



Renewing Alberta's Promise: A Great School for All





The Alberta Teachers' Association

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"Where does the world go when schooling is about schooling?"

Madeleine Grumet (2006, 47)

"Any attempt to tackle the learning/teaching conundrum through an exclusive focus on learning processes is unlikely to succeed."

Philip Kerr (2014)

"Not instruction, not learning, but study constitutes the process of education."

William Pinar (2006, 112)

"When teachers give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking, or the intentional noting of connections; learning naturally results..."

John Dewey (1997, 154)

"The multidimensionality of educational purpose is precisely what makes education interesting."

Gert J J Biesta (2013, 128)

Foreword

In 2012, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) asked us to bring together international experts to assist in the development of a path-breaking blueprint for supporting exemplary teaching practices. This inevitably and fortuitously led into an exploration of how to sustain innovation in all of the schools that make up Alberta's K–12 sector. The resulting report, *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta*, outlined a comprehensive approach based on the core value of achieving excellence through equity. Our work reveals to us that equity must be the core value of our education system since it is the very essence of democracy itself. No democracy can maintain itself unless it makes equity in terms of readiness to learn, access and classroom conditions the cornerstone of its education system.

The initial catalyst for *A Great School for All* was the launch of *Inspiring Action on Education* (Alberta Education 2010a), the Government of Alberta's vision for transforming basic education in Alberta. Recognizing that this document was more aspirational than a systematic plan of action, the Association sponsored a research collaboration with international scholars, including ourselves and our colleagues Pasi Sahlberg, Dennis Shirley, Andy Hargreaves and Larry Beauchamp, among others, that continues today.

Throughout the development of *A Great School for All*, the broad vision for change outlined in *Inspiring Action* was considered—in light of the ATA's commitment to excellence through equity—as one of many influences that might inform educational development in Alberta. At the same time, the international research team adopted a comprehensive view that examined global trends that contributed to the success of high performers and sustainable reformers. The resulting blueprint—which moves far beyond the broad aspirations of the former Conservative government's *Inspiring Action*—describes in detail the need to better understand and strengthen the complex interrelationships among the various parts of Alberta's education sector and to rethink how sustainable change must work to benefit all of the province's students. In particular, this blueprint focused on the need to support schools as community hubs to capitalize on the growing diversity and complexity of Alberta classrooms.

Of course our work bears no fruit if the public—and, ultimately, the government—does not make a commitment to equity as the basis of our education system. We are heartened to see some important work has already begun under the new government in Alberta.

The process that led to this publication began in 2012 and has been revelatory for participants and for the ATA. What began as a process focused on optimizing multiple dimensions of the education sector (ie, optimizing conditions of practice to enhance teaching and learning, supporting inclusion, public assurance) has evolved as it has become clear that a great school for all necessitates a rethinking of the purposes of a public school education and a rethinking of relationships with other social institutions and with the public. What began as a consultation process with experts and others close to education policy has evolved as it has become clear that education is not a system on its own but is, rather, a life-system of the community, the basis of our commonwealth as Albertans.

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. To that end, we are mindful, as Gert Biesta (2010) notes, that there are three distinct but interrelated aims for a schooling system: “qualification,” “socialization” and “subjectification.” Yet the latter, subjectification, is where schooling can truly become education in the spirit of co-creating a vibrant democratic society. Although qualification and socialization provide valuable training and preparation for our society and economy as they exist today, the process of subjectification helps students to become individuals capable of thinking and doing the unexpected, thus inspiring a sense that we as Albertans can, indeed, change the world around us on a micro and macro scale.

At the core of this report is the view that the government’s challenge is to enact educational reform that will help this province become more than a better version of yesterday. Instead of expecting too little or too much from our education system, we need to foster possibilities for freedom in an intentional way through community engagement and democratic deliberation as to the foundational purposes of Alberta’s schools. This goal necessitates educational theory based in the ethics of subjectivity, politics of emancipation and aesthetics of freedom. Indeed, these ideals are echoed in the forthcoming groundbreaking book, *Flip the System—Changing Education from the Ground Up* (Evers and Kneyber, in press). We share their view that it is time for governments to act, to redouble efforts to support innovations driven by local school-communities that provide support for teachers and their communities rather than by management edicts and surveillance masked as accountability. The Association’s conversations with educators, researchers, and others in Alberta and beyond continue working toward creating an educational system that benefits everyone.

Since the publication of *A Great School for All* in 2012, the Association has continued to advance the profession’s view related to educational development in the province. These efforts include ongoing consultation with experts around the world, as well as support for international partnerships of innovative schools. For example, many of the insights offered in this publication stem from the international symposium “Off the Charts—An International Dialogue on Redesigning Curriculum,” which the Association hosted in Edmonton in May 2014. This event brought together international experts in educational change, public policy, curriculum and assessment to engage educational thought leaders to examine curriculum and assessment reform in the context of the framework advanced in *A Great School for All*. Facilitated by Stephen Murgatroyd, the symposium featured Sam Sellar (University of Queensland), Rosemary Hipkins (New Zealand Council for Educational Research), Arja-Sisko Holappa Tiina Tähkä (Finland National Board of Education), Jean Stiles and Lisa Wright (Edmonton Public Schools), Kent den Heyer (University of Alberta), Sean Lessard (University of Regina) and Louise Green (Khandallah School, New Zealand).

Since the symposium, other curriculum experts have continued to contribute to the Association’s consideration of the road ahead, including Cathryn van Kessel, a PhD Candidate in Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. Two influences have further helped to shape the thinking in this publication. Jón Torfi Jónasson, former dean of the School of Education, University of Iceland, continues to meld futures thinking with curriculum reform. Carol Campbell, Director of the Knowledge Network for Applied Educational Research at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, prods us to consider the synergies of whole-system reform. Lastly, a special note of thanks to David King, minister of education during the Lougheed years and former

director at the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta. David's insights into the importance of public participation and engagement in education reform played a key role in crafting this report. This publication and the ongoing research mobilization of *A Great School for All* would not be possible without their contributions.

In addition to hosting the symposium, the Association has continued to advocate for positive improvements in teaching and learning conditions, particularly for support for the increasingly large and complex classrooms that characterize the province today. As well, research continues on a number of fronts: supporting exemplary teaching practice and school leadership; advancing the profession's views on assessment and public assurance; and addressing the systemic barriers to learning in the province, including poverty and a fragile commitment to social justice.

Alberta's educational landscape in the past few years is best characterized as a time of paradox. While it is true, as Gert Biesta (2013) suggests, that risk aversion drives most contemporary educational policies and practices, it is also true that many of the ambitious reforms of the former Conservative government have floundered. There was much anticipation that curriculum redesign and the Student Learning Assessments might yield important insights about how to improve learning, yet both initiatives have been hobbled by the lack of a shared coherent vision of educational reform.

Of course, the lack of concrete progress on sustained reform is not unique to Alberta. As Andy Hargreaves (2013) has observed globally, "in general, when it comes to curriculum reform, the grandiosity of the design is usually inversely related to the possibility of bringing it to life in practice." However, there has been important progress in some areas, such as the high school flexibility initiative that has opened up possibilities for local innovation and powerful networks of schools learning from each other. Ironically, the driver of this success has been what the government has *stopped* doing—removing barriers to change and risk-taking—rather than what it has *started* doing.

For teachers in Alberta and around the world, *Renewing Alberta's Promise* begins to reveal that a great school for all will be the product of weaving together many strands of change. Teachers must be the best that they can be, and they must be supported with the freedom and resources that will optimize their professional practice. Teachers must also be ready to lead a public conversation about the purposes of public education. The social license of public education must be restated and approved, and then not allowed to be forgotten or to lapse. Teachers—including their professional organizations—and other social institutions, the public and the government must also have conversations to assure that values, priorities and relationships are coherent.

The Association's ongoing consultations with the expert panel that initiated *A Great School for All*, including those who contributed to the "Off the Charts" symposium that this report explores, represent our current contribution to an important public conversation and decision-making process about education in Alberta. In sharing this work, the Association acts on the conviction that the new Alberta government must both make some initial, important evidence-informed decisions about K–12 education in the province and, more importantly, must call the public to a wide-ranging, hopeful and creative reformation of our K–12 education system.

J-C Couture
Associate Coordinator, Research,
Alberta Teachers' Association

Stephen Murgatroyd
Chief Scout, Innovation Expedition

Preface

It is time for Alberta's educational landscape to move past the volatility and uncertainty of the past few years. Under the administration of the Conservative government, we saw episodic and sporadic efforts of reform under three ministers of education in three years (including a minister who made every effort to undermine the collective voice of the profession). However, with the May 5, 2015, election of a new government that proclaims a core commitment to equity and sustainable innovation, promising signals have emerged. The profession shares the hope that this once-in-a-generation change in government will provide an opportunity to rekindle efforts to achieve educational excellence through equity, the core vision of *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta*.

This report, *Renewing Alberta's Promise: A Great School for All*, provides compelling strategies for democratic participation, professional leadership and student engagement, principles that all derive from the thoughtful study of Alberta's education sector in *A Great School for All*. Furthermore, this publication advances the Association's commitment to policies and practices that will guide the leadership of Alberta's new government in the important months and years ahead.

As with all Association research initiatives, a team effort drove this project to completion. J-C Couture, who oversees the Alberta Teachers' Association's research, and Stephen Murgatroyd, consultant and researcher, co-authored this report. Mark Yurick, coordinator of Professional Development, facilitated review of the report by the Association's Curriculum Committee. Administrative officer Lindsay Yakimyshyn patiently oversaw production of the final publication. A special thanks must also be extended to the network of researchers, noted in the Foreword, who offered their perspectives and are committed to working alongside the Association to ensure that the new government succeeds in capitalizing on the important leadership opportunity ahead.

Gordon Thomas
Executive Secretary

Introduction

In early May 2014, approximately 175 teachers, school leaders and administrators from across Alberta gathered in Edmonton to participate in an international symposium on curriculum change. Speakers from Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Alberta and Saskatchewan engaged participants and worked actively to better understand both the challenge and opportunity of changes to curriculum that are currently under way in Alberta.

The symposium, “Off the Charts: International Dialogue on Redesigning Curriculum in Alberta,” aimed to enable participants to learn from the experience of others, specifically New Zealand, Finland and Australia. These countries, which shared a commitment to equity, have all embarked on major change in what students learn, how they learn and how they are assessed. The symposium fostered understanding of the journey these countries have taken in sustaining democratic dialogue on the role of public education.

Gaining insight into the process of change and the nature of the changes themselves was another key goal of the symposium. To help contextualize curriculum change,

speakers and participants examined the impact of international assessments, such as the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), on the language being used to describe the process of change and on the importance of equity as a driver for public education.

Along with the significance of equity in relation to curriculum change, several key points and discoveries emerged from this symposium. This report summarizes and seeks to connect this learning to previous work, especially the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA's) study *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta* and the Government of Alberta's work in *Inspiring Education, Setting the Direction, Speak Out* and *Inspiring Action*. More specifically, this document uses the presentations and dialogue of the symposium to explore the questions asked of participants. These five question sets were

1. **Equity as the driver:** If the intention is to create a great school for all, how do we ensure that equity continues to be the driver of change in Alberta? How do we avoid ramping up performance around competencies, which will once again



If the intention is to create a great school for all, how do stakeholders ensure that equity continues to be the driver of change in Alberta?

distract us from nurturing student's individual capabilities and developing resilient individuals and communities? Notably, currently less than half (46 per cent) of kindergarten-aged children in Alberta are ready to start school (Alberta Government 2014, 19).

2. **Focus for learning and teaching:** To ensure a thriving Alberta and a democratic society, how do stakeholders contribute to a public consensus regarding the desired purposes of school and the attributes of a graduate of elementary, junior high and high school? The emergence of constructivism as a theory of learning may be informative, but it "is a theory of learning and not of teaching" (Richardson 2003, 1629). As Richardson argues, students have always "made meaning" both in traditional classroom settings and in the more alluring learning spaces conjured up by proponents of 21st-century learning. The shift in focus from teaching to learning has implied that teachers have nothing to teach and has relegated the teacher to the sidelines as a mere facilitator of learning. While critiques of the "transmission model of teaching" are justifiable, recent reform efforts packaged as 21st-century learning unfairly give "so-called didactic models of teaching a really bad name" (Biesta 2013, 44–46).
3. **Articulating a research-informed approach to change:** It has been said that education is a continual process of becoming. In this respect the community as a whole must recognize change as a constant in the life of the education system and must agree on a theory of change that is supported by research. Innovation in one

area, such as curriculum, must be established through a system-wide theory of change supported by research and education partners. What can stakeholders learn about the process of educational change in Alberta from (a) experiences elsewhere and (b) the province's current experience? How can we achieve a clearly articulated theory of action to ensure successful renewal of curriculum in Alberta?

4. **Teacher supports:** Building the professional capital of the teaching profession will create the capacity for innovation and sustained school improvement. How does one reconcile the reality that curriculum reforms seldom lead to any substantive changes in teaching and learning and often-times mask institutional obstacles and barriers that inhibit sustainable, positive change (Westbury 2008, 61; Deng and Luke 2008, 67)?
5. **Assessment and public assurance:** What kind of assessments and model for public assurance are needed to enable the implementation of a great school for all? What sustained supports do teachers need to treat curriculum as an encounter between students as selves interpreting subject matter (Henderson and Gornik 2007) and, further, to resist the impulse to see curriculum and instruction as a delivery system that lacks agency (Pinar 2004)?

With these sets of inquiry in mind, this report outlines the more immediate key steps needed to ensure that Alberta adopts a whole-system approach to curriculum renewal and educational development, as first outlined in *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta* (ATA 2012).

A Great School for All emphasizes that, in the context of the global education reform movement (dubbed “the GERM” by Pasi Sahlberg), the overemphasis on standardization, the bureaucratic management of change and the privileging of technology as a lever for improvement stand in the way of meaningful educational development. Also apparent is the strategic need to consider all educational reforms in Alberta, including curriculum change, in terms of the interconnectedness of all of the elements of Alberta’s K–12 sector. Andy Hargreaves (2012, iv), one of the leading contemporary educational thinkers today, reinforces these considerations in his foreword to *A Great School for All*:

Convincing policymakers and system leaders to take new approaches when they have experienced educational and political success with existing ones can be difficult, but it is before the peak of performance that decline is often already occurring, even though the decline might not be evident in performance results. A paradox of improvement is that you have to quit your existing strategy even when you look as though you are still ahead.

Schools need a purpose that moves beyond a strict Tylerian instrumental concern for predetermined outcomes and compliance—a purpose that “sees subject matter as a living culture” (Grimmett 2014, 115). When the public has established this deeper purpose, stakeholders need to facilitate optimal conditions of practice and empower teachers to teach and assess in ways that address the needs of the students in their classrooms.

With the appropriate supports and goals in place, Alberta’s teaching profession will develop the collaborative professional capital and autonomy that Hargreaves and Fullan describe (2012).

Further, a clear yet flexible system in public assurance is necessary to support teachers in their work and to build trust in the work of schools. In addition, investments to help prepare parents and children for school learning and community-based supports to sustain that learning will enable the success of Alberta schools.

As part of its ongoing engagement with government and the education community, the Association’s “Off the Charts” symposium represented a focused and meaningful engagement of professional teachers and policy analysts from around the world. Much of the discussion at the symposium reinforced a key underlying approach to system change articulated in the ATA’s *A Great School for All*. Table 1 provides a high-level summary of the discussions that ensued, outlining the inter-relationships of current government initiatives that will be examined further in this report.

Translating the basic ideas outlined in this report into a coherent set of actions (including elements to build on) requires evaluating the activities that should be stopped, started or continued. Though building on the strong performance already present in Alberta schools is not difficult, stakeholders need to accept two key conclusions from Pasi Sahlberg: (1) that “the path to excellence is through equity” and (2) “what a system starts doing is as important as what [it stops] doing.”¹

Table 1: Evaluating Activities: Stop, Start, Continue

	Continue...	Start...	Stop ...
Student Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focusing on learning as a by-product of meaningful activity, taking a broad view of the purpose of schooling as outlined by Dewey (1997); • considering the three purposes of education—qualification, socialization and subjectification—to create a system that promotes relationships and the development of the total person (Biesta 2010); • considering and developing curriculum as an encounter through “3 S” understanding (<i>students engaging subjects in social contexts</i>); • seeing equity as a driver for public policy in education in terms of student success in inclusive school communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging students in the highly relational work of study while rethinking assessment and public assurance in this regard; • working with the profession to build sound rich assessments of student learning; • helping students build networks in their communities that can support their learning; • moving beyond simplistic measures of student engagement to address the often hidden and systemic obstacles to students’ psychosocial life (eg, racism, poverty, community and family characteristics) through networks of youth leadership groups, including cross-jurisdictional, provincial and international partnerships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeing students as the “object” of schooling; rather, see them as co-creators; • focusing on lists of discrete competencies; instead, focus on capabilities contextualized by real-life experiences; • seeing technology as a catalyst for innovation rather than as a support for the relational work of teaching and learning; • seeing education as a form of social engineering that will create one fixed, unrealistic version of the ideal Albertan (Smith 2014).

	Continue...	Start...	Stop ...
Teachers' Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building the professional capital and practical wisdom of teachers to ensure exemplary instructional practices; • engaging the profession in curriculum design through professional learning connected to improving practice; • seeing teachers as researchers and innovators capable of capitalizing on opportunities and finding solutions to "wicked problems" within a school, using sustained networks of practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the sense of trust in the collaborative professionalism of teachers as designers, assessors and creators of appropriate teaching and learning through principals' strong instructional leadership; • ensuring that the conditions for optimal instructional practice exist in each school; • understanding the link between readiness to learn and early childhood education in the K–12 system; • sustaining a flow of understanding across the curriculum, which would include further development of understanding of a K–12 system; • supporting the enhancement of ATA specialist councils to support curriculum development and instructional practices; • building genuine innovation clusters and networks throughout Alberta focused on key challenges and on building teacher leadership capacity (based on some of the design principles of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • failing to provide time for local adoption or adaptation of curriculum developed in clusters (building collaborative professional autonomy and capacity); • seeing innovative assessments and the need to rethink public assurance as distinct and separate from current curriculum development activities; • seeing technology as "the answer"; instead, start seeing technology as one "arrow" in the assets teachers need to support differentiated instruction; • having school authorities work in isolation from each other, as well as from teachers and schools; • developing provincial assessments and other initiatives that marginalize teachers' professional judgment (eg, the initial pilot of the Student Learning Assessments).

	Continue...	Start...	Stop ...
Public Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeing equity—not competition—as the basis for public policy in education (working in concert with parent communities); • initiating and implementing local and provincial assessment programs focused on building the professional responsibility of teachers rather than on bureaucratic accountabilities; • viewing the school (supported by districts) as the locus of control and, therefore, the unit of measurement for outcomes and performance; • engaging parents through school councils in the work of public assurance, school development planning and community engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeing a combination of provincial measures (literacy, numeracy and core skills) and local measures (based on school development plans and district priorities) as the key components of public assurance; • making strong use of school development plans to engage communities in the work of public assurance; • ensuring that educational changes are based on research-informed theories of action shared by education partners, including international experts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positioning regulatory and legislative changes in governance as the foundation for school development; • seeing misplaced interpretations of evidence from PISA and other international rankings as a basis for public policy; • marginalizing the critical impact of social, economic and cultural conditions in a community on learning outcomes; instead, utilize key resources, such as The Early Childhood Education Mapping Project (Alberta Government 2014), to understand such impacts; • maintaining uncertainty about the strategic direction of the ministry of education; • undermining public confidence in the professional capacity of teachers.

Background—A whole-system approach to achieving a great school for all

In 2013, the ATA convened a consensus panel of leading education experts in an effort to develop a strategic framework for transforming education in Alberta schools. Connected to this work and informed by trends that were influencing school development globally, *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta* describes twelve dimensions of transformation that represent the contours of what schools committed to equity would look like in the years ahead.

The central conclusion of the consensus panel was simple in its clarity but provocative in its challenge: without considering each of the twelve dimensions in terms of a whole-system theory of change, educational improvement in Alberta would be neither achieved nor sustainable.² An executive summary of the panel's report, *Time for Action—Transformation in Alberta Schools* (2013), has been widely circulated among education partners to promote a broader public dialogue regarding the need for a strategic approach

to educational improvement. *Time for Action* was included in the symposium kit, as the symposium continued to consider the twelve dimensions of transformation that *A Great School for All* had outlined and *Time for Action* had endorsed.

Building on this discourse, the international dialogue on curriculum in May 2014 and the ATA's continued efforts to advance educational excellence through a focus on equity are foundational to the Association's strategic plan.³ As the strategic plan outlines, research and international partnerships, active engagement with the public and a commitment to advocate for optimal learning environments will enable the creation of a great school for all students.

Keeping the fundamental challenge of creating a great school for all in mind, the symposium honed in on a focal question: *What are the key implications of emerging curriculum reforms in Alberta in terms of the working lives of teachers, student learning and public assurance?*



Without considering each of the twelve dimensions in terms of a whole-system theory of change, educational improvement in Alberta would be neither achieved nor sustainable.

Mapping the rocky terrain of educational renewal in Alberta

As with other jurisdictions around the world, Alberta faces significant changes that promise to incite reexamination of the goals of basic education and what it means to be a well-educated citizen upon completing high school. For example, since 2009 and the publication of *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans* (Alberta Education 2010b), the government has struggled to achieve any significant changes.

Without meaningful input from the profession, Alberta Education decided to focus its curriculum-redevelopment initiative on cross-curricular competencies. This shift to competencies was announced by the government on 7 May 2013 (Ministerial Order No. 001/2013). The rationale for adopting cross-curricular competencies was outlined in *Framework for Student Learning: Competencies for Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens with an Entrepreneurial Spirit* (Alberta Education 2011). This focus on competencies, along with other emerging government reforms, offered both promises and challenges. Further, it reflected a global trend toward viewing basic education as an opportunity to adopt a more holistic approach to teaching and learning while at the same time advancing a view of schooling that embraces what are, at times, conflicting priorities: entrepreneurialism and competitiveness; emphasis on skills while retaining “the basics” of literacy and

numeracy; and enhanced personalization of learning while fostering the development of engaged, ethical citizens who contribute to vibrant communities.

After six years, *Inspiring Education* has produced few concrete changes in schools outside of the network of high schools engaged in flexibility projects.

Re-envisioning Alberta's curriculum requires critical consideration of what a competency focus might mean on the road ahead.

According to the Ministerial Order, students coming out of Alberta's school system should be able to

- know how to learn,
- think critically,
- identify and solve problems,
- manage information,
- innovate,
- create opportunities,
- apply multiple literacies,
- communicate well and cooperate with others,
- demonstrate global and cultural understanding and
- identify and apply career and life skills.

The Ministerial Order passed by the previous government offers vague aspirations for

Alberta's school system to enable young people to be entrepreneurial, engaged thinkers and ethical citizens. However, this requires changes to what we teach, how we teach and how we assess what has been learned. The Government of Alberta has attempted to achieve such changes through a series of efforts that includes redesigning curriculum (eg, prototyping); introducing new provincial assessments in Grades 3, 6 and 9; implementing high school flexibility initiatives; reconsidering school and system performance measures; and reviewing the role of technology in learning in *The Learning Technology Policy Framework*.

Despite the significant difficulties encountered with some of these efforts, the promised changes—some of which are outlined below—offer hope for progress.

1. A strong focus on the student and the process of learning

Increasing the sense of ownership, involvement and engagement in learning by teachers and students; making learning more focused on the way in which the student learns while being more inclusive of multiple cultural and social perspectives (eg, teachers, employers, postsecondary institutions, First Nations and Métis communities, nonprofit organizations and community organizations, students).

2. Less focus on content and more focus on the processes of learning

Students will still study subjects like science, arts and mathematics but will do so with the intention of developing skills, knowledge, understanding and the attitudes and methods required by those

subjects to achieve success. Drawing from constructivism as a theory of learning, some stress “discovery learning” and projects. While these will be a significant part of how students learn at some stages for some subjects, such instructional decisions need to be made by teachers.

3. Shift from a prescribed study schedule and curriculum to greater flexibility

Teachers will be able to make many more decisions about how best to achieve the competency expectations for their students through locally relevant, meaningful work and activities. All students in Alberta at each grade level will still be expected to have mastery of the competencies associated with that grade, but how they achieve this will largely be determined locally.

4. A focus on assessment for learning

Students will be assessed, but the focus for this assessment will be on the question “What else does this student have to do to master these competencies?” Provincial assessments will still exist, but the focus for these will ideally be to enhance the professional judgment of teachers and to focus on supporting student success through an interdisciplinary approach to curriculum design and instruction.

5. Less print, more varied forms of learning materials

Quality learning resources are available digitally and in print, as well as through simulations, interactive learning resources and global collaborative projects. Teachers and learners will have more choice in which resources to use to support learning.

6. Literacy and numeracy as foundations for developing competencies

Greater clarity regarding what is meant by the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy will be achieved by outlining the indicators and benchmarks that illustrate that students have the confidence in a variety of contexts to go beyond the basic skills of reading, writing and solving simple arithmetic problems.

Of course, these changes depend on teachers' capacity to see curriculum as an encounter, the community's trust in teachers' professionalism

and stakeholders' widespread support of more flexible approaches to learning. These necessary conditions were promised in 2010 but have been gradually eroding ever since. A number of criticisms of both the processes and outcomes of the *Inspiring Education* reform agenda have emerged and the most comprehensive reviews can be found in Jay Smith's recent analysis (2014). More recently, the fall 2015 piloting of the Grade 3 Student Learning Assessments signalled that change led by the profession remains an elusive goal.



These changes depend on teachers' capacity to see curriculum as an encounter, the community's trust in teachers' professionalism and stakeholders' widespread support of more flexible approaches to learning.

Our design challenges

As with the history of ambitious educational reforms, the proposed changes have not gone unnoticed or uncontested in the public domain. Along with public deliberation regarding the appropriate balance of “content versus skills” and the proper place of technology in the lives of students, concerns have emerged over the apparent growing influence of corporate interests in setting the education-reform agenda.

Of course, much of what is being advanced as “transformational change” has historical precedents. As von Heyking (2012) outlines, as one example in curriculum reform, the progressive education movement in Alberta in the late 1930s sought change akin to the current proposed shift to a focus on competencies. A key similarity between the moves in the 1930s and now is the call for a shift away from the study of traditional subjects for their own sake to instead emphasize learning focused on solving real-world problems (including grappling with the global economic meltdown of the Great Depression and the scale of military conflicts). The public contestation and media coverage of the “enterprise” method of teaching that followed the 1930s attempted changes demonstrate the challenges educators face when attempting to reform the purposes of schooling. Current debates over the desirability and utility of standardized testing and the growing influence of regimes of international rankings of system performance,

such as PISA, likewise contribute to educators’ challenges.

Multiple activities have emerged in the past five years in Alberta to support the shifts identified above, including, for example, curriculum prototyping work, which is predominantly intended to inform the rewriting of programs of study in the six subject areas: arts education, language arts (English, French language arts, Français), mathematics, social studies, sciences and wellness. As with any curriculum work, the complex tasks involved in prototyping will involve examining current promising practices while inquiring into the following questions:

- At each grade level, how can the proposed cross-curricular competencies be woven into subject areas and be meaningfully assessed?
- What would the scope and sequence look like for students as they progress through grades? How would this look in a truly inclusive approach to learning?
- How do we avoid the temptation to rush to adopt unproved technology applications as a substitute for sustained innovation?
- For each grade level, what are the literacy and numeracy progress indicators needed to ensure that students are progressing without crowding out the broad goals of education?

- For each grade level and subject/discipline area (taking into account cross-curricular competencies), what are the teaching and learning resources required to support student learning?
- How do we broaden the scope of vocational and academic opportunities in our high schools in order to honour the gifts and talents of every Alberta student?
- What are the necessary classroom conditions and community supports needed to enhance learning for all students regardless of personal or community characteristics?
- How do we build capacity for the teaching profession to lead curriculum and assessment development?

These design challenges are best addressed through lateral networks of school innovation built on the foundation of enhancing teachers' and principals' professional practice and leadership. A growing body of research provides examples of what locally developed and laterally connected networks of innovative schools can do to transform the entire system by "learning our way forward from the inside out" (Murgatroyd et al 2012, 200). As the following sections of this publication outline, we need to embrace a theory of change that sees school sites leading innovation, supported by a provincial government committed to working with the profession to achieve the innovations outlined in *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta*.

Educational renewal through strategic foresight

“Today’s problems come from yesterday’s solutions.”

Peter Senge (2013)

In their review of the eight contemporary competency policy frameworks, Voogt and Roblin (2012) proposed a framework that distinguishes between the *intended*, the *implemented* and the *attained* curriculum. While there are laudable aspirations associated with the move toward competencies, there will continue to be significant gaps “between the needs of the knowledge society expressed by the advocates of 21st-century competencies and the ways in which these competencies are addressed in national and school curricula—ie, the implemented curriculum” (2012, 301). Furthermore, Voogt and Roblin argue, “appropriate assessment practices need to be in place to be able to determine whether expected learning outcomes are achieved—ie, the attained curriculum.”

The major challenge in supporting the anticipated shifts in teaching and learning for Alberta will be reconciling the gaps between the curriculum as *intended*, *implemented* and *attained*. In Alberta, these gaps will be addressed by ensuring that the shift to competencies driven by technological enablers does not become yet one more layer of curricular prescription that overlays current programs of study and bureaucratic requirements for assessing and reporting student progress. Strategic foresight and

action will be needed to navigate a number of the promises and concerns that have emerged not only in Alberta, but also globally.

Specifically, the three recurring concerns teachers, school leaders and others in the education community are expressing about the changes under way are:

1. AN UNARTICULATED THEORY OF ACTION APPEARS TO BE GUIDING DECISION MAKING

- Evident are significant challenges regarding the management of curriculum change in apparent isolation from other changes in the education sector such as assessment, public assurance, high school redesign, roller-coaster educational funding and declining support for students with special needs. As well, numerous initiatives championed by different branches and divisions of the education ministry pile on top of local school authority initiatives.
- Significant concern from teachers persists regarding the transition from old to new. How will teachers and schools be supported in making transitions? Is there a plan of implementation to facilitate the school cultural changes needed to support innovation and risk-taking? How can cultures of command and control be shifted to allow for more professional autonomy? Currently over one-third of

Alberta teachers report having little or no control over their professional growth plans (ATA 2013).

- The foundational role of research and a well-developed theory of action remain unclear in Alberta. Previous attempts to establish a provincial research framework and a coordinated approach to system and school improvement have experienced little success (Couture 2015); meanwhile, large-scale changes are being proposed without a research-informed strategic conversation among education partners.⁴
- How learning is assessed and how schools are held accountable for their performance (now called public assurance) are central issues in curriculum redevelopment when outcomes are changing and the performance of school systems is under scrutiny. The new forms of provincial assessment being developed (ie, Student Learning Assessments) will have an impact both on what schools do in terms of focus for learning and how they do it, but these still appear as separate and episodic initiatives that are not part of an integrated model of change.

Some parents and the public at large are concerned about their role and influence in the change process. Areas of concern include the role of corporate interests in setting the agenda for educational reform and the lack of access parents have to decision-making processes.

2. THE BROADER SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF LEARNING ARE BEING marginally CONSIDERED

- Given the complex and interrelated set of trends and critical influences shaping the teaching and learning process and public education in general, it is essential that the interconnectedness of schools and Alberta's position as a global player be recognized. For example, no credible researcher disputes the claim that teacher and school programming combined determines no more than 30 per cent of student learning outcomes. David Berliner, one of the foremost educational writers today, reminds us that, "in the rush to improve student achievement through accountability systems relying on high-stakes tests, our policymakers and citizens forgot, or cannot understand, or deliberately avoid the fact that our children live nested lives."⁵ Further discussion of the trends affecting schools in Alberta is available in the Association's annual environmental scan, *Changing Landscapes*.⁶
- In the previous government's discussion of competencies, some see an overemphasis on work-related skills that may distort the work of the school in developing emotional intelligence, artistic and creative sensitivity, resilience and social skills.⁷ The broader questions of the purpose of schooling and education appear to have been subjugated by a focus on "learnification," a reductive "translation of everything there is to say about education in terms of learning and learners" (Biesta 2009, 38).

- When one considers questions of the purpose of school and the kinds of capacities children will require, bureaucratic forms of accountability based on lists of discrete and decontextualized competencies will fail the test of what children require to become successful by bringing the world into schools (Grumet 2006, 53).
- Given growing disparity in Alberta and the persistence of systemic obstacles to learning, the challenge is not the absence of skills and competencies, but rather ensuring that all children will be part of more hopeful futures. If Alberta conceives of this challenge only in terms of competencies, it risks being in the realm of empty promise to achieve excellence through equity. Alternatively, if a great school built around nurturing capabilities offers children participation in schools as hubs of communities—defined in terms of hope and meaningful forms of life other than immediate economic gain—then Alberta may become a more diverse and socially and economically rich place to live, work and play.

3. THE TEACHING PROFESSION'S VIEWS ARE NOT INCLUDED IN LEADING CHANGE

- Some have expressed concerns that a shift away from “traditional teaching methods” will not produce the skills and competencies parents expect from

their sons and daughters—the press and politics fuel this message. The connections between subjects, disciplines, grade levels and competencies should be clarified in terms of the implications for instructional practice, assessment and reporting. In particular, defining appropriate assessment practices and reporting requirements needs to be a priority.

- Trust in teachers and a coherent program of supports based on a collaborative professional autonomy will help ensure that curriculum changes will not dictate instructional practice. Teachers have expressed concern that a shift in how they teach (as well as what they teach) is being undertaken without real teacher engagement and involvement and without proper investment.
- If innovation is to be sustained in schools, the necessary supports must be in place. Teachers will cite lack of support for inclusion of students with special needs as the primary obstacle in their aspirations to see all students learning well (Alberta Teachers' Association 2015b). Long-standing evidence pointing to the precipitous decline in support for students with special needs has been well-documented, though all but ignored by government.⁸ Notably, poorly implemented technological “learning support” (ie, digital reporting tools and records management) is the number two source of stress for teachers.

The beautiful risks of innovation: Strategic challenges ahead

The observations made here lead to these five strategic questions—each of which directly points to questions examined during the symposium:

- 1. *Equity as the driver:*** If the intention is to create a great school for all, how do we ensure that equity continues to be the driver of change in Alberta? How do we avoid ramping up performance around competencies that distract us from nurturing capabilities and developing resilient individuals and communities?
- 2. *Focus for learning and teaching:*** To ensure a thriving Alberta and a democratic society, how do stakeholders develop public consensus regarding the defined learning outcomes for a graduate of elementary, junior high and high school?⁹ How do stakeholders address the distractions of an excessive focus on reforming governance structures and legislative and regulatory mechanisms, particularly when the school site remains the strategic locus of sustained change?
- 3. *Articulating a research-informed approach to change:*** What can stakeholders learn about the process of educational change in Alberta from (a) experiences elsewhere and (b) the province's own current experience? How can stakeholders learn from lost opportunities (ie, the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) and efforts to establish a provincial research framework)?

- 4. *Teacher supports:*** What sustained supports do teachers need to live curriculum as an encounter—to resist the impulse to see curriculum and instruction as simply “delivering someone else’s mail” (Pinar 2004) or to position technology as a panacea that will address complex systemic educational problems (McRae 2015)?
- 5. *Assessment and public assurance:*** What kind of assessments and model for public assurance are needed to enable a great school for all to move into practice? Though the public assurance approach includes public awareness and basic understanding around the changes being proposed, to date communication and public engagement in these respects has been limited to work done internally within government.

The May 2014 “Off the Charts” symposium provided an opportunity to explore multiple responses to these questions, as well as the implications for the developments in Alberta. In addition, the symposium addressed a broad range of issues that sought to link the idea of a great school for all with the teaching, learning and assessment that occur in such a school. These factors, while presenting seemingly intractable challenges, should be seen by leaders at all levels of the education sector as strategic opportunities that invite mindful and courageous leadership.

Key opportunities in taking a whole-system approach to change in Alberta

At the heart of the conversation flowing from the May 2014 symposium is an understanding that schools are the place in which change and development occurs for students, teachers and the highly relational process of learning. This reflects an emerging international shift reflected in the work of a number of commentators (Winnitoy 2015; Jónasson, in press). While policies and programs provide the framework for the work of teachers and students, the nature of innovation in education is school-based (Murgatroyd 2013). Alberta recognized this for many years and, seeking to enable local change to promote system-wide change, invested in AISI. The loss of AISI, as well as the failure to establish a coordinated provincial research strategy, disables genuine locally and professionally “owned” innovation and limits opportunities to bring innovation to scale. These lost opportunities cannot easily be replaced by initiatives framed and underdetermined by the Department of Education. Kent den Heyer of the University of Alberta examined this aspect of recent developments in his presentation at the symposium.

Using Biesta’s definition of “learnification” as the transformation of the vocabulary used to talk about education into one of “learning” and “learners,” den Heyer asked whether the future of education in Alberta “is more of the same [but using a different language] in the name of change” (den Heyer

2013; Kerr 2014). He suggested that Alberta was experiencing system confusion, policy amnesia and political tourism, inflected by an explicit political lack of trust in educational professionals and an attempt to strip the profession of its historical role in determining the process by which students learn. Focusing on “21st-century skills” was a way of making a stronger connection between education and the needs of the economy, effectively reducing education to the role of economic servant. den Heyer wondered what was “educational about education” in such a conversation, noting the need for socialization, engagement, discovery, exploration and understanding as being equal to the need for mastery, skill and competence. The challenge to schools implied by a focus on a certain kind of curriculum is clear: “[Curriculum making] is a mechanism or tool deployed to manage the political, professional and public fields around schooling, more often than not designed to mute rather than amplify calls for educational reform and change” (Westbury 2008 cited in den Heyer 2009).

Sam Sellar of the University of Queensland reinforced some aspects of den Heyer’s analysis when he reviewed the impact of the publication and coverage of the PISA by the media. He introduced the term “PISA shock”—what happens when a school system examined by PISA underperforms, fuelled by both media and political game-playing. Such shock acts as a catalyst for policy changes,

usually focused on accountability, curriculum and assessment; however, it can be reframed productively as the following opportunities.

OPPORTUNITY 1: USE EQUITY AS A DRIVER OF REFORM AND RENEWAL

The most recent 2013 “PISA shock” focused on Finland’s decline in performance and the emergence of Shanghai, Korea, Singapore and other Asian countries. Sellar’s interviews with policymakers made clear that the PISA evidence “prompts a political desire for change, but does not make clear what these changes should be.” Just because some Asian countries perform better than Alberta does not mean that Alberta can adopt and adapt the practices of these nations, since a range of factors are at work (socio-cultural, economic and other) that shape outcomes (Zhao 2014).

The communication of PISA results often detracts from the major findings of many studies that show that “less egalitarian societies have lower than average achievement, lower percentages of very highly skilled students and higher percentages of very low skilled students. In direct contrast, egalitarian societies have higher average achievement, higher percentages of very highly skilled students and lower percentages of very low skilled students” (Condrón 2011). Sahlberg (2011) also notes that in such societies there are fewer differences—less inequality—between schools in performance. High-performing school systems are those which put equity, not competition, at the heart of their work. PISA supports these political maneuvers by redefining equity as a performance measure,

containing the idea of “equity” within school factors and making schools responsible for inequality.

It is productive to reiterate Berliner’s findings that socioeconomic conditions account for 60 per cent of the variance in student performance, with a further 20 per cent due to schools and half of that due to teacher practice (2009). Also notable is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) most recent finding that 46 per cent of the variance in scores on its PISA tests of mathematics, science and reading competence were related to social factors, especially poverty (Ash 2014; OECD 2013a). In addition, the following evidence-based observation demands attention:

The focus on test scores also detracts attention from the serious underrepresentation of low-income populations in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and the larger problem that underrepresentation illustrates [...] the growing gap in income and access. The gap will not be narrowed by rhetoric about international test-score rankings. (Rotberg 2014)

Equity therefore needs to be a driver for educational policy and practice, developing mechanisms by which students from a range of different backgrounds have similar levels of educational outcomes. Equity is more than equal opportunity for access to learning; it requires differentiated investment and instruction to create more equal outcomes (Murgatroyd and Couture 2013).

OPPORTUNITY 2: FOCUS FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING RATHER THAN EXCESSIVE PRESCRIPTION

Rosemary Hipkins and Louise Green from New Zealand and Arja-Sisko Holappa and Tiina Tähkä from Finland explored the implications of their own countries' respective curriculum change journeys, both of which are complex stories with many nuances and yet-to-be-resolved issues (see, for instance, Hipkins and McDowall 2013).

Drawing from her experience, Hipkins suggested that there were some necessary conditions for effective learning in competency-based education systems. One of these is a significant investment in teachers' collaborative professional autonomy, which would enable teachers to engage in mindful conversations about their role in a school that focuses on learning outcomes and competencies and makes effective use of differentiated instruction, appropriate assessment for and of learning, appropriate technology, and the projects and activities to build competencies and skills. Other conditions necessary for effective learning in

such competency-based regimes, as identified by teachers in New Zealand, include

- to have space in which students can take initiative and directly experience what it feels like to be and become “a person who can...”;
- to be encouraged and enabled to make meaningful connections between the task at hand and other aspects of their lives, including their cumulative, ongoing and lifelong learning; and
- to be challenged and supported in developing key competencies in contexts that are progressively wide-ranging and complex—being busy and engaged are not enough: the work of learning must stretch students. (Hipkins and McDowall 2013)

Interestingly, these necessary conditions for student learning also apply to collaborative professional learning for teachers.

Hipkins also delivered some key advice for those encountering competency-based learning for the first time. This advice is summarized in the table below (see also Hipkins et al 2014).

Table 2: Advice on Competency-based Learning¹⁰

Helpful ways of thinking about a focus on competencies	Common misunderstandings and actions related to a focus on competencies
<p>There are reciprocal relationships between key competencies and curriculum learning: while they can be viewed as ends in themselves, key competencies are also means to the other broader purposes of school beyond our preoccupation with “learnification.” Through collaborative inquiry, teachers may be able to situate competencies more as metaphors about learning than allow them to become decontextualized lists of attributes.</p>	<p>Competencies are seen as an “add on” to traditional learning, not something that transforms that learning, with a specific focus on both immediate and longer-term purposes for learning supports.</p>

Helpful ways of thinking about a focus on competencies	Common misunderstandings and actions related to a focus on competencies
<p>All of the key competencies are always in use, but one might be foregrounded for learning purposes.</p> <p>Meta-level conversations help students build awareness of their areas of strength and areas that require attention. Purposeful strengthening of competencies begins with making the tacit explicit. Developing a shared language for learning and associated reflective practices can be helpful.</p>	<p>"Name and hope" actions—eg, putting the name of one or more key competencies beside an activity that was going to take place anyway and doing little to nothing differently. "We already do that" encapsulates this dilemma.</p>
<p>The "meaning-making" key competency (using language, symbols and texts) has subject-specific differences. Understanding these differences can challenge teachers to learn more about the "nature" of their subject (eg, nature of science or historical thinking).</p>	<p>Meaning-making is a synonym for "understanding" the rigours of a cross-disciplinary learning.</p> <p>This key competency is only about "literacy across the curriculum."</p>
<p>Every individual's competencies can be developed and strengthened given the right sorts of <i>learning opportunities</i>. This has implications for <i>pedagogy</i>: what the teacher does to create and foster appropriate learning opportunities is at least as important as what students bring and are prepared to try.</p>	<p>The key competencies are seen as personality traits of individual students (individuals will have their own areas of strength, of course, but what happens in class enables them to stretch and develop these—or not).</p>
<p>The key competencies apply school-wide. Participation or leadership opportunities leverage the development of citizenship capabilities.</p>	<p>It is appropriate to say one thing but do another (eg, school's disciplinary framework and practices do not support collective and individual competency development).</p>
<p>Key competencies are demonstrated in action. This has implications for the types of tasks used to assess them.</p>	<p>Traditional pencil and paper tasks remain a sufficient means of assessment.</p>
<p>The relative strengths a student can show are context- and task-dependent and hence likely to vary across familiar and less familiar tasks and settings and be different for different students at any one time (the sociocultural idea of affordances is useful here). Often the challenge is to demonstrate capabilities as the contexts get more demanding.</p>	<p>Teachers make the judgment about students' areas of strength based on their own inferences and without involving students in the process.</p>
<p>The nature of "progress" in strengthening key competencies is complex and likely to follow different trajectories for different students. This relates to the idea of affordances. Individuals already bring different strengths and skills to new tasks. What is a stretch for one might be routine for his or her neighbour.</p>	<p>Making progress is an unproblematic construct, or even one that can be figured out just by thinking about what students typically do at different ages and stages. This thinking tends to be what has informed our view of progress when building curriculum levels.</p>
<p>Finding ways to involve students in discussing their personal competency growth is helpful. Ideas for the coconstruction of assessment and reporting are productive here, especially if they can weave in conversations that extend beyond school (eg, building genuine learning partnerships with parents).</p>	<p>Thinking "student-centered" means handing over power and responsibility for decision making to the students, though students do not know what they do not know and learning conversations need to be carefully scaffolded.</p>
<p>Teachers also need opportunities to learn in ways that strengthen their instructional practices and development; therefore, all of the above applies to them as learners as well.</p>	

Echoing Hipkins, who focused on New Zealand, was the message from Finland: if the focus is on meaningful learning for a sustainable future, then there is a need to

- build on current strengths of preprimary education, basic education and voluntary additional basic education—strengthen readiness to learn;
- reinforce the values and principles that are the basis of Finland’s education system:
 - reduce inequality
 - support the diversity of student growth and development
 - consolidate the development of identity and the experience of success
 - reinforce mutual respect
 - promote sustainable development
- be present- and future-focused on the skills and competencies needed for the future of the country;
- strengthen the conditions for creativity and collaboration for learning in a way that promotes diverse learning environments;
- encourage “less is more” in terms of content—allow the unhurried concentration on the essentials and consolidate learning;
- enable local pedagogical development—schools create innovation;
- encourage and enable the flexible approach to curriculum using technology, professional networks and local resources; and
- enable teachers to design, develop and deploy appropriate assessment for learning and assessments of learning.

Although the education systems in Finland and New Zealand are significantly different, the messages that emerge are very much the same. In both systems, students and their teachers reside at the heart of the process of curriculum change. Engaging both parties in the journey for change is essential, as is empowering teachers to work collaboratively as autonomous professionals if change is to “stick.”

Both systems also framed curriculum similarly, defining it in terms of (a) what students learn, (b) how they learn, (c) what teachers do to enable and support learning (the nature of pedagogy) and (d) how learning is assessed, both in terms of assessment for learning and assessment of learning. That is, they took a holistic view of curriculum as being more than about competencies, knowledge, skills and understanding.

In addition, both Finland and New Zealand systems view curriculum change as an evolutionary process taking time (Finland has set a five-year window for the process and New Zealand has been on its journey since 2007). As Hargreaves (2013) has observed, “In general, when it comes to curriculum reform, the grandiosity of the design is usually inversely related to the possibility of bringing it to life in practice.”

This was evinced in New Zealand, where the direction of curriculum change was affected by politics. A change in government, as well as political direction and emphasis, led to disruption of carefully-built processes of engagement and ownership. This, in turn, led some—especially some teachers—to become

disaffected. This connects to the observation that

Curriculum change processes and discourses must be made transparent so that teachers can have a framework for “de-reification” of a curriculum document into their classroom practices. Without planning for teachers’ participation in the negotiation of curriculum meanings, curriculum developers themselves become marginalized, and the cultural objects they have developed will be adopted in unanticipated ways. (Fernandez et al 2008)

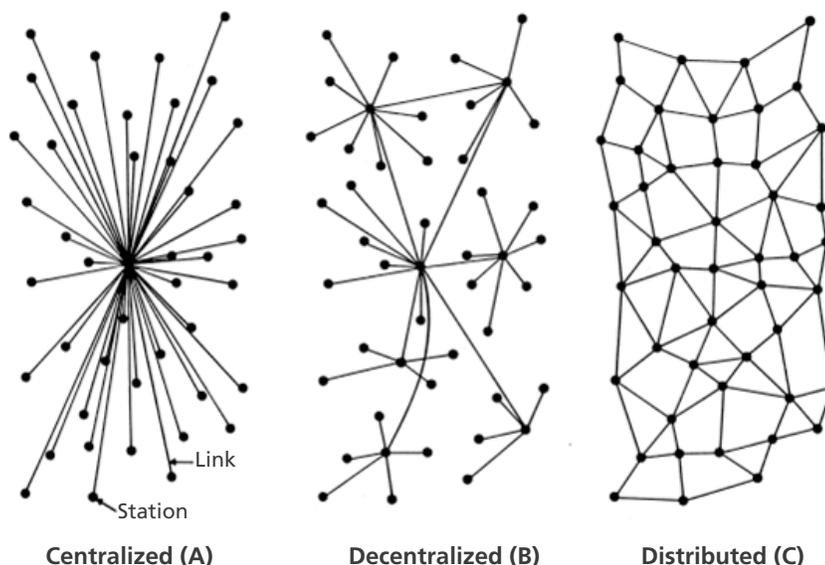
This sense of marginalization was evident in some of the responses to the changes related to the curriculum development process in New Zealand. Nonetheless—as recent accounts of the changes in New Zealand make clear (Hipkins et al 2014)—the process of

future-focused curriculum change appears unstoppable, as it is owned by schools, students, communities and teachers.

**OPPORTUNITY 3:
DEVELOP AND ARTICULATE A
COHERENT RESEARCH-INFORMED
THEORY OF WHOLE-SYSTEM
CHANGE**

In curriculum reform, three kinds of system change processes are at play and are captured in figure 1. The first process (A) located the definition and specification of curriculum at the centre (ministry) level, with schools expected to implement the curriculum. This is very much the process currently in use in England and in the common core curriculum in the United States. In such a process, experts define what is to be studied and schools are asked to implement it.

Figure 1: Centralized, Decentralized and Distributed Networks



The second type of process (B) sees a more decentralized change process in place. New Zealand pursued this decentralized approach. Rather than emphasize defining competencies and skills, the New Zealand process focused on clusters of school systems and regional networks as curriculum developers, with curriculum including instruction and assessment (Hipkins 2011). In the New Zealand case, the intent was to

- catalyze high-level curriculum change;
- energize school professionals in ways that would affirm and sustain their commitment to learners and learning;
- strengthen the process of continuous improvement supported by ongoing inquiry into shared practice;
- give additional impetus to the growing awareness of the importance of culture and of the diversity of New Zealand students;
- consolidate strength-based approaches to learning, in contrast to deficit-based thinking about behaviour and achievement.

School clusters were to develop appropriate curriculum based on the national framework that would then be adopted and adapted by schools throughout New Zealand, with best practices being shared in collaborative professional development processes. But this takes time. Even in “change-ready schools,” the process of engaging and implementing change took two years or more.

To some extent, Alberta hoped to pursue a decentralized change process through its prototyping work (Hambrook and Schrieber 2013). In this approach, the central agency

sets a broad framework, but the bulk of the work is done by key “nodes” in the system—Edmonton Catholic and Public Schools for Grades K–3, Calgary Public and 17 other districts in relation to Grades 4–6, 7–9 and 10–12; Black Gold Regional Schools and five other school districts for Grades 7–9.¹¹ Each school in Alberta was then to take the prototypes and develop appropriate school-based curriculum leveraging this work. Curriculum is seen in this process as focused on knowledge, skills and competencies rather than instructional strategies or assessment. However, ownership of these “prototypes” was limited and the engagement process for the system at large was fragmented at best.

The distributed system (C) is closer to the Finnish approach to curriculum change. While the National Board of Education sets out a curriculum framework based on the work of groups of specialist teachers, the translation of this broad framework into local action is determined at the school level, driven by locally determined priorities and the resources of the school. As Couture (2013) observes:

Rather than identifying elaborate lists of competencies and competency indicators, the Finns focused on helping teachers assess competence as it manifests itself in each school community. The Finns, in other words, focus on assessing demonstrable competence, not on looking for evidence of generic competence.

These different approaches to the process of change have different consequences. At the heart of the differences are the issues of “who owns the future?” Do teachers as professionals

have such a stake in the emerging curriculum that they are actively engaged using and in the community in which they live and work? Have other stakeholders been so engaged that they see the emerging curriculum as needed and appropriate development, versus a “fad” or change for the sake of change? As we have seen in Alberta, these issues raise doubts.

As our New Zealand colleagues emphasize,

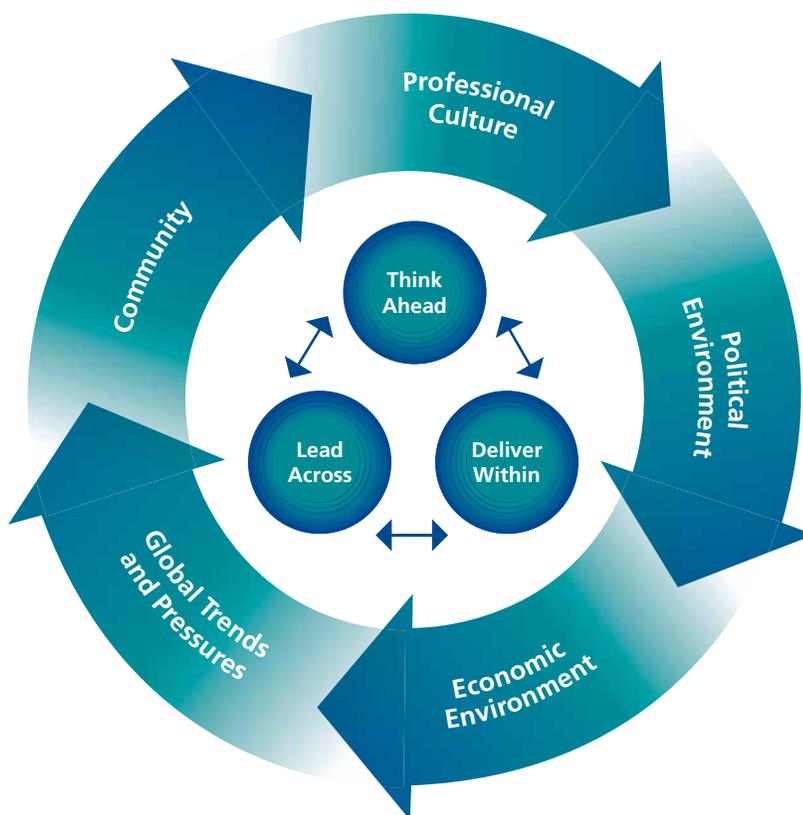
The implementation process is usefully viewed as a complex process of growth and change. This journey can start with school engagement of any aspect of New Zealand curriculum. What is

important is that schools persist with their development programme engaging with, responding to and calling on the strengths of all those within their wider community. (Hipkins 2011)

This is why we need to encourage mindful school leaders and teachers as professionals to understand the transformation and change journey and to engage in this journey in active and meaningful ways.

The ATA's *A Great School for All* (2012) outlines a systematic approach to this leadership work, which the following model captures:

Model 1: Leadership Cycle for Innovation in Alberta Schools



Bounded by culture and socio-economic and political factors, educational change and transformation in schools require mindful school leaders and those charged with the management of whole-system change to practice the three disciplines of effective leadership:

1. **Thinking ahead:** being bold, visionary and forward-thinking in aspiring to create a great school for all students. Key here is the foresight to avoid distractions such as the symptoms of the GERM: focusing short-term gains in test scores or the privileging of “quick-fixes” sometimes offered by technology vendors.
2. **Delivering within:** materially supporting and committing to the values and goals one sets. A prime example here is the tendency to side-step the issues of poverty and the readiness to learn factors that could build tremendous capacity to improve educational development.
3. **Leading across:** principals, teachers and students crossing within and between school and jurisdictional boundaries to learn from each other. This includes sustaining networks that cross jurisdictional and national boundaries to address complex and nettlesome problems such as improving school climate and student engagement.

When these leadership dimensions are practiced in thoughtful, strategic ways, positive change can occur. Building on the strengths of high-performing schools around the world involves trusting principals, teachers and students to lead the way to transformation.

OPPORTUNITY 4: DEVELOP THE PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS TO ENABLE THEM TO LEAD THE CHANGE

Principals from New Zealand and Edmonton (Canada) reinforced the importance of effective leadership and professional capital in their presentations at the symposium. In particular, they provided examples in which mindful school leadership had enabled teachers to demonstrate inspired curriculum change that “tapped into the curious minds of students and teachers” (Leslie et al 2013) and changed the way students and teachers understood the work of teaching and learning. Sean Lessard demonstrated this with respect to self-esteem and First Nations learners, and Jean Stiles, Lisa Wright and Louise Green spoke eloquently as to the impact of building the collaborative professional capacity of teachers within a school to act autonomously on learning and learning outcomes: innovation and quality learning comes from such work.

Essential to this work, as symposium participants emphasized, are appropriate conditions of practice. This relates to class size, class composition (skills sets, number of students with special needs, development stages of students), appropriate technologies for learning and access to relevant resources and skills in the community and parental engagement. Alberta’s conditions of practice, therefore, require consideration.

As documented in the research, Alberta teachers are currently working more hours than their counterparts globally. Alberta teachers currently work an average of 56.5

hours per week while the results of the recent (2013) Teaching and Learning International Survey place Alberta teachers in the top tier of jurisdictions in terms of amount of hours worked per week.¹² The consequences for students' learning conditions have also been dramatic. Alberta classrooms have twice the level of complexity compared to OECD jurisdictions, with growing diversity continuing as our economy grows.

In the absence of optimal conditions of practice, differentiated instruction and the ability to support the different developmental needs of all learners is compromised. Developing “collaborative professional autonomy” as configured by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) offers real promise to address the current conditions, specifically the growing complexity of classrooms. The traditional focus on “professional autonomy”—referring to the professional independence of teachers in schools, especially the degree to which they can make decisions about what they teach students, when they teach what, how they teach and assess the student—ought to be complemented and undergirded with recognition that collaboration through communities of practice will advance innovation and exemplary teaching practice.

In a similar vein, the previous government's aspiration for education (see *Inspiring Education* and the Ministerial Order) as a system seeking to develop competent, lifelong independent learners would be complemented by the view that the development of such learner independence depends on teacher autonomy (Lamb 2000; Little 2000) to interpret a provincial curriculum in ways appropriate to the learner, the school and the community. Regardless of the fate of *Inspiring Education*, any meaningful educational reform must be undertaken in a collaborative environment—schools, specialist councils, districts, and professional networks and organizations. Further, teacher professional autonomy, like that of doctors, is to be guided by evidence-based practice and expert knowledge.

Professional development—both ongoing development for school-based curriculum and the enhancement of teaching skills, assessment skills and social networking within the community to support learning—is an essential prerequisite for the development of relevant local versions of a competency-based curriculum. Given that the teaching of competencies in Grande Prairie or Olds (Alberta, Canada) may look very different, teachers need time to prepare their versions of the curriculum and supports to facilitate change in innovative ways.



Professional development—both ongoing development for school-based curriculum and the enhancement of teaching skills, assessment skills and social networking within the community to support learning—is an essential prerequisite for the development of relevant local versions of a competency-based curriculum.

OPPORTUNITY 5: SUPPORT TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOUND ASSESSMENT AS A PATH TO PUBLIC ASSURANCE

“What will get in the way of curriculum change and innovation is an unchanged system of accountability and assessment,” said one symposium member. Another added, “Until we align assessment with the emerging competency-based curriculum and link this to public assurance, nothing will really change except the language we use to talk about learning and teaching.”

What will also get in the way, according to Sellar, is an over-reliance on external validation and assessment, such as PISA. The OECD is currently expanding PISA to assess more cognitive skills, a wide range of noncognitive and “soft” skills (eg, trust, collaboration, future-directedness, citizenship) and is working with accredited providers such as CTB-McGraw Hill to do so at the level of the school (already under way in the US, UK and Spain). The aim is to better assess the flow of human capital relevant for the labour market (see OECD 2013b) and to improve the explanatory power of such data for policymakers. This may lead, according to Sellar, to governance and policy through comparison and the unwise adoption of policies developed elsewhere “since they produce results.” Such policies and practices are rooted in social, economic and cultural systems and cannot easily be transported

indiscriminately into other jurisdictions. This “political tourism” does not lead to enhanced learning or enhanced collaborative professional autonomy (Harris and Burns 2011), but satisfies the politicians’ need to be seen as taking bold steps.

What is needed, according to the discussions at the symposium, is a focused strategy for the assessment of student progress (assessment for learning) and assessment of learning outcomes (assessment of learning) coupled with a new model for public assurance directly connected to the emerging Alberta curriculum. Rather than seeing assessment and assurance as separate initiatives, stakeholders must view them (as in Finland and New Zealand) as core and integrated questions for the development of curriculum.

AISI provided some strong examples of best practices for the assessment of and for learning (Townsend et al 2010) and there is a range of options for a new model of public assurance that provides provincial comparison on key measures of literacy and numeracy and local measures appropriate to the school development plan for each school (Alberta Assessment Consortium 2012; Murgatroyd 2011). What needs to be avoided—and there is evidence that this is a challenge (Torrance 2007)—is the development of competency-based assessments as learning.

Most importantly, the discussion and development of assessment and assurance strategies need to be aligned with the curriculum.

A counter-narrative to “learnification”

Policies—successful and unsuccessful—are ultimately epic poems or stories, with problems to be solved, heroic agents, participants, false starts and dead ends, and with endings, at times happy and at times tragic. A principled policy borrowing depends upon an interpretive analysis of a whole educational system in operation: an understanding of everyday cultural practices, of diverse communities and demographics, of contending ideologies and relations of power, and of the human beings who make that system what it is.

Allan Luke (2011, 374)

From a review of the work of the symposium—the presentations, the challenging dialogue and inspired conversations—a model emerges of the way in which curriculum change in Alberta could unfold. It begins with creating intersections between decentralized curriculum development and collaborative professional autonomy to produce schools where learning is the byproduct of meaningful study and student inquiry. Such an approach signals a rejection of a “social engineering” approach to educational leadership (Grimmett 2014, 114–115) and avoids an all-too-familiar trap described by Pinar (2006, 109): “if only we make the right adjustments—in teaching, in learning, in assessment— it will hum, and transport us to our destination, the promised land of high test scores.” Positioning the

school and networks of schools as the locus for innovation is key (Jónasson, in press).

To achieve the aspired model of curriculum change requires a basic statement of broad curriculum goals and an investment in the readiness of students to learn. This then leverages the key points made throughout this symposium summary regarding what is necessary to develop engaged student learning that avoids the trap of “learnification.”

The policy drift toward “learnification” refers to the growing use of the language of “learners” and “learning” that privileges process over the content of learning and the content of human relationships. In brief, “learnification” focuses attention on acquiring skills and/or competencies while removing the social aspects of learning (including consideration of students’ personal circumstances and school-community characteristics) from policy discussions. With the focus on assessing outcomes, “it has become very easy to forget not only about the content of language learning, but also its purposes and the social relationships through which it takes place” (Kerr 2014). Biesta (2010), who first coined the term “learnification,” delineates the core functions that public education ought to perform: qualification, socialization and subjectification (19–21). While the first two speak for themselves, the latter—arguably the most “educational” of the three—refers to the more ephemeral aspects

of developing critical, creative “actors who are critically, creative, independent thinkers.” More recently, in the evocatively titled book *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Biesta (2013, 57) has elaborated on the limitations of the almost singular focus on learning as if it could be isolated from human relationships:

The experience of “being taught” is about those situations in which something enters our being from the outside, so to speak, as something that is fundamentally beyond the control of the “learner.” To be taught—to be open to receiving the gift of teaching—thus means being able to give such interruptions a place in one’s understanding and one’s being. This is why, following Kierkegaard, such teachings, when they are received, are a matter of subjective truth, that is, of truth to which we are willing to give authority.

Two problems exist with the focus on ‘learning’: (1) that learning is reduced to a process that “is in itself neutral or empty with regard to content, direction, and purpose”; and (2) that learning “is an individualistic and individualizing term” that moves “attention away from the importance of relationships in educational processes and practices” (63). Taken another way, the best forms of education are those in which the outcomes are

not tightly predetermined by instrumental focus on narrowly-defined results or by prevailing economic interests (Grimmett 2014, 118). This is particularly true, Biesta suggests, when “questions about the content and purpose of education become subject to the forces of the market instead of being the concern of professional judgment and democratic deliberation” (2013, 31).

For Alberta, then, the overriding challenge becomes the creation of whole-system reform, including curriculum change, where student success absorbs the concern for achieving results. At risk in Alberta is the potentiality of, yet again, creating managerial accountability regime if the shift to a focus on competencies is colonized by “learnification” (as opposed to embracing the broader purposes of public education—qualification, socialization and subjectification).

Avoiding a drift toward “learnification” is perhaps one of the greatest underlying challenges Alberta faces in the work ahead in moving toward educational development. To address this, and other concerns outlined in this report, four pillars—based on the overriding need for whole-system change informed by research—constitute a strategic approach to effective curriculum change in Alberta.



For Alberta, then, the overriding challenge becomes the creation of whole-system reform, including curriculum change, where student success absorbs the concern for achieving results.

- **Pillar 1: An investment to support collaborative professional autonomy and efficacy**—focused investments in professional development, a re-engagement with teachers as trusted and respected professionals and a strengthening of professional autonomy and efficacy. This re-engagement needs to focus on what it is that students need to learn, how they will be supported for this learning, how learners will be assessed and how teachers can contribute to public assurance. While changes in regulation, legislation and governance tend to preoccupy governments committed to reform, there is much greater impact on improved outcomes for students through a systematic focus on networks that support equity, particularly as it relates to the readiness to learn, as documented internationally.¹³ A promising model in this respect is Ontario's Teaching Learning and Leadership Program initiated in 2007. Funded by the ministry, collaboratively designed and administered with the Ontario Teacher Federation, this initiative supported 110 projects in 2013–14 alone and has been proven to build the capacity of teachers to innovate and develop instructional strategies in a complex array of school-community contexts (Amato, Anthony and Strachan 2014).
 - **Pillar 2: Mindful¹⁴ and agile leadership¹⁵ at the level of the school and the district**—engaged and empowering leadership aimed at enabling collaborative professional development, optimal conditions of practice, evidence-informed instructional practice and appropriate assessment for and of learning. Several studies of school effectiveness point to such leadership as the
- critical component in building a culture of high performance to sustain innovation while attending to the complexities and diversity of each student (eg, Reynolds 2010; Wilson 2011).

 - **Pillar 3: Optimal conditions of instructional practice and student learning**—appropriate class size and composition to support inclusive education with appropriate technologies and supports for differentiated instruction and an emphasis on school-based adaptation of the curriculum to meet local needs. These conditions of practice are essential for effective teaching and learning, for enabling learning to be differentiated, personal and meaningful, and to support the effective use of technology.
 - **Pillar 4: Public assurance through local community engagement**—When one considers curriculum not as a *thing* but as more of an encounter of the students as selves working through and interpreting subject matter (what Henderson and Gornik (2007) frame as '3 S' understanding), the role of the teacher shifts to approach assessment through a "curriculum wisdom," drawing on multiple methodologies.¹⁶ Balancing provincial data based on sampling (literacy and numeracy) with local assessments linked to school development plans and agreed district-level measures offers a sound basis for public assurance that draws on the curriculum wisdom of teachers. Parents and communities need to know the answer to a seemingly simple question: "Is this school doing what it says it will do for the students attending this school?" But a key

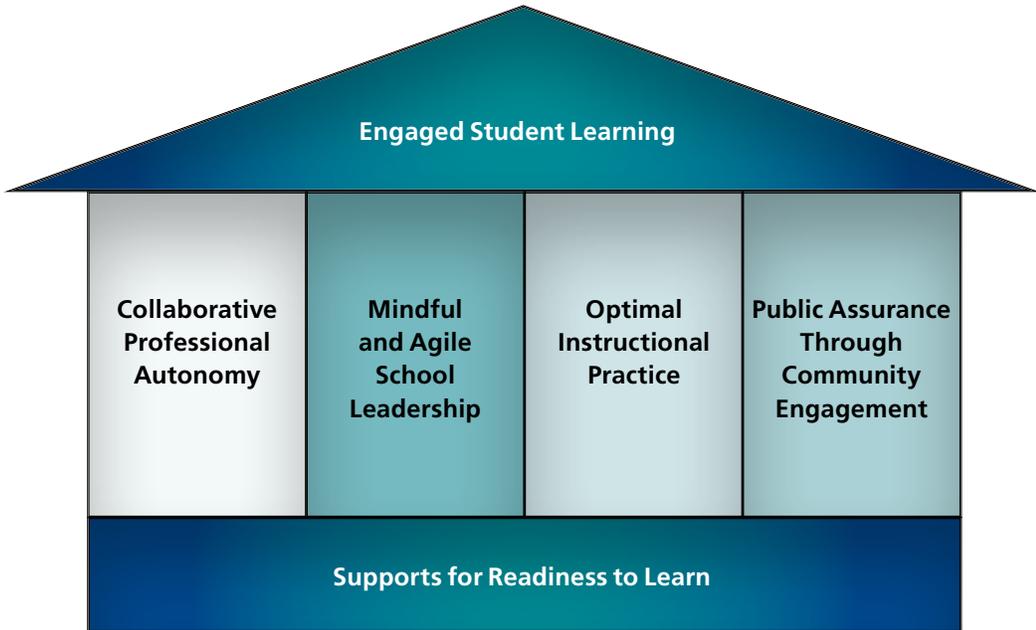
element of this process is a commitment to equity demonstrated by ensuring all students show up to school ready to learn. Readiness to learn is foundational.

The thinking encapsulated in the four pillars is represented in Model 2. Notice that the foundation at the bottom layer is an investment in readiness to learn reflecting a commitment to equity identified at the opening of this report, drawing on the work of Susan Lynch who led the Early Childhood Development Mapping Project (Alberta Government 2014). This groundbreaking ‘mapping’ study fostered appreciation of what is required to sustain an investment and a focus on early learning, supporting parents in their desire to help their children learn and to be “ready for school” and making differentiated investments in communities where poverty and social conditions leave learners at a disadvantage.¹⁷

Refocusing and reshaping the efforts now under way in Alberta—through a genuine engagement with the profession in collaboration with policymakers, community leaders and others—will enable key developments in curriculum change and create great schools for all in every community in the province. As outlined earlier, this renewal work can build on features of existing activities and action (continue...), but needs to have some new beginnings (start...) and needs to end some activities that are counter to the thinking outlined here (stop...).

Alberta schools and its school systems are not unique in seeking to change to improve education, the experience of teaching and learning, and the broader work of schools. We should learn from the experience of others around the world so that Alberta can become the place the world needs to see.

Model 2: Whole-System Approach to Co-Creating a Great School for All



Time for action: Co-creating a great school for all

Alberta teachers look forward to the renewed opportunities ahead to engage Albertans in co-creating a great school for all. While the work ahead and the efforts that went into creating this report reflect Alberta contexts, we cannot lose sight of the fact that our challenge is shared across the globe. The recent publication of the UNESCO report, *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* (2015) picks up the spirit of the earlier landmark publication *Learning: The Treasure Within* (UNESCO 1996), that catalysed a worldwide conversation on the purposes of education and the principles that govern education and knowledge as common goods. *Renewing Alberta's Promise* picks up many of the themes of these groundbreaking reports and invites Albertans to consider the work ahead in a global context.

A commitment to the core value of equity in public education is the very essence of democracy. No democracy that does not make equitable readiness to learn, equitable access and equitable classroom conditions the cornerstone of its education system can maintain itself. These were the messages of David King, former minister of education during the Lougheed years, to the Association's 2015 Summer Conference. He went on to offer teachers—as citizens first—this challenge:

“you have the opportunity to begin remaking public education in a way not

yet seen in North America (perhaps not yet seen anywhere in the world). You have the opportunity to begin remaking the Alberta community in ways that might make it a beacon for many other progressive communities around the world.”

He further stressed the fact that that there is no Alberta education system as such “but a living system of school-communities that ideally operate as complex, responsive and living systems.”

In the context of this call to action, the following steps will be actively championed as ways forward for engaging Albertans and their government in renewing the promise of a great school for all:

1. Convene an international consensus panel of expert researchers to provide advice to the government on whole-system reform and to evaluate progress through ongoing public engagement.
2. Address the challenges of students with special needs and their inclusion in the work of schools—simplify and stabilize the use of targeted funding for students.
3. Convene the key education partners to form a provincial working group that will affirm the guiding purposes and principles for renewing Alberta's K-12 curriculum and Programs of Study based on

- i. the agile leadership and innovation strategies underlined in this report (see pages 36–37),
 - ii. proven successes of innovation networks (AISI in Alberta) and current successful change and renewal strategies (TLLP Ontario, New Zealand, Finland) and
 - iii. a commitment to community engagement through democratic dialogue.
4. Ensure that the processes used for assessment and public assurance are consistent with a renewed approach to locally supported curriculum development and implementation and the needs of all learners. Ensure school evaluation processes and government policies and processes support school improvement through a focus on building adaptive capacity and exemplary teaching practice through whole-system reform.
5. Create a systematic mechanism and process by which innovation in schools in teaching, learning, assessment and student and community engagement can be shared and scaled throughout Alberta, and shared nationally and internationally. Key to this process will be schools as hubs of community (one of the twelve dimensions for change outlined in the Association's blueprint for change) to capitalize on the growing diversity and complexity of Alberta classrooms.

Epilogue

Last summer, I was part of a group of educators that had decided to spend a week together sailing on the Adriatic Sea and discussing the future of education. Well in advance, we had made an itinerary for the cruise and the work plan for the week. Everyone, including the skipper of the boat, agreed. Soon after leaving the port on day one, before we had done any work at all, the captain told us that some bad weather would be ahead of us. This sounded odd to us because all we noticed were the sunshine and calm sea breeze. Within 30 minutes, however, the sky was dark, winds were blowing and rain was falling down like we had never seen before. Our plans for work and pleasure were ruined by the storm. We had to reschedule because Mother Nature decided so. The theme of the cruise was Sea of Change.

What we learned during that week on board was that no matter how detailed your plans for endeavors such as sailing, building a house or educational renewal of your school system are, when circumstances around you change, you had better adjust to new realities. Having a guiding vision of what you wish to accomplish is, in most situations, better than a detailed blueprint or step-by-step manual. In education policy, writing curriculum or setting standards for teaching are something that many of us seem to be able to do all too readily. But finding an empowering vision that inspires people to be the change—and supporting them in their work—that is much

more difficult. That is why we see more of the former than the latter if we travel from one school system to another.

The education community in Alberta has a talent that trumps many others: to design clear and exciting visions and roadmaps to improve education for the youth in their province. Ever since my first visit to Alberta in the early 2000s, I have admired the enthusiasm and courage of Albertans, including the Alberta Teachers' Association, to develop education visions such as those outlined in this report. The aspirations and the agenda for positive change outlined here are the result of ongoing consultations with and collaboration between networks of researchers and practitioners in Alberta and beyond.

The promise of a great school for all is a brave promise. It requires, first and foremost, that politicians and education leaders elevate equity in education as one of their strategic priorities. Equity in education is often used as reform mantra, or a general term to say nice things that people like to hear. But when taken literally, as this document does, equity points to fairness, inclusiveness and social justice, with resource allocation, teaching and learning, and parental and community engagement to fulfill this promise. The five steps outlined in the "Time for Action" section of this report build on these fundamental elements of equity better than in any other education system that I know.

This promise for continuous enhancement of equity in education in Alberta is made on a solid ground of past good practice and visionary insight. For example, the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) was an internationally recognized and locally celebrated innovation network. Teachers and teacher educators in Alberta are known around the world as professionals who are not only concerned about their work in classrooms but also responsible for improving and upgrading their profession during their careers. Internationally, Alberta is recognized as a hub for school leadership and teacher leadership—which are often undermined in many other education systems where teacher evaluations, micromanaging schools and inadequate support too often typify system leadership practice nowadays.

International networks and collaboration have become critical in building better school systems. Students and teachers are connected to their peers in other countries and exchange their experiences with one another. Ministers, researchers, school leaders and school board members have their networks—both official and personal—to interact with colleagues around the world. What makes me excited about *Renewing Alberta's Promise: A Great School for All* is the genuine openness that Alberta currently demonstrates through various global connections with students, teachers and leaders in other education systems.

I was privileged to have a ringside seat and follow how the Finland–Alberta Partnership (FINAL) initiative brought together high school teachers, principals and students from

these two jurisdictions to explore together what a great school for all would actually look like. I learned that international cooperation—both virtual and face-to-face—is absolutely critical for the sustainable betterment of education for all.

Renewing Alberta's Promise: A Great School for All celebrates an awareness that every child can learn and be successful in school if only sufficient individualized support is made available early on to those who need more help than others. It is a promise built on cooperation, not competition; creativity, not standardization; responsibility, not accountability. This is in line with solid international evidence from other successful education systems around the world. Equity and inclusion that rely on strong public school systems are key to educational prosperity and more equal societies overall.

There are many lessons that Alberta can teach to the rest of the world about building a successful education system. I would like to see Albertans, with their newly elected government and education minister, work with researchers and other international partners to achieve the goals outlined in this document. Leadership in a sea of change is, as we have witnessed, navigating in collaboration with one another rather than racing against those on the same boat.

Pasi Sahlberg, Harvard University

Notes

1. For a full analysis of these conclusions, see *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta Schools*, especially pages 11–13.

2. A similar approach has been clearly outlined in the Ontario context recently by Carol Campbell. See *Lead the Change Series* no. 41 (August 2014). www.aera.net/Portals/38/docs/SIGs/SIG155/41_Carol%20Campbell.pdf

3. The strategic plan is available at www.teachers.ab.ca/About%20the%20ATA/Governance/Strategic%20Planning/Pages/Strategic-Plan.aspx

4. In 2012, after two years of considerable effort by education partners, the Education Research Framework was ratified in an effort to bring some coherence and coordination to policy development and research in the province. Following budget cuts, including the elimination of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, work on the framework came to a halt. This initial work in Alberta was informed by some of the earlier efforts in Ontario to develop a provincial research strategy. More recently, Carol Campbell articulated a similar hope that a provincial research strategy in that province will inform whole-system education leadership that examines the leadership practices of individuals and groups leading whole-system change. In working on a case study of the

Ontario Research and Evaluation Strategy with Doris McWhorter, Campbell outlined a comprehensive set of recommendations regarding the central role of research in leveraging system improvement. Meanwhile, in Alberta, there is an urgent need for a provincial research framework and strategic approach to system change (Couture 2015).

5. This analysis comes from his keynote address at the international conference, “Primary Education: Taking Stock—Moving Forward,” held in Wellington, New Zealand, January 22–25, 2014. For more information, see www.education2014.org.nz/?page_id=127.

6. This item was included in the symposium kit. An updated version is available on the ATA website under Publications > Other Publications > Alberta’s Education System.

7. For a detailed overview of these concerns, see the September 2014 issue of *Alberta Views* 17, no 7, featuring the cover caption, “Should every kid in Alberta be an entrepreneur?”

8. See Couture, J-C, and S Murgatroyd. 2013. *Rethinking Equity—Creating A Great School for All*. Edmonton, Alta: FutureThink Press. The Association’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusion further reinforces the scope and scale of the decline in support for students with special needs in its report published in September 2014.

9. For a thorough discussion of the challenge of framing educational reform within the broader contexts of the democratic purposes of public education, see Westheimer, J. 2011. "Practicing Democracy." In *Education and Humanism: Linking Autonomy and Humanity*, ed W Veugelers, 95–103. Boston: Sense Publishers.

10. Special thanks here to Rosemary Hipkins, chief researcher at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

11. For full details on who is engaged in which prototyping activity, see <http://education.alberta.ca/media/8382747/partners.pdf>. For an account of the change process, see <http://education.alberta.ca/department/ipr/curriculum/curriculum-development-prototyping.aspx>.

12. Alberta teachers provide instruction 26 hours per week, compared with 19 hours, on average, for TALIS countries. TALIS further reports that Alberta teachers are second only to their Japanese colleagues in terms of total hours worked per week. The country note for Alberta is available at www.oecd.org/canada/TALIS-2013-country-note-Alberta-Canada.pdf.

13. See UNESCO. 2009. *Overcoming Inequality: Why governance matters*. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001776/177683e.pdf>

14. For a treatment of the literature on the mindfulness in teaching, see Shirley, D, and E MacDonald. 2010. *The Mindful Teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press. Dennis Shirley is currently pursuing further research in articulating a conception of mindful leadership.

15. We take "agile leadership" from the emerging work of Simon Breakspear.

16. For a detailed description of this orientation to curriculum and instruction see den Heyer (2009). "3 S" understanding consists of *selves/students* using *subject matter* to interpret and make meaning in their *social* contexts.

17. For a thorough analysis of the urgent need to make early learning a government priority, see Lynch (2015).

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