 4: Forms of Off-Campus Education Supervised

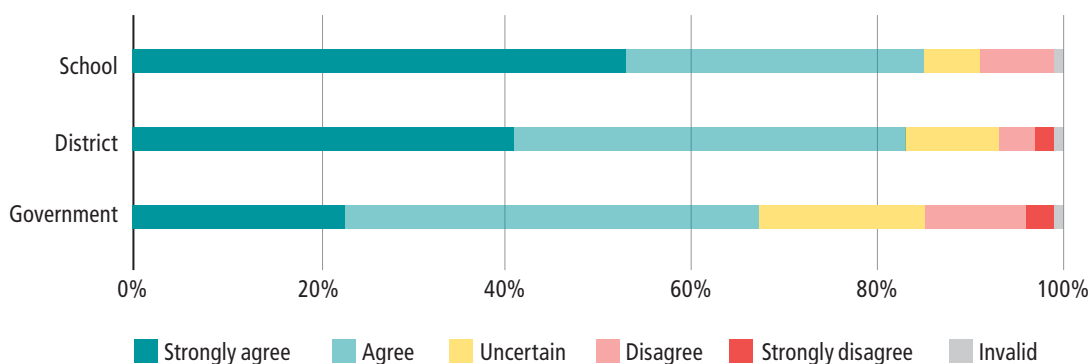


Overall, the descriptors of respondents' teaching assignments show great variations in content and teaching assignment configuration, particularly with the complexities related to the expansion of dual-credit programming.

## II. PERCEIVED VALUE OF OFF-CAMPUS EDUCATION

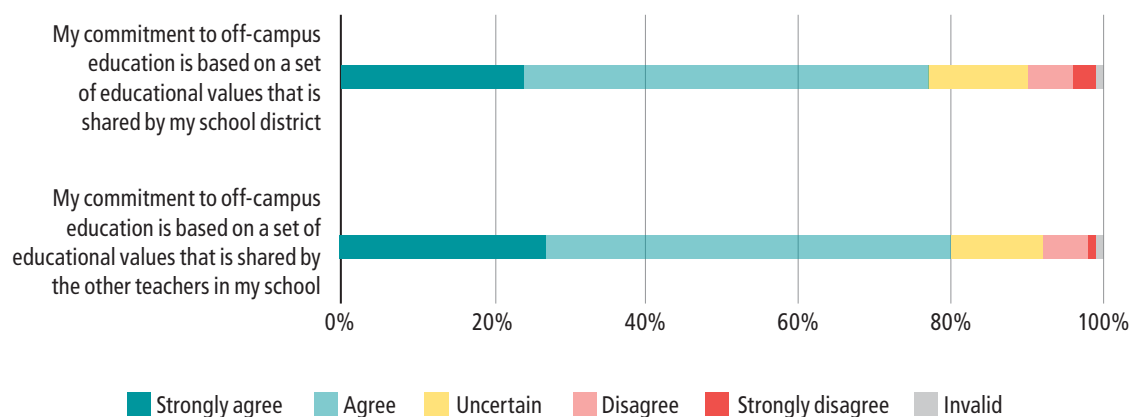
The majority of respondents believed that their work was valued in their schools and by their districts. First, 85 per cent agreed that off-campus education was valued in their schools as a “meaningful high school experience and pathway to success.” Similarly, 82 per cent agreed that off-campus education was valued at the district level. Fewer respondents (68 per cent) agreed that government values off-campus education, although there was less certainty with respect to this. As illustrated in Figure 5, certainty of support and commitment from others declines as that support is further removed from teachers’ immediate daily experiences.

*Figure 5: Perceived Value of Off-Campus Education by Schools, School Jurisdictions and Province*



In Figure 6, respondents had frequently agreed that their educational values, as they apply to off-campus education, are shared by teachers and districts, suggesting that most schools and districts have achieved clear messaging within their jurisdictions about off-campus opportunities for students.

*Figure 6: Shared Educational Values at School and School Jurisdiction Levels*



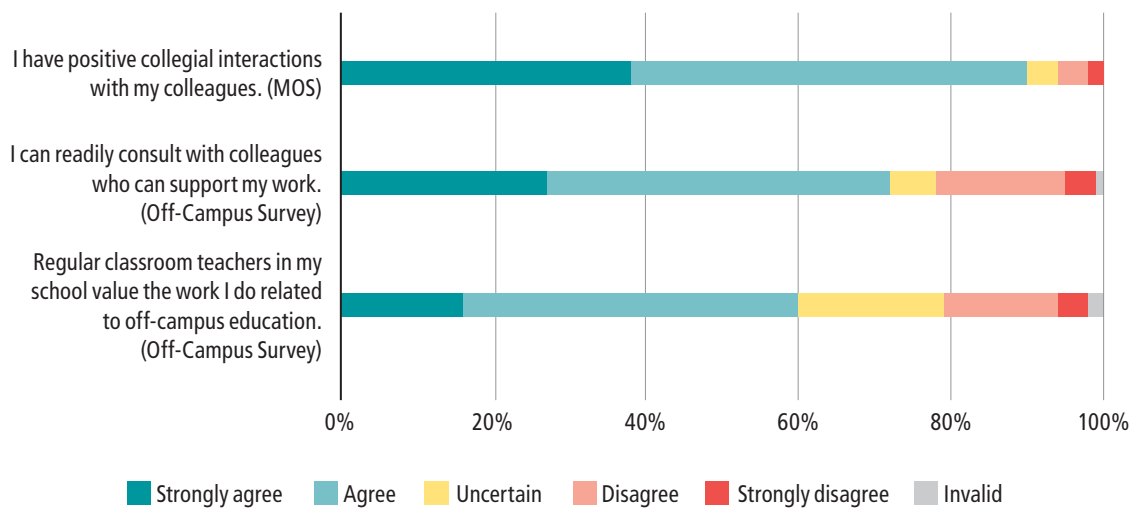
Schools increasingly see the value of off-campus education, as evidenced by the number of requests I now get from schools to have students learning off campus and [by] the higher levels of engagement between schools and the community.

~Study participant

If the aims of off-campus learning are valued by the administrator and other teachers in the school, it stands to reason that the OCC will feel supported. Anecdotally, there are some indications that OCCs may feel that they are misunderstood or unsupported by the other teachers in the school. Yet, evaluations of relationships with colleagues were somewhat positive, with the majority (60 per cent) of OCCs agreeing that their colleagues “value the work I do related to off-campus education.” Further, 72 per cent of OCCs agreed that they could access and consult with supportive colleagues.<sup>2</sup>

Though somewhat positive, these results still suggest that OCCs may feel marginalized or isolated in school. Further, comments from survey respondents reinforce an impression that a significant minority of off-campus teachers feel that their work is not valued on par with classroom-based learning.

**Figure 6: Perceived Collegial Support**



At the school level, our off-campus program is often treated as a “penalty box” by high school administrators in which students are sent to us for a time due to poor behaviour. This, in turn, fortifies the negative stigma attached to outreach and off-campus programs.

~Study participant

<sup>2</sup> One additional consideration is how respondents interpreted the meaning of “colleagues”. In the context of the questions, colleagues might refer to teachers in one’s own school, other OCCs in one’s school jurisdiction or both. Open responses at the end of the survey make it clear that OCCs place a very high value on opportunities to exchange knowledge and best practices with other OCCs in their districts.



### III. PROGRESS AND POSITIVE CHANGES

In the first open-response question on the survey, respondents were asked to describe improvements or positive trends affecting off-campus education:

Considering your work in off-campus education, what are the two biggest positive improvements, if any, you have seen in terms of the overall support you receive to help you in meeting the needs of your students? Please specify if these are at the school, district or provincial level.

Responses to this question focused almost exclusively on perceived support from school administrators and school jurisdictions. One respondent noted feeling supported at the provincial level, describing positive contact with Alberta Education. Several respondents noted Careers: The Next Generation as a support. Others also remarked that they were generally pleased by the commitment of their communities and community employers.

#### School Administrators and Colleagues

At the school level, comments largely focused on administrators who structured timetables and other duties to allow the OCC to conduct site visits during the school day. This is noteworthy, as many respondents noted at various points in the survey that lack of time and flexibility during the school day caused them to use their own personal time to complete visits.

Respondents shared some specific strategies at the school level that they appreciated:

- “My school and district have allowed me to simplify the forms required by students, parents and employers to make it easier for these stakeholders to participate.”
- “Allowing contact with an employer by phone or e-mail has been helpful.”
- “I am given the freedom to flex time for evening and weekend visits.”
- “I am removed from many other duties such as supervision to be able to react in a timely way to emergent issues.”
- “I have an 80 per cent flexible day to meet with students, staff and employers. I have a classroom turned into a career centre.”
- “My school provides one class per day assigned to off campus.”
- “I have the assistance from an EA to support administrative work.”
- “Our principal has ensured that we maintain two teachers in our off-campus department, and this allows our office to be open from 8:15 (45 minutes before school) until 4:00 (1/2 hour after school) and during lunch hour as well. This makes it easier for students who need help and guidance.”

Respondents also noted support from their administrators and school colleagues, particularly when colleagues took concrete steps to show that they valued off-campus learning, for example, by “opening their classroom for presentations and visits,” or providing “access to students during class time.” Some simply appreciated that staff were “getting what we do,” or understanding “how much untapped potential the program could have.”

### School Jurisdiction

Respondents were less specific in their comments when it came to the support of their school jurisdictions. “Support” may have been mentioned without a great deal of information about what this support looks like. However, most comments about positive changes and progress at the school district level reflected three key forms of support that stem from the jurisdictional level:

*Leadership:* Respondents appreciated when their district offices sent clear messages to schools and the community regarding the importance of off-campus education. “Our district office and trustees are 100 per cent committed to and supportive of our mission,” stated one OCC. Another respondent noted, “Our district has emphasized the importance of kids being able to explore career pathways.”

*Professional Development:* Lack of professional development (PD) is a key concern expressed by study respondents in both open and closed response questions. Some districts fulfill an important role by creating opportunities for OCCs to connect with each other regularly to share information and best practices. Respondents noted that formal PD opportunities for OCCs are scarce; therefore, the expertise of colleagues becomes paramount. As one respondent explained, “The hardest part of this job is that we are always running across a variety of work sites and scenarios where students want to be placed. By drawing on the knowledge of other OCCs I am able to make informed decisions about work placements and student safety.”

*Streamlining Administration:* Respondents are relying on their school districts to streamline the administrative requirements related to the OCC role. One OCC stated that her district “has begun to develop a scope and sequence document and is working to eliminate some of the redundancies.” Another respondent described a process, supported by his jurisdiction and Careers: The Next Generation, to simplify required forms, noting that this “makes it easier for these stakeholders to participate” and promotes “ease of RAP students to register.” Additionally, some districts have employed a district specialist to support CTS and off-campus education. Others are working toward online repositories or other technology-facilitated strategies to improve communication and standardize paperwork.

I have excellent support and flexibility to meet the requirements of my position from my school administration and my district administration. I feel they do value the work I do and see its value to our students. I do not feel there is the same kind of support at the provincial level.

~Study participant

## IV. CHALLENGES

In an open-response question, survey participants were asked to comment on some of the negative changes they had experienced in their roles:

Considering your work in off-campus education, what are the two biggest negative changes you have seen in terms of the support you receive to help you in meeting the needs of your students? Please specify if these are at the school, district or provincial level.

An additional open-response question on the survey asked:

Considering your work in off-campus education, are you able to fulfill your roles and responsibilities? (Consider time, expectations interacting with employers, students and colleagues.)

Because the responses to these two questions overlapped considerably, responses and supporting data from closed-response questions are woven into one section of the findings to highlight some of the challenges that OCCs are experiencing in their roles.

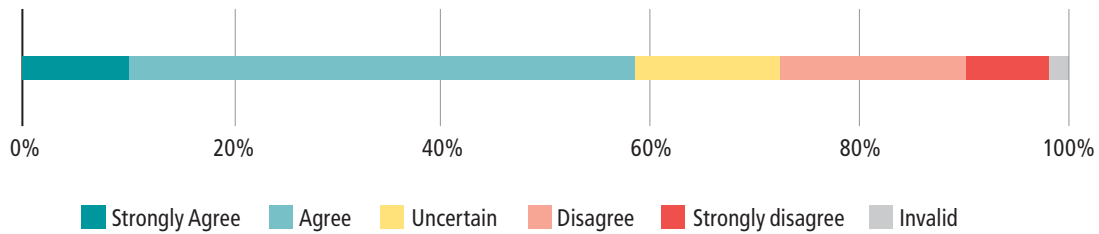
### Meeting Off-Campus Roles and Responsibilities

In their responses to the open-response question on the OCC's roles and responsibilities, about one-quarter indicated they were about to fulfill their roles and responsibilities under present working conditions. Another 17 per cent suggested that it was only possible to fulfill the role if they put in additional time outside of their formal agreements with their employers. Others stated that they were able to manage their role as OCC, but were not able to live up to their own standards. "I must be highly organized, efficient and innovative," said one coordinator. "Having said that, it is also true that I am unable to provide the level of personalized or individual support that I know would contribute to much better results for students."

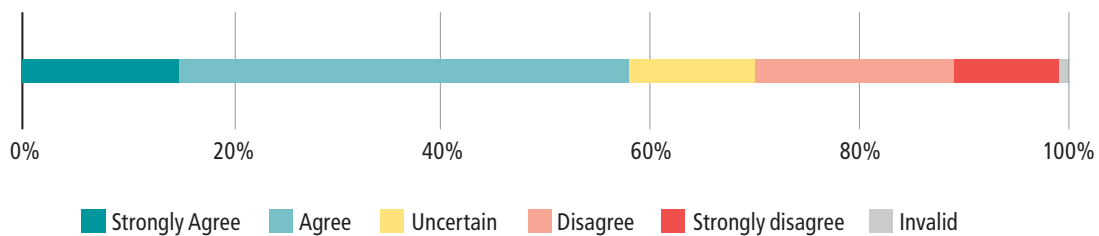
The balance of responses (nearly 60 per cent) to this open-response question was uncertain or negative; that is, respondents did not believe they were able to fulfill their roles and responsibilities as OCCs under their current working arrangements. Respondents attributed this to a combination of school- and district-level decisions as well as to provincial funding cuts to off-campus education. OCCs noted that funding cuts have created "greater pressure on off-campus coordinators to increase production to offset [funding] loss," and made it more difficult to "provide the level of care" expected of teachers and schools.

Figures 8 and 9 report data from closed-response questions that further indicate OCCs' ability to meet the expectations and responsibilities of the position.

*Figure 8: “The expectations to complete my off-campus education responsibilities outside of school hours are reasonable.”*



*Figure 9: “I am fairly compensated for the time and effort required to fulfill my responsibilities related to my off-campus education role.”*



Notably, since the survey was completed in 2016, there have been dramatic changes in the time allotted for OCCs to do their job. The study working group suggests that many schools have decreased the amount of time OCCs have to fulfill this role by adding other teaching assignments and responsibilities or decreasing supports. Again, these changes are in large part due to the changes in funding structure (ie, Tier 4 funding for work experience credits and the move to “block funding”).

The biggest change to my programming came with the introduction of Tier 4 funding. That is, Alberta Education reduced the per credit funding for off-campus education. Further, there was little consultation with school divisions and certainly not [OCCs] regarding the effect that reduced funding would have.

~Study participant

This past year (2016) provincial funding of credits has decreased in work experience from what is called a Tier 1 to Tier 4 level. Less money means we need to reduce teacher time or increase the numbers of students we can provide opportunities for.

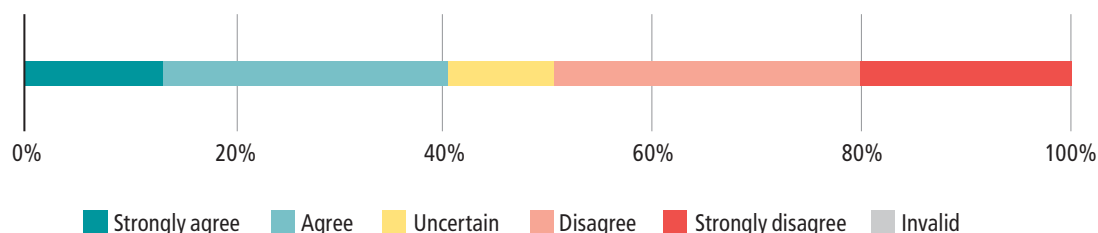
~Study participant

## Site Visits and Employer Relations

By far the greatest negative expressed by respondents was the time required outside of the school day to perform site visits and speak to employers. Accommodating site visits becomes more difficult as the number of students participating in off-campus learning grows. Some OCCs are feeling pressed by a combination of shrinking funding and growing student rosters, making it difficult or impossible to meet the visit requirements. “I have insufficient time to contact all students every 25 work hours,” stated one respondent; “I have time to visit each work site one time.”

Many respondents also noted that, given a dearth of time provided during the school day, they found themselves scheduling employer visits on evenings and weekends. One OCC stated, “The numbers of students has increased [but] the time allotment for me has not, so I am giving more and more of my own personal time to complete the demands of the position.” In the following closed-response question, over half of study respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “I have the time and resources needed to maintain meaningful contact with employers.”

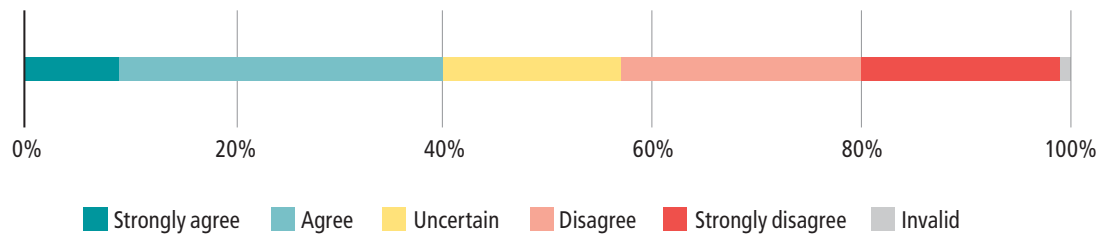
*Figure 10: “I have the time and resources needed to maintain meaningful contact with employers.”*



OCCs stressed that the inability to maintain expected visits to employers has both legal and educative consequences. “Schools, teachers and students are at greater risk if we continue to offer work experience,” stated one study respondent.

There appears to be ambiguity about whether and when it may be acceptable to maintain contact with employers by telephone or e-mail in lieu of site visits. As one respondent observes, “the district-level and provincial-level regulations and requirements are interpreted differently at every school.” The combination of insufficient time for site visits and ambiguity around regulation incentivizes shortcuts, even while OCCs recognize that this is not a desirable course of action. This position is stated clearly by one respondent: “The policy manual is only realistic if you have full time. I know of others who are lying and gaming the system since it is set up to fail.” This same respondent, who also has a regular teaching assignment, determined that 50 students set up for two-week work experience placements would require “five site visits a day. On top of teaching and other responsibilities, this is impossible.”

*Figure 11: “Sometimes I have to bend or break a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.”*

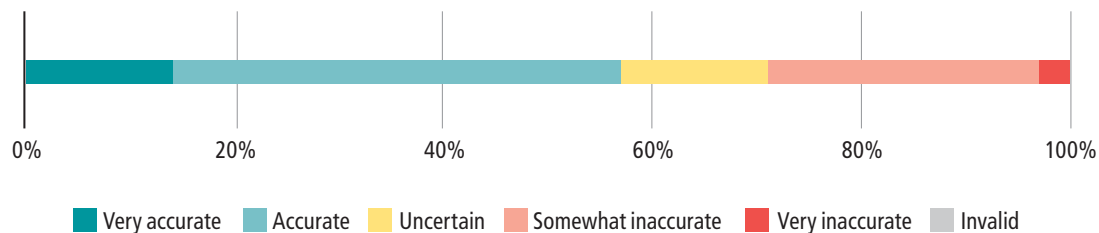


Some OCCs questioned the practicality of standards for visits. “Safety visits/multiple supervisor-teacher contacts are not critical for the typical ‘McJob’ most students have,” stated one respondent, adding that “RAP is a different matter.” Another respondent felt his oversight was at times unnecessary: “In our urban setting our employers have a lot of people checking the safety and continuity in the workforce, so to expect too much interaction with the employer is an interference or negative encounter in the workplace.” Contact requirements could thus be a disincentive for employers to take on students—a problem exacerbated by Alberta’s economic downturn over the past 18 months.

### Administrative Requirements

Many OCCs believe that inconsistent and excessive documentation requirements hinder their ability to focus on relationships with students and employers. Alongside insufficient time to complete their work and lack of professional development, onerous paperwork was a key concern expressed by respondents. In a closed-response survey question, 57 per cent of respondents agreed that “there are processes I must follow in my current role, but that should be done differently.”

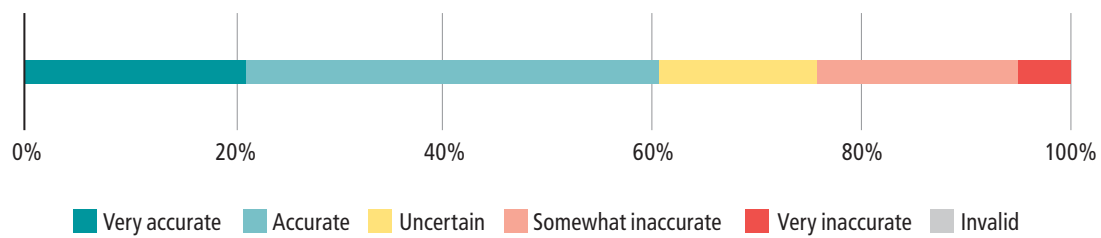
*Figure 12: “There are processes I must follow in my current role, but that should be done differently.”*



For the most part, coordinators appear to trace responsibility for administrative requirements to the provincial level. Districts may or may not play a role in simplifying, streamlining and clarifying these requirements. Survey responses suggest a great deal of variation in routines and expectations across school jurisdictions, making it almost impossible to evaluate the specific conditions that individual coordinators may be facing in their day-to-day work. It is safe to say, however, that “chasing”

or “hunting down” students and employers to complete time sheets and other required forms can be a time-consuming and frustrating process. It is also clear that many OCCs regard their present administrative processes as unnecessarily complex and at times of limited or unclear value. More than half (60 per cent) of respondents concurred that reforms in this area could improve their workload.

*Figure 13: “It would be possible to reduce my workload through the elimination of unnecessary tasks that are currently required of me.”*



On a positive note, survey results suggest that many districts are working toward standardized procedures and technologies to help OCCs with the administrative aspect of their work. One coordinator, for example, noted progress in her district, which “has begun to develop a scope and sequence document and is working to eliminate some of the redundancies of tasks and more than one or two people doing the same job.” The challenge, at both district and provincial levels, is to streamline administrative requirements in ways that ease OCCs’ administrative loads, while allowing for a reasonable degree of flexibility for coordinators to exercise professional judgment to “adapt evaluations or assignments to meet employer/student needs.”

Please work to create a single standardized form for work experience. Too much paper work seems to make employers less likely to want to cooperate. Also a standardized information card for employers regarding the Workers’ Compensation partnership with Alberta [Education].

~Study participant

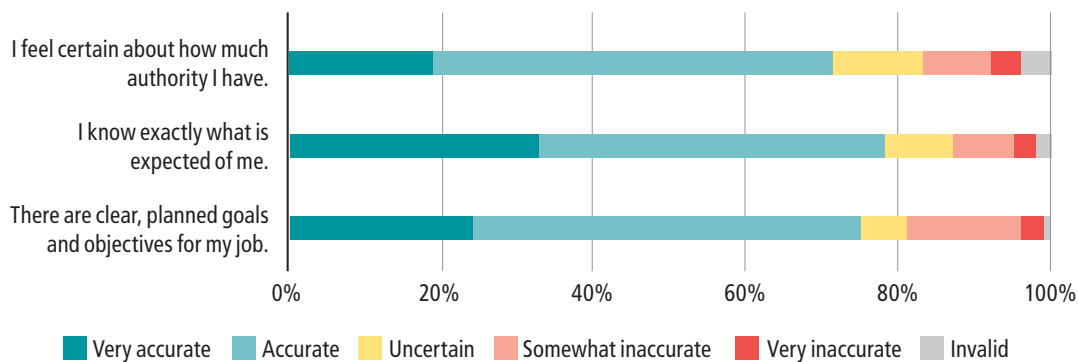
## V. EFFICACY AND JOB SATISFACTION

The balance of closed-response questions in the survey inquired into various aspects of respondents' satisfaction with their working conditions and overall sense of efficacy. In other words, the questions focused on OCCs' perceptions of whether they have the tools, capacity and influence to do their jobs well and have a positive impact on students.

### Clear and Consistent Expectations

Respondents appear to feel reasonably confident that they understand what is expected of an OCC. In closed-response questions, 76 per cent agreed that “there are clear, planned goals and objectives for [the OCC] job.” Replying to similar questions, 78 per cent agreed that “[they] know exactly what is expected of [them]” and 73 per cent felt the statement “I know how much authority I have” was accurate. These questions attend to the clarity and boundaries of the OCC's role and the responses indicate reasonable consistency in how the role is understood across different schools and school districts.

*Figure 14: Clarity of Role Boundaries and Expectations*



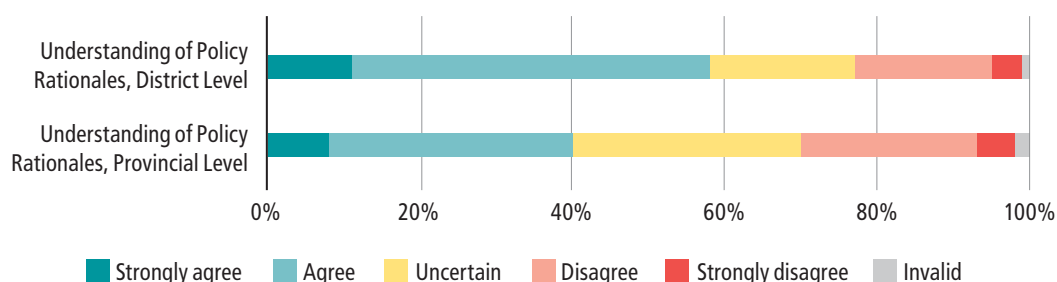
Even as about three-quarters of survey participants indicate clarity of role boundaries and expectations, responses to other questions also suggest that OCCs rely a great deal on their districts and on informal professional development exchanges with colleagues to understand their role. This is problematic given the gaps in professional development described earlier. Given this inconsistency, it may be worthwhile to investigate whether some OCCs “don’t know what they don’t know,” especially given the apparent lack of formal professional development coming from authoritative sources.



## Understanding of Policy Development

Respondents were also asked whether they understand how and why off-campus policies are developed at district and provincial levels. There was more uncertainty and more disagreement expressed in relation to these questions. With respect to the school district level, 56 per cent agreed that they “understand how [their] school district’s policies related to off-campus education are developed.” In comparison, only 39 per cent agreed that they understand provincial-level policy rationales.

*Figure 15: Understanding of Policy Rationale and Development*

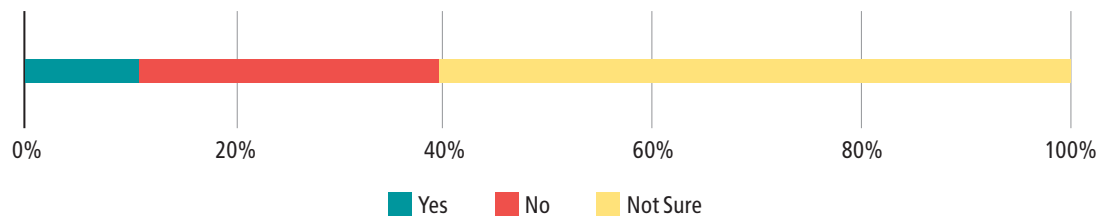


Open-response questions pointed to some issues with respect to policy understanding, particularly at the provincial level. While not all OCCs commented directly on their expectations of Alberta Education, those who did were frequently critical of what they perceived to be a lack of responsiveness and direction. One OCC stated, “With the changes in RAP 15, 25, 35 to the trade-specific course codes, there is a lot of confusion and little support from Alberta Education.” Another respondent remarked, “There was little consultation with school divisions and certainly not [OCCs] regarding the effect that reduced funding would have. Further, there is little contact or support from Alberta Education when it comes to the *Off-Campus Education Handbook* and how programming is offered.” Interpreting the handbook appears to be problematic: one OCC observed, “The expectations are laid out in the handbook, but the practices for each school seem to be vastly different.”

A strong understanding of policy development at district and provincial levels would suggest that OCCs are playing a significant role in the evolution of off-campus education: a particularly important point given recent changes to CTS and off-campus learning tied to the *Framework for Student Learning* and the major curriculum review undertaken by Alberta Education. However, unfortunately, a significant minority of OCCs expressed uncertainty about policy rationales. This will likely weaken their collective capacity for professional advocacy for the role of off-campus learning within broader goals for students’ learning and well-being. Advocacy is also hindered by the lack of communication networks for OCCs beyond collaboration opportunities offered at the district level.

An apparent lack of awareness of policy and policy rationales also links to the finding that 68 per cent of the survey respondents are “not sure” whether their collective agreements contain provisions for off-campus educators.

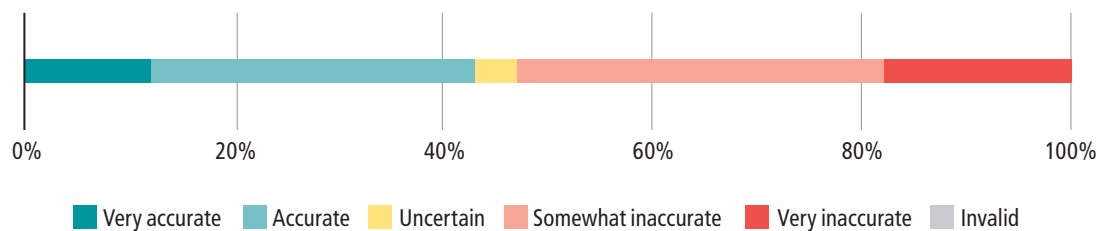
*Figure 16: Does your collective agreement contain provisions related specifically to off-campus education?*



### Working Conditions and Job Satisfaction

Respondents clearly derive personal satisfaction from their work, with 93 per cent indicating that they found their work fulfilling. At the same time, 42 per cent of respondents agreed that they work “under a great deal of tension.”

*Figure 17: “I work under a great deal of tension.”*

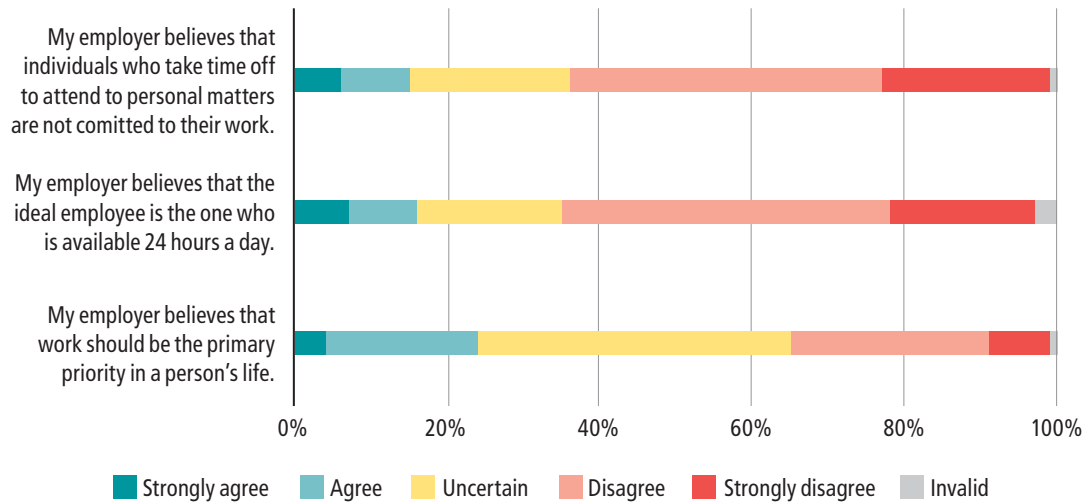


### Perceptions of Employer Expectations

The survey of OCCs also included questions taken from larger national studies of work-life balance and employer expectations in different occupational sectors. Respondents were asked a number of questions about their perceptions of their districts’ expectations around workloads, work-life balance and time commitments.

The questions were designed to measure how employees perceive the values of their employers with respect to time commitments to the job. Taken together, these questions show that, for the most part, respondents believe their districts’ expectations around work-life balance are reasonable. More than three-quarters of survey participants disagreed that employers look disapprovingly on “taking time off work to attend to personal matters.” Further, 63 per cent disagreed that districts idealize an employee who is available 24/7. Read in the context of other survey responses, these questions suggest that respondents perceive the demands on their time to be more the consequence of insufficient resources than district culture.

*Figure 18: Perceptions of School Jurisdictions as Employers*



### Summary

Overall, the study results show that there is a great deal of variability in how OCCs are deployed in their schools and districts, making any global assessment of working conditions difficult. As the preceding analysis suggests, though, satisfaction related to working conditions revolves around

- a supportive school setting, including administrative decisions and leadership that support and validate off-campus learning as a legitimate complement to classroom-based learning;
- clear guidelines and expectations, particularly from the district and province;
- sufficient time and flexibility to fulfill the off-campus role;
- recognition and compensation for time spent off campus fulfilling the off-campus role; and
- a reasonable workload in terms of supervising students.

These themes are expressed consistently across closed- and open-response questions.

There should be a set amount of time allocated to the teacher for a set number of students. After talking to other off-campus teachers it appears that the time given to [OCCs] varies from each school.

~Study participant

## VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The fourth and final open-response question on the survey asked respondents for suggestions on how to improve the OCC position. The question asked:

The Association continues to advocate for improvements to teaching and learning conditions to ensure success for all students. If you could suggest one or two improvements to the off-campus education in your jurisdiction and/or the province, what would these be? Please provide supporting detail.

Most of the responses to this question related directly to the concerns and challenges identified in the preceding sections. In particular, participants requested more time and more flexibility to perform their role, specifically as it pertains to employer visits and especially when these visits encroach unreasonably on OCCs' evenings and weekends. Several respondents are also seeking improved—or any—compensation for mileage. Respondents also reiterated the need for improved professional development. Some are also seeking more opportunities to collaborate. While responses emphasized the importance of collaborating with other OCCs, other comments suggested “partnerships with the ATA and community,” “job coaches for students to enter the workforce successfully” and more direct input from OCCs on programming at the provincial level.

The following responses are representative of the supports and improvements that OCCs seek:

*Professional Development:* “At the provincial level, have a coordinator bring all the OCCs together to collaborate and share best practices. As well, the same is needed at the school district level. In addition, from the provincial and district level have more professional development opportunities for teachers link the theory to the practice in regards to career pathways.”

*Clear and Fair Compensation:* “There has to be clarity as to what the stipend is intended to cover. In the seven years I have been a RAP coordinator, I have seen mileage removed, summer contracts constantly changing up to the point where, last year, I was asked initially to work the summer for free. Eventually, my colleagues were able to sort out an hourly wage, with a cap on hours.”

*Relationships with Student Employers:* “Have support from employers to build career internships for all high school students in ALL fields of interest. Career internships would allow students to make more informed decisions about future postsecondary and career paths. Providing an incentive for employers to take on these students could assist with persuading employers to participate.”

*Clarity of Expectations:* “I feel that as a coordinator I am useless because my decisions/following of the guidelines are voided due to administration mingling. It would be nice to actually know what is expected with the program.”

*Restoration of Funding to Off-Campus Education:* “[Credit Enrollment Unit] cutbacks have made it difficult to run a balanced program. If the time is committed it should be funded accordingly.”

## CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

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Findings from this study illustrate that the experiences of OCCs in their positions vary widely. The spectrum ranges from OCCs working full-time in their positions with strong support to OCCs administering work experience programs as a fragment of a complex teaching assignment.

### IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR OFF-CAMPUS COORDINATORS

With respect to the working conditions of OCCs, the next steps are clear. OCCs need more time and flexibility to do their jobs, as well as more professional learning to do their jobs well. Unfortunately, given the great variations in teaching assignments, it will continue to be difficult to negotiate fair working conditions for all OCCs.

This issue is exacerbated by the separate negotiation of summer contract work. From the survey, it is unclear how and under what conditions summer contracts are negotiated, as well as how they differ from teaching assignments over the regular school year. Future research might parse out summer roles versus school-year roles, as these can be accompanied by very different working conditions.

With respect to regular teaching assignments, inferential analyses on a sufficiently large sample could yield further insight into working condition variances by geographical locale, school size, number of students supervised and percentage of assigned time allocated to the OCC role. The findings from this survey show that a significant minority of OCCs are working under difficult conditions, but more information is required to identify whether common aspects of their experiences could be redressed by policy reforms and advocacy. In the meantime, advocacy for streamlined administration, improved funding for off-campus education and more professional development will yield benefits for all OCCs, regardless of their specific working conditions.

## FUTURE CHALLENGE AREAS

The literature and policy review conducted for this study, along with study findings, points to several broad challenges that require long-term vision on the part of stakeholders who envision vocational education and training mainstreamed into public education. These are particularly important in terms of the curriculum renewal process that is under way.

**Off-campus education is part of a system of VET that remains poorly defined and integrated into secondary public education.**

A challenge of research into nonacademic streams of youth learning is a tendency to lump many categories and issues into one program that may include any or all of the following: vocational education, preapprenticeships, bridging programs, dual-credentialing schemes, career advising, career exploration, postsecondary choice advising, programs for youth-at-risk, stay-in-school initiatives, mentorship programs, work experience programs and IOP programming.<sup>3</sup> Although these programs may have very different philosophies and aims, they are frequently undifferentiated, appearing under the umbrella term of vocational education. These challenges are especially worth noting in the context of the growth of dual credit programming in the province.

These programs may also be assigned en masse to one department, or in some cases one individual, within a school. This not only increases the likelihood of unrealistic workloads for such individuals or departments but also creates conceptual confusion around the role(s) that schools ought to play and feasibly can play in youth transitions to future work and learning (see Appendix B). When it comes to policies and programs that pertain to youth transitions, the same conceptual confusion means that the people charged with providing transition-related supports for students lack a clear mandate about prioritizing skills and knowledge in their professional development and professional learning.

**Alberta policy documents fail to articulate widely disparate qualities in labour market outcomes.**

At one end of the spectrum, career and technology pathways encompass bridging programs to trades, which generally have longer transition pathways and prospects for a reasonable to very good standard of living. At the other end of the spectrum, career and technology pathways lead students to terminal credentials with few or no opportunities to move into new, higher skills or more specialized career pathways (Taylor, Servage and Hamm 2014). As Taylor (2007, vii) concludes, “It is very important that a balance be struck between providing job-specific training to high school students to increase their short-term employability, and ensuring that they are exposed to general knowledge that will help them to progress in a career and develop as citizens.”

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<sup>3</sup> Molgat, Deschaneau and LeBlanc (2011, 519) note that VET may be promoted as a panacea for youth labelled at risk, when in fact the needs and concerns of these youth “fall outside the strict realm of schooling and instead related to health problems, addictions, financial obligations, own-family or couple projects (pregnancy, for example).”

**Program aims do not take into consideration longstanding stratification in trades participation, based particularly on gender and social class.**

Current research in VET, as well as some bridging and specialized tertiary programs, highlights unequal participation and success in VET (Taylor 2016). While most attention has focused on gendered participation in trades, there is growing interest in low participation in VET—particularly skilled trades learning—by Canadian newcomers and visible minorities. As already noted, VET is sometimes degraded as “lower status,” and thus does not tend to attract middle-class students and their parents. Alberta’s CTS curriculum does not speak to stratification in participation, instead seeking to broadly engage all students (Alberta Education 2009).

The goal of integrating experiential learning for all students may be desirable, but mainstreaming of experiential education has not occurred in Alberta schools yet. Change depends considerably on present initiatives to revise Alberta school curriculum, which operates very much in traditional, compartmentalized subject areas and continues to stress academically oriented courses and curriculum.

**Flexibility in program offerings may encourage and/or obscure under-resourcing.**

Although the province’s policies aim to allow districts to tailor VET (including off-campus opportunities) to local conditions and economies, this same flexibility makes it quite easy for local VET programming to be pursued in an ad hoc manner, responding to short-term opportunities and problems instead of planning long-term, comprehensive strategies to integrate VET fully into schools and communities. Lacking regular audits, VET program offerings may outstrip the capacities of districts and individual schools to support them properly. As Watt-Malcolm (2011, 260) discusses, schools and school jurisdictions differ in organizational capacity: “Resources, budgets and expertise affect an organization’s ability to enter into and maintain partnerships.”

Under-resourcing may have a particular effect on curriculum development and assessment, especially with respect to personalizing the off-campus program while maintaining the integrity of the learning environment. Each of the pathways that make up experiential learning opportunities accompanying CTS requires expertise that may or may not reside within a given school system or school. The quality of students’ learning experiences will depend considerably on the capacities of individual partnerships formed at local levels. Off-campus programming will be weak and will not serve students’ educational interests if it is not grounded in robust, relevant curriculum and assessment.

**Little can be concluded about the quality, or consistency of quality, of off-campus placements.**

While OCCs may do their best to follow guidelines and ensure off-campus experiences are safe, valuable and positive experiences for students, lack of data about both resourcing and outcomes of off-campus education makes it difficult to ensure that students are benefiting from off-campus placements.

## NEXT STEPS: FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR WORK EXPERIENCE IN ALBERTA

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Missing from the study findings is a clear sense of how the conditions described ultimately affect students' learning experiences. This is largely because the survey questions did not target the particulars of OCCs' engagement with students and employers. Thus little can be concluded from the survey findings about the content or quality of student learning in work experience placements. There is reason to suspect, from some study participant comments, that a great deal more can be said about what benefits students are deriving from work experience. This OCC states clearly that effective partnerships with employers are pushed out by a combination of administrative requirements and under-resourcing: "Because I work in a very small high school, my district is not able to allot much time to the OCC coordinator position. This leaves me virtually no time to connect/interact with employers and seek out opportunities for students. The majority of my time is spent tracking hours and organizing the paperwork and doing my best to meet with students."

This coordinator's observation is key because it points to an unassessed yet critical feature of effective off-campus education for students—that is, a collaborative relationship between the employer, teaching professional and student through which a meaningful work experience curriculum is crafted and assessed.

### CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN WORK EXPERIENCE PLACEMENTS

Work experience is particularly challenging from a curricular perspective because learning opportunities and curricular content will vary considerably depending on the workplace setting. This means that it falls to the OCC to fulfill the role of crafting and assessing student learning particular to a given workplace setting. This is work ideally completed with the support of an employer, who can help the OCC by providing the skills and knowledge expected of the students in their placement. The OCC is then tasked with framing skills and knowledge in pedagogical terms. It is to be hoped that the OCC is also able to assist the employer in "thinking pedagogically" about student placements and in mentoring skills and expectations that are developmentally appropriate for young people who are learning about the world of work.

These are not easy tasks. They require positive, ongoing relationships with employers that indicate

- shared understandings of quality work-based learning,
- collaboration with an understanding of and agreement about students' learning needs,
- work experience supported consistently by mentoring relationships with caring adults (Kenny et al 2015) and
- students' ability to reflect on and articulate what they have gained in their placements.



## THEORIZING AND FRAMING CURRICULUM FOR WORK EXPERIENCE

A pedagogically sound work experience placement is based on a theory of workplace learning. There are numerous ways in which workplace learning can be conceptualized. As noted in the front matter of the report, work experience placements for Alberta students are articulated in terms of competencies outlined in the *Framework for Student Learning* (Alberta Education 2011). Aside from this and the *Off-Campus Education Handbook* (Alberta Education 2010), there are almost no supports to help OCCs map competencies to specific workplace settings. In other words, the competencies in and of themselves are insufficient, and significant labour and expertise are required for these competencies to be translated in order to inform a renewed curriculum for work-based learning. The study findings suggest that the off-campus education programming, as currently organized, lacks the capacity to ensure that the upcoming curriculum development is of high and consistent quality.

Also found in the preceding discussion of policy contexts are critical questions about the appropriateness of competencies as a means of framing students' work-based learning. An OCC in this study observed:

I have excellent support from my school and my district. I just feel the government is struggling with finding the correct language and structure for off-campus programs. Decisions are made based on money, not what the value is for the student and for the education system and for the value [that] off-campus programs provide for our society.

The OCC's comment points to the need for more robust conversations about the fundamental aims of work experience so that decisions are made based on established and agreed-on values rather than short-term expediency. The three fundamental purposes of education proposed by Biesta—qualification, socialization and subjectification—manifest in *Inspiring Action on Education* (Government of Alberta 2010) and *Framework for Student Learning* (Alberta Education 2015). Yet, neither of these documents provides a means for prioritizing these three purposes when they conflict, as they inevitably will at times.

Based on the findings of this study, the competency focus outlined in its present form in the *Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum* (Alberta Education 2017) offers little means by which curriculum renewal can be moved forward until stakeholders come together to seek consensus for the purposes of a program of studies, or indeed the broader purposes of public education on the whole. Specific to work-based learning, Appendix B provides some alternative frameworks for thinking about and classifying the goals and outcomes of student off-campus experiences in ways that might assist the curriculum renewal process moving forward.

## QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future inquiry into the role of OCCs in Alberta schools might take the following directions. The first pertains to the practical requirements of the OCC role:

- What steps can be taken to streamline and otherwise reduce the administrative burdens of setting up and monitoring off-campus education?
  - What are some existing promising practices in school jurisdictions?
  - What roles can be played by centralized repositories and other digitally mediated forms of communication?
  - How can these tools be organized effectively so that they do not become additional time burdens in and of themselves?
- What steps can be taken by the ATA to advocate for OCCs?
  - What role(s) might be played in future negotiations of collective agreements, particularly with respect to off-campus time and travel and expenses?
  - What can the ATA do to support OCCs' professional development needs?
  - What additional or ongoing data sources can be drawn on to continue to document and understand the wide variations in OCCs' working conditions?

The second research direction is one that continues conversations about the pedagogical value of off-campus learning and the ultimate role of VET in a public education system that rigorously pursues inclusion and equity:

- Is a competency-focused model the best way to frame the curriculum and assessment of off-campus learning? If not, what are some alternatives to this model?
- What curricular materials and professional development do off-campus educators need to feel confident that work experience placements support meaningful student learning?
- What systemic changes and resources are needed for schools to build effective partnerships with employers and other local community organizations?
- What systemic changes and resources are required for VET to be integrated into schooling in an interdisciplinary fashion so that all students have opportunities to engage in meaningful learning outside of the classroom?
- What roles do VET, community service learning and other forms of experiential learning play in the overall purpose(s) of public education?

It would risk an understatement to suggest that the off-campus education must form an integral part of the educational development in the province in the years ahead. This study offers some important context in helping to better understand current teaching and learning realities in this critically important sector of the K–12 education experience and to inform practice and policy in the years ahead.

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## APPENDIX A: Survey Questions

### OFF-CAMPUS EDUCATION SURVEY

Thank you for participating in this survey regarding the experiences of teachers in off-campus programs. Your involvement in this survey will contribute to the Association's ability to advocate for optimal conditions that will support teaching and learning in off-campus education programs. *All responses will be kept confidential.*

#### A. Contexts of teaching in off-campus education

Use the scale below to indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

1—Strongly Agree      2—Agree      3—Uncertain      4—Disagree      5—Strongly Disagree

1. In my school district, we have high expectations for the learning of all students.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Off-campus education programming in my school is recognized as a meaningful high school experience and pathway to success.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Off-campus education programming in my school jurisdiction is recognized as a meaningful high school experience and pathway to success.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Government recognizes off-campus education as contributing to a meaningful high school experience and pathway to student success.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel that I have little influence when it comes to making school-wide decisions related to my assignment in off-campus education.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My commitment to off-campus education is based on a set of educational values that is shared with the other teachers at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My commitment to off-campus education is based on a set of educational values that is shared with my school district.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I understand how government policies related to off-campus education are developed.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I understand how my school district's policies related to off-campus education are developed.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Regular classroom teachers in my school value the work I do related to off-campus education.	1	2	3	4	5



### B. Professional growth and impact in off-campus education

Use the scale below to indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

1—Strongly Agree      2—Agree      3—Uncertain      4—Disagree      5—Strongly Disagree

1. When a student does better than expected, it often is because I found better ways to support that student.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am confident in my ability to provide off-campus education opportunities for at risk students.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I regularly search for professional learning opportunities to improve my work in off campus education.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am aware of resources needed to improve my teaching practice related to off campus education.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My school and district provides me with career opportunities that improve my professional growth and practice.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Administrators in my school provide me with constructive feedback to improve my professional practice as an off-campus educator.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I can readily access and consult with colleagues who can support my work.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have the time and resources needed to adapt my instruction to the learning needs of each student.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel that I have influence regarding the decisions made at the school level related to my work in off-campus education.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I feel that I have influence regarding the decisions made at the school district level related to my work in off-campus education.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I have the time and resources needed to maintain meaningful contact with employers.	1	2	3	4	5

### C. Conditions of practice

1. Use the scale below to indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

1—Strongly Agree      2—Agree      3—Uncertain      4—Disagree      5—Strongly Disagree

a. I find my work as an off-campus educator fulfilling.	1	2	3	4	5
b. My employer believes that work should be the primary priority in a person's life.	1	2	3	4	5
c. My employer believes that the ideal employee is the one who is available 24 hours a day.	1	2	3	4	5
d. My employer believes that individuals who take time off to attend to personal matters are not committed to their work.	1	2	3	4	5
e. The expectations to complete my off-campus education responsibilities outside of school hours are acceptable.	1	2	3	4	5
f. I am fairly compensated for the time and effort required to fulfill my responsibilities related to my off-campus education.	1	2	3	4	5
g. I have appropriate access to professional development related to my off-campus education assignment.	1	2	3	4	5
h. I have flexibility and control over the professional development provided related to my off-campus education assignment.	1	2	3	4	5

**2. Use the following scale to indicate how accurately the following statements describes your job.**

1—Strongly Agree      2—Agree      3—Uncertain      4—Disagree      5—Strongly Disagree

a. There are processes I must follow in my current role, but that should be done differently.	1	2	3	4	5
b. There are clear, planned goals and objectives for my job.	1	2	3	4	5
c. I have to bend or break a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.	1	2	3	4	5
d. I know exactly what is expected of me.	1	2	3	4	5
e. It would be possible to reduce my workload through the elimination of unnecessary tasks that are currently required of me.	1	2	3	4	5
f. I feel certain about how much authority I have.	1	2	3	4	5
g. I work under a great deal of tension.	1	2	3	4	5

**3. Think about a typical work day and indicate in the space below approximately how many communications you encounter related to your off-campus education work:**

1. E-mails you receive (on a typical work day)?	<input type="text"/>
2. E-mails you send (on a typical work day)?	<input type="text"/>
3. IMs you receive (on a typical work day)?	<input type="text"/>
4. IMs you send (on a typical work day)?	<input type="text"/>

#### D. Overall supports for off-campus education

1. Considering your work in off-campus education, what are the two biggest positive improvements, if any, you have seen in terms of the overall support you receive to help you in meeting the needs of your students? Please specify if these are at the school, district, or provincial level.
2. Considering your work in off-campus education, what are the two biggest negative changes, if any, you have seen in terms of the overall support you receive to help you in meeting the needs of your students? Please specify if these are at the school, district, or provincial level.
3. Considering your work in off-campus education, are you able to fulfill your roles and responsibilities? (Consider time, expectations interacting with employers, students, and colleagues.)
4. The Association continues to advocate for improvements to teaching and learning conditions to ensure success for all students. If you could suggest one or two improvements to the off-campus education in your jurisdiction and/or the province, what would these be? Please provide supporting detail.

### E. Demographic data

the following information does not identify you. It is used only to compare aggregate data with the results of previous surveys. Check (✓) **only one** response to each of the following questions.

1. Teachers' convention that you attend:

- |   |  |                                       |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mighty Peace     | <input type="checkbox"/> Central East    | <input type="checkbox"/> Calgary City |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northeast        | <input type="checkbox"/> Central Alberta | <input type="checkbox"/> South West   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North Central    | <input type="checkbox"/> Palliser        | <input type="checkbox"/> Southeast    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater Edmonton |  |                                       |

2. Your teaching experience, including the current year

- |                                       |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year       | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 to 14 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 to 30 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 to 4 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 to 19 years | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 30 years  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 9 years |   |   |

3. Your teaching experience **in off-campus education**, including the current year

- |                                       |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year       | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 to 14 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 to 30 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 to 4 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 to 19 years | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 30 years  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 9 years |   |   |

4. Your current off-campus assignment is related exclusively or mainly to

- ☐ Supervising students in one school
- ☐ Supervising students in two or more schools
- ☐ Supervising students throughout the district
- ☐ District-wide coordination of students and other off-csmptus tachers
- ☐ Combinations of the above (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Indicate the off-campus education programs you supervise:

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Green Certificate    | <input type="checkbox"/> Career Internship                                | <input type="checkbox"/> RAP           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work Experience      | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 to 19 years                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 30 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dual Credit Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge and Employability Work Place Practicum |  |

6. You are employed

☐ Full-time

☐ Part-time

☐ Other (ie.contract)

7. Do you work in off-campus education during the summer months?

☐ Yes

☐ No

8. Does your collective agreement contain provisions related specifically to off-campus education?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

9. How many students do you supervise in your off-campus education program

☐ less than 50

☐ 51-100

☐ 101-150

☐ more than 150

☐ Other/not applicable \_\_\_\_\_

10. Indicate your current off-campus education assignment in terms of your total employment status:

☐ 25 percent or less of my assignment

☐ 26 to 50 percent of my assignment

☐ 51 to 75 percent of my assignment

☐ full-time

☐ Other (eg, extra hours worked in lieu /substitute teaching)

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11. Your age+

☐ 25 and younger

☐ 41-45 years old

☐ 56-60 years old

☐ 26-30 years old

☐ 46-50 years old

☐ 61-65 years old

☐ 31-35 years old

☐ 51-55 years old

☐ Over 65

☐ 36-40 years old

12. Your gender

☐ Male

☐ Transgender

☐ Prefer not to answer

☐ Female

☐ Not listed

THANK YOU.

## APPENDIX B: EVALUATIVE FRAMEWORKS FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

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The *Off-Campus Education Handbook* (Alberta Education 2010) delineates numerous forms of off-campus education, ranging from cursory exposure to work settings and roles through observation (eg, work visits, job shadowing) to hands-on apprenticeships (eg, RAP). The handbook also describes several aims of off-campus education, including career exploration, career education, preparation for direct entry into the workforce and preparation for postsecondary education.

Work experience is a central component of off-campus education. The quality and outcomes of work experience can vary widely depending on the teacher, the workplace supervisor or mentor, the student and the experiential learning curriculum. When the student performs actual work in the workplace, the characteristics of this work may vary. The student may perform a full or limited range of tasks. He or she may work independently or assist a mentor or supervisor. The work experience may be more or less pedagogical in its structure. Currently, there appear to be no clear strategies within curriculum and assessment practices in off-campus education to assure that all students receive high-quality experiential learning through their off-campus placements.

First steps to address inconsistencies may be a more careful articulation of the aims of an off-campus placement, such that activities agreed on by the OCC, the student and the community organization or employer have clear and mutually understood objectives (Wiseman and Page 2002).

### WATTS (1991) AND WATTS ET AL (1996): AIMS OF WORK EXPERIENCE

A pedagogical approach to work experience requires a broad conceptualization of the aims of work experience. Broad aims of work experience proposed by Watts (1991) include the enhancement of school-based learning and attempts to motivate youth by showing them a purpose for this learning. Integration of school and work-based learning (emphasized in the *Off-Campus Education Handbook* 2010) is an important part of this. Other aims proposed by Watts include maturational aims that facilitate students' personal and social development, expansive aims that broaden the range of occupations that students are prepared to consider as careers and investigative aims that allow students to learn more about the world of work as a general field of inquiry.

Investigative aims involve learning not only particular job tasks but also how different workplaces are organized, what work processes are, what social relations at work are like and (if applicable) about the role of unions in the workplace (Watts 1991, 19). Investigative aims promote local knowledge of particular employers and how they function, as well as broader knowledge of work organization and the economy.

The following table is adapted from Watts's work:

<b>REINFORCING OBJECTIVES:</b> Reinforce the students' existing, perceived possibilities.		<b>BROADENING OBJECTIVES:</b> Encourage students to explore new possibilities, new ways of seeing self and the world.	
Relatively short-time horizons, passive strategies (students as trainees), narrowing/reinforcing existing, perceived possibilities/goals for students (perceived by themselves and/or others), reinforcing institutionalized norms and the legitimacy of learning for work.		Longer-time horizons, active strategies, enhancing "planful" competence (ie, students' capacities for reflexivity, discernment of opportunities, self-confidence and self-knowledge), expanding students' horizons of possibility, expanding depth of understanding of "world of work."	
<b>Work Oriented</b>	<i>Preparatory Placement Custodial</i>	<b>Personal Development</b>	<i>Motivational Maturational</i>
<b>School Oriented</b>	<i>Motivational Enrichment Enhancing</i>	<b>Career Development</b>	<i>Investigative (Educ) Investigative (Work) Expansive</i>
		<b>Critical Emancipatory</b>	<i>Investigative (Work) Race/Class/Gender Stratifications  Work in structural contexts</i>

## FULLER AND UNWIN (2006): EXPANSIVE VS RESTRICTIVE WORKPLACE LEARNING

A similar distinction between learning as narrowing or broadening perceived possibilities is proposed in Fuller and Unwin's (2006) distinction between expansive and restrictive workplace learning. The authors' work comes out of a series of comparative workplace ethnographies. Each workplace investigated afforded its workers different kinds of learning. The workplace learning in which workers engaged depended on their own dispositions, their positions within their organizations, and the organization's culture and priorities. Like Watts (1991), Fuller and Unwin (2006) are ultimately interested in critical questions that influence the quality of present experiences and the long-term implications of these experiences—that is, whether the workers will be limited in future or be able to grow and adapt in their work and learning. Fuller and Unwin's expansive–restrictive framework may be applied with equal validity to the assessment of youth experiential learning opportunities.



The following table is taken directly from Fuller and Unwin (2006):

Expansive Workplace Learning	vs	Restrictive Workplace Learning
Participation in multiple communities of practice inside and outside the workplace		Restricted participation in multiple communities of practice
Primary community of practice has shared “participative memory.” Cultural inheritance of workforce development		Primary community of practice has little or no “participative memory.” no or little tradition of apprenticeship
Breadth: access to learning fostered by cross-company experiences		Narrow: Access to learning restricted in terms of tasks/knowledge/location
Access to a range of qualifications, including knowledge-based vocational qualifications		Little or no access to qualifications
Planned time off the job, including for knowledge-based courses and reflection		Virtually all on the job; limited opportunities for reflection
Gradual transition to full, rounded participation		Fast: Transition as quick as possible
Vision of workplace learning: Progression for career		Vision of workplace learning: Static for the job
Organizational recognition of, and support for, employees as learners		Lack of organizational recognition of, and support for, employees as learners
Workforce development is used as a vehicle for aligning the goals of developing the individual and organizational capability		Workforce development is used to tailor individual capability to organizational need
Workforce development fosters opportunities to extend identity through boundary-crossing.		Workforce development limits opportunities to extend identity: Little boundary-crossing experienced.
Reification of “workplace curriculum” highly developed (eg, through documents, symbols, languages, tools) and accessible to apprentices		Limited reification of “workplace curriculum” and patchy access to reificatory aspects of practice

The following questions, which might be used to guide the evaluation of off-campus opportunities for students, are generated from Fuller and Unwin's work:

Individual	Organizational	Society and Social Equity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who gets to learn?</li> <li>• Is the learning interesting and valuable to the individual?</li> <li>• Does the learning increase opportunities for the worker, or more tightly confine him or her to prescribed roles?</li> <li>• How is the learning recognized and by whom? (eg, certificates, credentials, prerequisites)</li> <li>• Does the learner have choices and opportunities to exercise autonomy in his or her work and learning?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the learning encourage good organizational communication?</li> <li>• Does the learning help workers and divisions to learn from each other?</li> <li>• Does the learning foster creativity and new, more effective ways of working?</li> <li>• Does the learning encourage the full utilization of workers' skills, talents and potential toward organizational goals?</li> <li>• Does the learning highlight new organizational problems, new opportunities, new strategies or new ways of looking at old problems?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the learning reinforce existing knowledge, status or other forms of hierarchy in the organization, and/or in wider society?</li> <li>• Are learning opportunities stratified by race, class, gender or some other identity category that unfairly excludes people?</li> <li>• Does the learning retrench or disrupt existing systemic inequality?</li> <li>• Does the learning strengthen equality of opportunity for all workers?</li> <li>• Are all forms of work recognized as valuable contributions to social and economic life?</li> </ul>





# The Alberta Teachers' Association