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Professional Curriculum Analysis
and Critique of Alberta Education's
2021 Draft K-6 Curriculum





The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Professional Curriculum Analysis and Critique of Alberta Education's 2021 Draft K-6 Curriculum

First-graders are very interested [in school], but over time, engagement slides and slides. There are often multiple reasons why, but one is that they don't see the relevance of what they are learning. They don't see how it serves their lives.

—David Perkins¹



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The Honourable Adriana LaGrange

Minister of Education

228 Legislature Building

10800 97 Avenue

Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister

Teachers of Alberta have waited patiently for years for a new, up-to-date and modern curriculum and program of studies. In the early part of the previous decade, hundreds of teachers participated in prototyping exercises bringing their extensive subject-based knowledge, professional know-how, understanding of the range of K to 12 students and practical classroom experience to the process. As the process proceeded toward the latter part of that decade, hundreds of teachers collaborated with academics from Alberta's faculties of education on curriculum working groups that produced high-quality draft curriculum. I note that these constructive processes took place while a variety of ministers of various political orientations were in office.

As I have expressed in my previous letters on this topic, the role of teachers in curriculum development shifted dramatically in 2019. The Association has been effectively cut out of meaningful conversation and teachers have really been engaged only once, in a very brief "consultation" that was not transparent and seemed to simply serve as a means to legitimize predetermined outcomes.

When the draft curriculum was released on 2021 03 29, teachers across the province, along with many other Albertans, immediately expressed concern about its contents and design. Over time, teachers have increasingly realized that this curriculum has a very different philosophical basis and fundamentally different structure and outcomes from previous Alberta curriculum. The theoretical framework that underlies this draft and the approach taken to creating it are very unlike previous programs of study produced over the last several decades, including the most recent 2018 draft. The design and underlying theoretical framework mark the beginning of a dramatic and highly problematic shift for K to 12 education in Alberta.

In response to the release of the draft curriculum, the Alberta Teachers' Association's Curriculum Committee initiated an extensive study to collect, gather and analyze feedback from teachers related to the draft curriculum. This study included an online survey open to all Alberta teachers, written submissions from specialist councils and a one-day curriculum circle of 120 classroom teachers who gathered together virtually on 2021 05 31 to participate in discussions.

This extensive engagement resulted in the production of *A Professional Curriculum Analysis and Critique of Alberta Education's 2021 Draft K-6 Curriculum* (the Report), a copy of which accompanies this letter. It is worth noting that until now, our public analysis and critiques were more focused on process, structure and initial reactions to the draft curriculum. We reserved extensive commentary on the specific content of the curriculum until we could spend more time hearing from teachers. That work is now done and we feel better able to report how teachers feel about the content of the curriculum.

The findings of the study are clear and well substantiated. In straightforward and simple terms, the draft curriculum does not measure up. It is not what Albertans deserve and have become accustomed to over the previous decades. Further, it will not serve Alberta's students in preparing them for an uncertain future or equip them to respond to the economic, social and technological challenges ahead.

Provincial Executive Council received a preliminary draft of the Report on 2021 08 09, and subsequently passed the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the Association provide the minister of education with a copy of *A Professional Curriculum Analysis and Critique of Alberta Education's 2021 Draft K-6 Curriculum* and insist that

1. a moratorium be placed on piloting the K-6 draft curriculum and further development of the Grades 7-9 and 10-12 curriculum;
2. a provincial curriculum committee be established, including representatives from the Alberta education stakeholder groups, including Indigenous representatives and Alberta francophone representatives, with the mandate to
 - a) develop a new framework for K-12 curriculum development,
 - b) oversee the development and piloting of a new K-12 curriculum,
 - c) oversee the development and/or selection of teaching and learning resources for the new K-12 curriculum, and
 - d) design and facilitate the implementation of the provincial curriculum;
3. the development of the curriculum be led by curriculum working groups, including practising teachers identified by the profession, representatives of the Alberta teacher preparation institutions, experts in subject disciplines, human rights scholars, members of the Indigenous communities and members of the Alberta francophone community, as appropriate;
4. the curriculum working groups review and revise the K-6 draft curriculum (2021), considering all the input received, and draft the curriculum consistent with the well-established standards of an Alberta program of studies; and
5. the development of the curriculum be open and transparent and include authentic opportunities for public consultation prior to piloting.

Please understand that when it comes to this curriculum, teachers of Alberta are unified in their concern and overwhelmingly resolved in the need for change. As I stated in my letter of 2021 04 26, we can still work together to design a curriculum that enjoys the support of parents, curriculum experts and the profession. The Association has expertise and resources to advance this important work.

I regret that your schedule would not permit a meeting in the entirety of the month of September and would very much have appreciated the opportunity to discuss the Report with you in greater detail and guide you through its findings in person. I do still suggest that we meet urgently.

Finally, Minister, teachers are tired. It has been a long and exhausting 18 months. Students and families are also fatigued. The priorities for the school system for the year ahead do not include curriculum testing and development. The priorities need to be student wellness and learning recovery. Now is not the time to pilot and implement new curriculum. Please take this time to undertake the review we are proposing, while allowing the vast majority of our teachers in the province to focus on their students.

I await your response.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason C. Schilling". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J".

Jason Schilling
President

JCS/mm

Enc

cc Provincial Executive Council
Executive Staff Officers

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Preface

Over decades, Alberta has developed and refined its public education system to be recognized as one of the very best in the world. This success is due in part to Alberta's excellent curriculum. Alberta's curriculum development process for all past curricula has been consequential, complex, rigorous, collaborative and apolitical. The result has been a provincial program of studies (which Alberta Education refers to as *curriculum*) that has been widely accepted by parents, teachers, postsecondary institutes, employers and the general public.

The development of the public education curriculum is consequential because of the direct impact the curriculum has on a graduating student and their success in their future career and personal life. Students graduating from high school must be prepared to enter the workforce or move on to further studies, and to contribute to Alberta's society. The prosperity of our province now and into the future is directly dependent on the knowledge, understandings and skills that are developed through the kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum.

Curriculum development, when it is done well, is a complex and rigorous process. It requires input from a wide range of experts, including teachers who have current classroom experience, university professors of education who study learning science and curriculum, and subject matter experts who have broad working knowledge of the discipline. Together, these experts define what is most important for students to know and be able to do in each discipline, starting in kindergarten and through to Grade 12. It is not possible to include everything about a discipline within the instructional time available, so these experts work together to distill important concepts in age-appropriate sequence in order to provide a strong grounding in the discipline. Next comes the complicated task of organizing this content into a scope and sequence, identifying themes, developing thinking skills, embedding competencies and carefully crafting learner outcomes that describe what the student must know and be able to do.

For previous curriculum development, the members of subject advisory committees and working groups have been volunteers who have dedicated their time and expertise to producing the best possible curriculum. Everyone there is working toward the same goal. In the spirit of collaboration, they will have tough discussions, listen to opposing views, consider new perspectives and, most often, arrive at consensus decisions.

Prior to this curriculum development, it has been the experience of teachers on curriculum advisory committees and working groups that all participants have an equal voice. No one is asked how they vote. No one pulls rank or plays the power card. University deans, classroom teachers, superintendents, academic specialists and Alberta Education staff check their titles at the door

It is our responsibility to educate children for their future, not our past.

—Dave Hancock,
Minister of Education 2011

and roll up their sleeves to do the good work. The process is apolitical because the education of our children and the development of curriculum for public education must not be a political activity. We all want the same thing: what's best for children and the future of this province.

On behalf of the Alberta Teachers' Association, I want to thank the thousands of teachers who completed the survey and contributed to the specialist council written submissions, and the teachers and school and system leaders that participated in the Curriculum Circle meeting. Your voice matters and your voice will be heard. The observations, analysis and critique presented in this report are offered in the spirit of "free, lively and respectful dialogue which reflects the viewpoints of caring and knowledgeable teachers with a rich, interconnected knowledge base" (Alberta 2020a).

Dennis Theobald
Executive Secretary

Executive Summary: Key Findings from 6,500+ Alberta Teachers

The Alberta Teachers' Association *Curriculum Analysis and Critique* is a detailed analysis and assessment of the K–6 Draft Curriculum by expert teachers, including elementary generalists, subject specialists, diversity specialists, and school and system leaders from across Alberta. The theoretical framework for this study is Elliot Eisner's theories of connoisseurship and criticism, which can be used to analyze educational policy (Eisner 2005).

The criteria for this curriculum analysis and critique (study) are based on the vision, guidelines and considerations for curriculum development as outlined in Alberta Education's *Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of K-12 Provincial Curriculum* (Alberta 2020b). These criteria were used to develop the survey questions, the specialist council written submission template and the discussion questions for the Curriculum Circle meeting with 120 teacher participants. In total, more than 6,500 teachers participated in these data collection activities.

The study's key findings indicate that the draft curriculum does not meet the Alberta Education overall vision, guidelines and considerations for curriculum development.

1. There is very little relationship between the Ministerial Order on Student Learning, the goals for student learning and the draft curriculum. This may be the result of the compressed timeline for development of the draft curriculum. The entire draft curriculum, seven grades with eleven subjects in each grade, was completed in eight months.
2. The draft curriculum is not logically sequenced. The architecture and design of the draft curriculum does not provide subject Rationale, Philosophy, Goals, Principles of Learning, or Scope and Sequence, which teachers require when they design their classroom curriculum and which are standard for Alberta programs of study.
3. Many of the learning outcomes are not developmentally appropriate with high academic standards. The learning outcomes are a list of content and do not adequately describe what the student must know and be able to do. As a result, grade-level learning and assessment standards will not be consistent between classrooms and schools across the province.
4. The four themes—Literacy, Numeracy, Citizenship and Practical Skills—are narrowly defined and do not reflect the development of knowledge, understanding and skills for the 21st century. Teachers expressed concern that the literacy and numeracy progressions and the information and communications technology framework are not reflected in the draft curriculum. The financial literacy learning outcomes are not developmentally appropriate and do not respect the socioeconomic and cultural diversity in Alberta classrooms. There is concern that the learning

outcomes related to consent and human sexuality do not reflect current research on teaching these topics in elementary classrooms.

5. The draft curriculum does not reinforce essential knowledge and skills across subjects. Teachers observed that crosscurricular connections are not identified, and the few that are included have not been well developed.
6. The draft curriculum does not support all students to do their best in an inclusive classroom. This curriculum is prescriptive and heavily weighted to knowledge outcomes with low-level learning and thinking skills. This curriculum does not support differentiation, scaffolding and the development of learning support plans that build on students' strengths and interests.
7. First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, contributions and perspectives are not respectfully included in the draft curriculum. Teachers expressed concern that Indigenous peoples are referenced in the past tense and that there is no representation of Indigenous peoples in current society. The inclusion of Indigenous content is not authentic and appears as tokenism. First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples must be *respectfully involved* in the curriculum development process to determine the curriculum content they believe should be included.
8. Francophone histories, contributions and perspectives are not adequately included in the draft curriculum. The curriculum must highlight the history, culture and past contributions of the Franco-Alberta community and those of the current strong, vibrant and diverse community.
9. The draft curriculum focuses on content and prescribes pedagogy. The draft curriculum has more than twice the number of learning outcomes than does the current programs of study, which will result in "coverage" of content and less time to develop understandings. The Skills and Procedures learning outcomes are largely examples of tasks or assignments that prescribe teaching methods and learning strategies.
10. The draft K–6 curriculum does not support students to develop an acceptance of diversity and a sense of belonging, empathy and community—what it means to be a member of a diverse, inclusive community that is welcoming, caring, respectful and safe. The draft curriculum makes no reference to and fails to acknowledge the *Alberta Human Rights Act* or the protected grounds. Teachers have identified this as a fault in the draft curriculum, specifically referencing the lack of content related to gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation, which, by omission, discriminates against 2SLGBTQ+ students and their families.
11. The draft curriculum does not represent a rich variety of ideas and viewpoints. Teachers overwhelmingly disagree that the draft curriculum respects Alberta's diversity and supports a peaceful, pluralistic society. Unfortunately, a significant number of teachers also find that the draft curriculum reflects Judeo-Christian bias and Eurocentric ideology. Given the serious human rights concerns regarding the explicit and implicit content in the draft curriculum, it must undergo a complete review and rewrite with input from experts and scholars in Canadian human rights.

12. The teachers' analysis of the draft curriculum identified that racism, sexism and other forms of bigotry have *not* been addressed and, in fact, the curriculum language promotes racism, sexism and bigotry. The Government's Anti-Racism Advisory Council,² in its 2021 report, called for Alberta's public school curriculum to address these issues.
13. The draft curriculum represents the first time that instruction about world religions will be included in a mandatory core subject in kindergarten through Grade 12. This decision infringes on the religious freedoms of Alberta parents who do not want their children to be taught the main ideas and beliefs of various religions in secular public schools. The Minister of Education did not behave in an ethical manner when the public consultation on the vision for student learning failed to disclose the Minister's intention to include the study of world religions in the mandated curriculum for public schools.
14. The draft curriculum is clearly written and avoids educational jargon so that it is understandable by parents and teachers alike. Respectfully, teachers submit that the first audience for the draft curriculum is the more than 40,000 professional teachers and school leaders in Alberta who must teach the draft curriculum. A well designed, rigorous and research-based curriculum must include language of the discipline and the education terminology needed to communicate with certificated education professionals. The language of subject disciplines is not educational "jargon."

Foreword

The Alberta Teachers' Association, as the professional organization of teachers, has a responsibility to advance and promote the cause of education in Alberta. Over its 103-year history, the Association has participated in the development and ongoing review and renewal of curriculum to ensure that the provincial curriculum supports quality teaching and serves the needs of all Alberta students.

For several decades now, Alberta's curriculum has reflected the educational philosophy of *progressivism*, in which there is a focus on meeting the needs of the individual learner (McNay 2009). Students are exposed through the curriculum to “real life problems and emphasizes problem solving.” The draft K to 6 curriculum that was released on March 29, 2021, represents a fundamental shift in philosophy from progressivism to something that resembles what is known as *perennialism*. Curriculum that reflects perennialism has as its highest priority, according to McNay, “the development of the rational mind and cultivation of the intellect” (McNay 2009, 8). It is typically Eurocentric and utilizes the “great books, and the great ideas of Western civilization” (McNay 2009, 8). Make no mistake: this switch in philosophy will result in many students lacking the skills to succeed in their future career and advanced studies. The draft curriculum prioritizes the acquisition of content over the ability to think critically and solve problems.

In mid-2019, the Minister of Education terminated the partnership agreement that existed with the Association to develop curriculum. As a result, teachers have been virtually shut out of the development process for the K–6 Draft Curriculum. The Minister did not provide any information to the Association about the scope of the curriculum development, who was writing the curriculum or how teachers would be involved. In December 2020, the Department hosted a two-day virtual meeting for 102 teachers who were nominated by school authorities and selected by the Minister to provide advice and recommendations on a draft K–6 curriculum. Participating teachers were required to sign a nondisclosure agreement. They are not free to talk about the draft or the recommendations they made for improvement until the end of October 2021. We are appreciative of these teachers who shared their expertise, and hope that the Minister considered their advice.

Since March 2020, the world has been in the grip of a pandemic that has disrupted schooling. In Alberta, teachers have had to pivot between in-school teaching to virtual teaching at different times in the school year. This has added immensely to their workload and personal stress. In March 2021, the Draft K–6 Curriculum was released to the public. At the same time, a survey was opened for the public, including teachers, to share their feedback on the 2021 draft. Teachers have been frustrated by the lack of opportunity to be involved in the development of the 2021 Draft Curriculum and to provide feedback.

X

Following the public release of the Draft Curriculum, the Association launched its own curriculum engagement project to gather feedback from teachers and school and system leaders. Phase one of the curriculum engagement project included an online survey, written submissions from ATA specialist councils and a Curriculum Circle meeting. Due to pandemic health restrictions, the Curriculum Circle was scheduled as a one-day virtual meeting in late May.

This curriculum engagement process was designed to be inclusive, open and transparent. Teachers' response in the different aspects of the curriculum engagement project has been overwhelming, in both the number of individuals who have participated and the passion for teaching and learning that is expressed in their feedback. This report is the culmination of the first phase of the Association's curriculum engagement project. We have been committed to open sharing of the data collected and to honouring the teachers' voice in this report.

Thank you to the 6,500+ teachers who have contributed their time and expertise in the different aspects of this review. Your dedication to the profession and the students in your care is a key factor in success of Alberta's public education.

Mark Swanson, PhD
Coordinator
Professional Development

Philip McRae, PhD
Associate Coordinator
Research

About This Study

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the Alberta Teachers' Association *Curriculum Analysis and Critique* is to offer advice from the profession on the provincial K–6 Draft Curriculum (March 2021), so that Alberta students have the opportunity to reach their full potential and graduate from Grade 12 with the knowledge, skills and personal attributes that will lead to personal and community success.

The *Curriculum Analysis and Critique* is a detailed analysis and assessment of the K–6 Draft Curriculum (2021) by expert teachers, including elementary generalists, subject specialists, diversity specialists and school and system leaders from across Alberta. The study is designed as a professional curriculum critique³ to identify those aspects of the working draft that teachers believe (1) support the goals for student learning and quality teaching, (2) should be revised to better meet the goals and (3) do not support the goals for student learning and/or quality teaching.

Four essential questions framed this study:

1. To what degree do teachers believe the Draft Curriculum supports the Visions Statement, Ministerial Order on Student Learning?
2. To what degree are teachers satisfied with the Draft Curriculum grade-level and subject learning outcomes?
3. To what degree do teachers believe the scope and sequence of elementary grade level and subject learning outcomes provide the foundations for student learning in higher grades?
4. What is the overall level of satisfaction among teachers with the K–6 Draft Curriculum?

CURRICULUM CRITICISM

The theoretical framework for this study is Elliot Eisner's theories of connoisseurship and criticism, which can be used to analyze educational policy (Eisner 2005). Eisner developed his concept of educational connoisseurship from his background in arts education. He posits that the quality of education should not be narrowly determined from a "scientific management" approach, but should also include the professional judgments of connoisseurs who appreciate and understand the ecological systems that significantly influence the quality of education. The connoisseur appreciates what he or she encounters because they are aware of the technical, scientific and artistic qualities; understand what is experienced; and have a genuine curiosity about the shared interests of their field of expertise. Connoisseurship can be applied to all manner of human potential, including craftsmanship, design, engineering, physical activities, creative endeavours and research.

Connoisseurship involves three aspects. The first is the ability to notice and distinguish between different sorts of qualities. The second is an appreciation that comes as a result of being well acquainted with the activity and being able to recognize and understand the nuances of what one observes and experiences. And the third is the ability to evaluate why an activity or discourse is important. These aspects of connoisseurship are necessary components of criticism (Nordin and Wahlström 2019).

Criticism is the art of disclosure; to make known the unspoken or hidden meaning within a human endeavour. Educational criticism involves three interrelated aspects: description, interpretation and evaluation. The description includes the observations of the educational policy, program or activity without any deeper analysis. In the interpretation or analysis phase, the connoisseur uncovers evidence to understand and make meaning of the observations. In the evaluation or critique phase, the evidence is critically evaluated, considering the context of the education system, and a judgment is then made about the quality and potential value of the policy, program or activity (Nordin and Wahlström 2019).

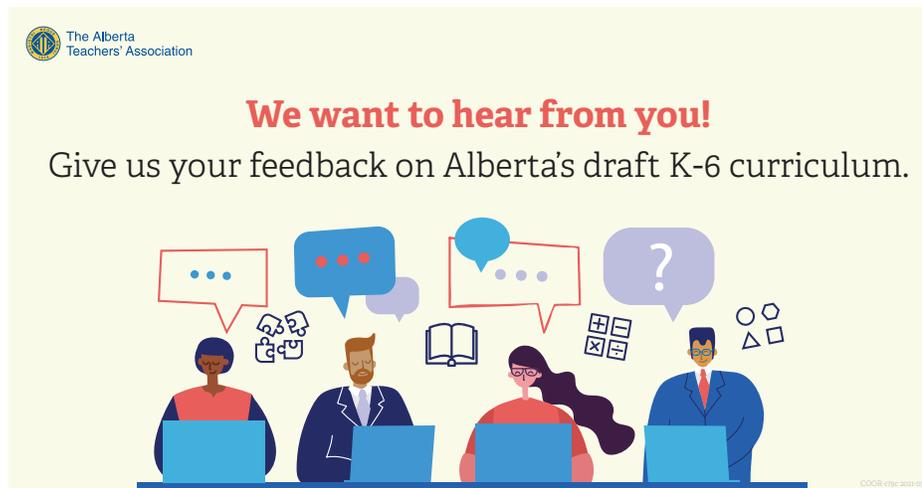
In this study, the object of the criticism is the Draft K–6 Curriculum (March 2021). The Draft Curriculum is being studied as a provincial policy with planned implementation in September 2022. The connoisseurs in this study are practising Alberta teachers and school and system leaders. Their academic preparation, teaching practice, experience interpreting curriculum and understanding of the education system make them highly qualified to evaluate the quality and potential value of the Draft Curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

The criteria for this curriculum analysis and critique are based on the vision, overall guidelines and considerations for the curriculum development as outlined in Alberta Education's *Guiding Framework for the Development of K-12 Provincial Curriculum* (Guiding Framework) (Alberta 2020b). The Guiding Framework provides a list of overall guidelines (Guidelines) for developing curriculum, which are further elaborated on in the body of the Framework (see page 5). These Guidelines and supporting information in the Guiding Framework became the criteria used for the survey questions, the written submission template and the discussion questions at the Curriculum Circle meeting. A description of the three sources of data for the *Curriculum Analysis and Critique* follows.

Online Survey

The online survey questions included Likert scale questions based on the Alberta Education curriculum guidelines, and open-ended questions for which teachers provided their comments about the draft curriculum. The survey was field tested with members of the Curriculum Circle and reviewed by two university professors with expertise in survey methodology. The online survey was posted on the Alberta Teachers' Association website and open from March 29, 2021, to May 15, 2021.



The online survey results are included in Appendix A.

Over that time period, 6,028 individuals responded to the survey, of which 98.9 per cent indicated that they had reviewed the Ministerial Order on Student Learning and the Draft Curriculum. The qualitative data were analyzed to identify key themes, and the individual comments were analyzed and tabulated using the key themes. Themes that were commented on by less than 5 per cent of respondents have not been reported.

Specialist Council Written Submissions

ATA specialist councils were invited to review the draft curriculum and prepare a written submission. Specialist councils are voluntary professional development groups that foster the professional development of teachers interested in a common curriculum or specialty area and provide opportunities for teachers to network and share information. Each specialist council has an elected, volunteer executive board that represents its members and organizes professional development activities. Specialist councils, whose members would be implementing the elementary draft curriculum, were invited to review the draft curriculum using a template of guiding questions. Eight specialist councils returned a written submission by the May 15, 2021 deadline.

Curriculum Circle

Specialist councils were invited to nominate teachers for the one-day Curriculum Circle meeting. Thirteen specialist councils were asked to nominate up to 12 teachers with expertise and experience in elementary education to participate in the Curriculum Circle. From the list of nominations, 130 teachers were selected, based on grade level taught, school size and geographic representation, and sent an invitation to attend the Curriculum Circle meeting.

The 120 delegates who registered to attend the Curriculum Circle meeting received a draft agenda and a printed copy of the *Technical Briefing: Draft K-6 Curriculum*,⁴ 14 days in advance of the meeting. The discussion templates for the meeting were posted in advance on the registration website. Originally the Curriculum Circle was planned for May 15, but due to health restrictions that forced the closure of schools, the online meeting was postponed until May 31.

Each delegate was assigned to a grade-level group for the first discussion period and a subject specialist group for the second discussion period. Recognizing the limitations of an online meeting and to maximize participation, each group had no more than 15 participants and was supported by an assigned teacher facilitator and a group reporter. The groups were provided with a discussion template containing questions to guide their review. The recorder's notes were projected, in real time, on screen so all group participants could confirm what was being recorded. Following the meeting the group notes were immediately saved to the secure, private meeting website.

LIMITATIONS

While the size of the survey sample, at 6,028 participants, is more than adequate for identifying common themes and key findings, the respondents in the open survey were self-selected. To triangulate the findings of the open survey, a survey question gauging Albertans' concerns with the Draft Curriculum was included in an Environics Research survey of a random stratified sample of 900 Albertans between April 19 and May 1, 2021. The results of this survey indicate that only 17 per cent of Albertans agree the draft curriculum will provide students with the knowledge and skills they need for success. The results of this random stratified survey are deemed to be accurate plus or minus 3.3 per cent, 19 times out of 20 (Alberta Teachers' Association 2021). The results of the random survey question were almost identical to the Draft Curriculum open survey results in this report, thus indicating the certainty that the results of this study are representative of all Alberta teachers.

The curriculum survey participants were, in terms of demographics, also highly representative of Alberta's teaching population.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Each section of this report focuses on one of the overall guidelines for drafting the curriculum set out by Alberta Education. The introductory paragraph describes the Alberta Education guideline used as the criterion and any additional information from the Guiding Framework that helps to understand the intent of the guideline. No commentary is made about the curriculum in the introductory paragraph(s). The Analysis is a summary of the teachers' observations related to the guideline as gathered from the survey results, specialist council written submissions, and reports from the Curriculum Circle subject and specialist groups. The Critique is the evaluation of how well the draft curriculum has met the guideline and supports the goals of student learning and/or quality teaching in Alberta.

Overall Guidelines for Drafting the Curriculum

The curriculum will

- 1) be consistent with the Ministerial Order on Student Learning
- 2) require developmentally appropriate high academic standards
- 3) support opportunities for students to reach their personal best
- 4) have content that is logically sequenced within each grade and from grade to grade
- 5) encourage students to examine a rich variety of ideas and viewpoints
- 6) respectfully include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, contributions, and perspectives (with explicit core knowledge about treaties and the history and legacy of residential schools, with age-appropriate content)
- 7) respectfully include Francophone histories, contributions, and perspectives
- 8) be developed in English and French
- 9) be scientifically rigorous while respecting a variety of beliefs in our pluralistic society
- 10) be developed in six subject areas: language arts and literature (English, Français, and French), mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, and physical education and wellness
- 11) reinforce essential knowledge and skills across subjects (for example, books read aloud in elementary language and literature arts can reinforce content knowledge in social studies and science)
- 12) be clear and concise, avoiding specialized jargon so it is easily understandable by parents and teachers alike
- 13) focus on content (curriculum), not teaching methods (pedagogy)
- 14) have the following structure for all subjects:
 - organizing idea (overall subject-specific theme that may span multiple grades)
 - guiding question (a question that leads to the learning outcome)
 - learning outcome (what students must know, understand, and do by the end of grade)
 - knowledge (what students know)
 - understanding (how facts and knowledge fit together in a logical and meaningful order)
 - skills and procedures (what students learn to do to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding)
- 15) identify opportunities where literacy and numeracy will be developed within and across subjects
- 16) identify opportunities where competencies will be developed within and across subjects

Vision for Student Learning

The Ministerial Order on Student Learning, approved in August 2020, established a new vision for student learning: “Students will gain the knowledge and skills to form the foundation for successful and fulfilling lives, and make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world” (Alberta 2020a). The Ministerial Order also describes the knowledge development, character development and community engagement learning goals for Alberta Grade 12 graduates.

The *Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum* (Guiding Framework) set the direction for the curriculum development and provided “transparent guidelines to help education stakeholders understand the process of curriculum development” (Alberta 2020b). The Overall Guidelines for Drafting the Curriculum (the Guidelines) list 16 guidelines, which are further explained in the Guiding Framework. The first guideline reads “The curriculum will be consistent with the Ministerial Order on Student Learning” (Alberta 2020b, 7).

Analysis

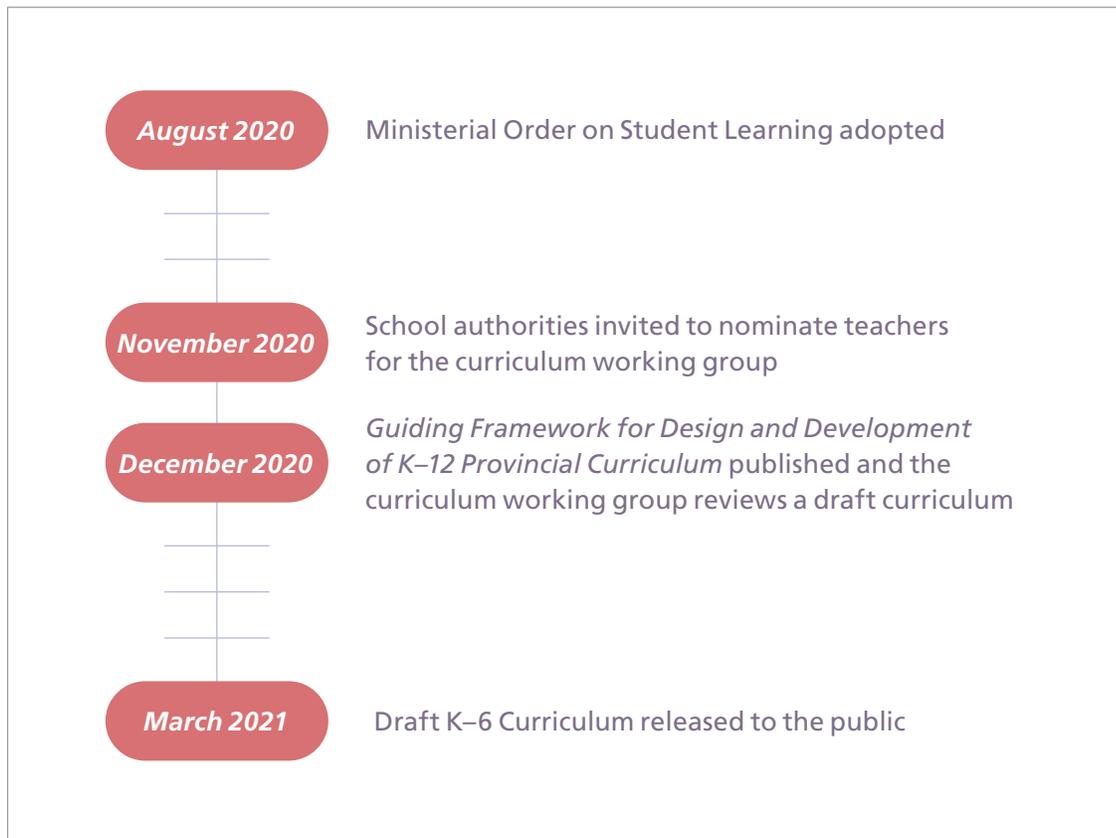
The online survey asked teacher⁵ respondents if they had reviewed the new K–6 draft curriculum; 96 per cent of teacher respondents and 98 per cent of school leader respondents replied that they had reviewed the draft curriculum. Teachers were then asked whether they agreed that the draft curriculum is consistent with the Ministerial Order for Student Learning; 82 per cent of respondents disagree that the draft curriculum is consistent with the Ministerial Order on Student Learning. As stated above, the Ministerial Order on Student Learning includes the vision for student learning and knowledge, character development, and community engagement goals for learning.

In another survey question, teachers were invited to comment on what they found least useful or disliked about the draft curriculum. A significant number of respondents referred to the lack of a clear vision and goals. (*Editor’s note: comments from survey participants may have been amended in accordance with ATA style.*)

- The draft curriculum does not meet the standards for an Alberta Provincial program of studies. The underlying philosophy is flawed and lacks a current research base. The subject curricula do not have the usual front matter that provides the Rationale and Philosophy, Goals, Scope and Sequence, crosscurricular connections, integration of literacies, and development of competencies.
- The draft curriculum fails to put children at the centre of the curriculum. The curriculum does not recognize the diverse learning needs in elementary classrooms. Where is the joy and wonder of learning?

Teachers in the Curriculum Circle subject specialist groups analyzed the draft curriculum and offered their observations of the rationale, philosophy and overall goals. The subject specialist groups provided the following comments:

- English Language Art and Literature: The curriculum needs to include the traditional front matter, which would provide the goals, values and principles of pluralism.
- Mathematics: The curriculum front matter needs to explain the philosophy, rationale and overall goals of the program. A curriculum scope and sequence must be developed. The draft curriculum is disjointed and not sequenced to develop students' understanding and skills.
- Science: The draft curriculum fails to provide students with the foundational knowledge of the discipline of science. The draft curriculum does not support the development of critical thinking or inquiry. The draft curriculum has no scope and sequence.
- Social Studies: Missing are the underlying, organizing themes of social studies education, including people and the environment/land; governance; continuity and change; culture and community; global connections; and economics and resources. These essential themes should be included and described in what we often refer to as the front matter and then used as the organizing framework for the curriculum. The organizing ideas and guiding questions address some themes of education in social studies, but they are not age appropriate for the elementary age level, and key themes of Alberta social studies education have not been included. The core concepts of citizenship and identity are not evident in the K–6 draft curriculum.
- Fine Arts: The organizing themes do not seem to be informed by experts in the fields of arts education and do not align with best practices in the field. The organizing themes do not reflect logical, sequential learning goals but, rather, reflect goals that might support a forced adherence to an academic chronology that has been adapted in other subject areas—namely the social studies curriculum.
- Physical Education and Wellness: The front matter does not set up the intended audience (teachers) to understand the foundational components of the draft curriculum. There is a lack of overarching understanding of *why* we are teaching this subject. There is no overarching framework and philosophy to ground the document. The rationale is lacking. The subject front matter should be designed around organizing themes and provide the Scope and Sequence. This section of the document requires a stronger alignment with the areas of both physical education and wellness.
- School Leaders: The draft curriculum moves away from conceptual understanding in the current curriculum to rote learning of knowledge-based information. This is a concern because critical thinking will be supplanted by an overwhelming focus on knowledge content. Assessment practices may revert to a less desirable focus on knowledge recall over understanding.

Development of the Draft K–6 Curriculum (2021)

Eight months (160 working days) to develop 7 grades with 11 programs in each grade.⁶

Critique

Alberta programs of study are legally mandated documents that teachers are required to follow; all stakeholders in the education system place a lot of emphasis on the programs of study. In Alberta programs of study, the front matter describes how the subject will support the vision for student learning and provides direction to all stakeholders. It includes the program Rationale, which describes how the subject learnings support the Ministerial Order on Student Learning, and the Philosophy, which describes how the current knowledge, understandings and skills of the discipline are addressed in the curriculum and how students will be engaged in learning the discipline. Guiding Principles describe how competencies are developed, how technologies will be used, how students with diverse learning needs will be accommodated in the curriculum, and other contextual considerations. Thinking skills and procedural skills that are foundational and critical to the discipline are defined. The Scope and Sequence outlines how the knowledge and skills will be developed within and across all grade levels. The information included in the front matter provides guidance to the teacher when they make pedagogical decisions about which teaching, learning and assessment strategies to apply that will result in optimum learning for all students.

Without this information, education stakeholders, including parents, do not know the end goal. What will graduating students know and be able to do at the end of this program? The Philosophy, Rationale and Goals for each program have traditionally been collaboratively defined with teachers, postsecondary institutions, education stakeholders, experts in the field, and business and industry representatives as appropriate. When these Goals are defined, the curriculum development will begin with the end in mind. Clearly, none of this happened in the development of this draft curriculum.

Teachers at the Curriculum Circle and in survey comments placed a great deal of importance on having a Scope and Sequence for subjects they teach. None of the K–6 draft curriculum subject disciplines have a Scope and Sequence. *Scope* describes the breadth and depth of content and skills to be covered in each subject area from kindergarten to Grade 12. *Sequence* refers to how the content and skills are organized and presented kindergarten through Grade 12. The Scope and Sequence provides the framework of the curriculum and ensures its coherence and continuity (UNESCO 2013). During curriculum development, choices must be made about what is the *most significant* knowledge, understandings and skills students should learn in each discipline by the time they graduate from Grade 12. Using this information, the curriculum developers will decide, given the instructional time available at each grade level, what content needs to be taught and in what order so that students are prepared for more challenging content in the next grade.

The draft curriculum needs a rewrite with teachers involved. If teachers were consulted it would be practical, comprehensive and valuable to students. Where is the joy, creativity, inspiration and curiosity?

—English language arts teacher

It was not obvious to survey respondents and teachers at the Curriculum Circle that the Ministerial Order on Student Learning provided the vision or goals for the draft curriculum. The current Ministerial Order does not clearly articulate the knowledge, skills and competencies of a graduating student as well as does the previous Ministerial Order, 2013 (Government of Alberta 2013). Instead, the current Ministerial Order seems to be justifying the philosophy for student learning and the curriculum concepts that are included in the draft curriculum. Consider this timeline: the Ministerial Order 2020 was adopted in August 2020; the Guiding Framework was published four months later, in December 2020, when the draft curriculum was reviewed by 102 teachers in a Zoom meeting; then, four months later, the draft curriculum was publicly released, in March 2021. It is also interesting that the Preamble statements in the *Education Act*⁷ have not been updated. These statements in the *Education Act* are reflective of the 2013 Ministerial Order and describe the role of public education as being to develop engaged thinkers who will think critically and creatively, to develop ethical citizens who work with an entrepreneurial spirit.⁸

The K–6 draft curriculum fails to provide the necessary foundational elements, found in previous Alberta programs of study, that teachers need in order to design their classroom curriculum. The draft curriculum includes subject overviews at the beginning of each subject area curriculum. The subject overviews contain none of the information teachers require and, instead, read like media communication tools. The subject overviews do not accurately describe the current programs of study or the draft curriculum outcomes.

Curriculum Architecture and Design

The Guiding Framework states, “Alberta is well-known for an academically rigorous educational curriculum that is developmentally appropriate. The curriculum will continue to follow the best research in order to build on foundations shown to succeed in Alberta ...” (Alberta 2020b, 13). This statement is supported by information in the accompanying footnote, “Historically, international education scholars and other jurisdictions have recognized the strength of Alberta’s curriculum. They have attributed the success of Alberta’s students to programs of study that are specific about what students should know and be able to do, and the fact that detailed programs are supported by high-quality resources (Stewart 2012, 47)” (Alberta 2020b, 13). The Guiding Framework continues to link Stewart’s research into Alberta’s curriculum when describing the intentions for drafting subject curriculum. “The curriculum states, in subjects by grades, what students are expected to know, understand, and be able to do, building a rich and coherent body of essential knowledge and skills by the time of graduation” (Alberta 2020b, 21). “It describes the logical arrangement of the common components (architecture) and the relationships among the components (design) for all subjects. This will make it easier for parents and teachers to understand what is being taught, why it is being taught in each subject, and from grade to grade. Specific content is designed to create connections between subjects and a predictable progression of knowledge” (Alberta 2020b, 3).

ORGANIZING IDEAS AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

Analysis

The survey asked if the curriculum provides age-appropriate content that is logically sequenced within each grade and from grade to grade; 95 per cent of respondents disagreed with that statement.

A small number of survey respondents commented on the curriculum architecture and design in response to the question “What do you find most useful or like about the draft curriculum?”

- The website layout and seeing three grades across the same page. Like the structure of guiding questions, knowledge, understanding, skills and outcomes.
- Easy to read. Simplified, structured outcomes and in some cases practical.

Teachers in the Curriculum Circle subject-specific groups provided the following observations of the Organizing Ideas and Guiding Questions:

- English Language Arts and Literature: The sections for the different aspects of language arts are not balanced. The comprehension and writing sections are small and focused on low-level skills.

The concept of critical thinking comes up *once* in the entire document. There is no attention paid to instilling a love for reading. The Guiding Questions do not meet the criteria set out by Alberta Education. The Guiding Questions do not “spark curiosity and wonder, which inspire truth seeking, understanding and lifelong love of learning.” The Guiding Questions lack complexity, particularly in the comprehension section. The metacognitive guiding questions from the current curriculum have been lost. We have concerns about some specific guiding questions continuing over multiple years of learning.

- English Language Arts and Literature: The draft curriculum has been constructed in such a way as to create silos for each subject area; it lacks crosscurricular connections. Middle schools often use a humanities approach; this would be very difficult using this curriculum.
- Mathematics: This draft curriculum does not meet the standards of Alberta curriculum design and does not provide sufficient guidance for teachers to plan for instruction. The draft curriculum is missing foundational steps. The draft curriculum is missing concrete and pictorial representation, and there is very little use of manipulatives. It is not designed to teach students to be problem solvers, but rather relies on formulaic approaches where everyone is required to arrive at a solution in the same way. It does not support the fact that there are multiple ways in mathematics to reach the correct answer and will lead to a great deal of confusion. The rote-learning, formula-based approach will likely increase student fear of mathematics and result in disengaged learners.
- Mathematics: The draft curriculum has removed many scaffolding steps and focuses too much on algorithms rather than developing understanding and problem solving. It does not allow for creative and innovative thinking. The organizing ideas and guiding questions are not developmentally appropriate and contain too many abstract concepts for students of certain grade levels—for example, multiplication and division of negative numbers in Grade 6, multiplication and division of fractions being introduced in Grade 6, adding and subtracting fractions in Grade 4, preservation of equality when solving algebraic equations in Grade 4 and exponents in Grade 6.
- Science: The draft curriculum is logically sequenced within each grade and from grade to grade. Many of the concepts and topic are not developmentally appropriate. It is concerning that middle school content is now in elementary, and one wonders what the upper grades will have to accomplish if this moves through.
- Social Studies, K–Grade 3: Many Guiding Questions are not developmentally appropriate. The guiding questions require skills that are not developmentally appropriate to K–3 age group—concepts of time, mapping/navigation skills, financial management, knowledge of other cultures. The expectations are too high for the K–3 age group.
- Social Studies, Grades 4–6: At first glance, the Organizing Ideas and Guiding Questions can seem like a reasonable basis for curriculum; however, there are deep concerns as to whether the organization of these ideas is reflective of how elementary students learn. Instead of using the current model—having students understand their immediate surroundings and then study their province and country, this curriculum focuses on chronology, which many social scientists criticize

because it can lead to thinking that events were inevitable. There are also no organizing ideas that promote dimensions of thinking, any that invite the students into social participation, nor any that promote a critical assessment of how all this history contributes to a collective identity.

- **Fine Arts:** The stated Organizing Ideas and Guiding Questions are not developmentally appropriate, and do not reflect best practices in contemporary, research-informed arts education. Further, emphasis throughout is inappropriately on acquisition of a Eurocentric, hierarchical canon of knowledge lacking an approach that meets the students where they are within an arts discipline, and fully neglecting development of them as creators, artists and innovators. In particular, the Organizing Idea “Appreciating Beauty and Goodness and Truth” frames learners as passive recipients of a notion of beauty. The Fine Arts teacher group would prefer the learner to be considered as reflective, critical, creative, and actively, cognitively engaged.
- **School Leaders:** The Guiding Questions could be a valued part of a new curriculum and offer a template for framing the draft curriculum. The key will be to make a much stronger effort to build coherence throughout any draft curriculum. At the moment, the guiding questions do not align with the intent of the curriculum outcomes.

The Guiding Framework states the curriculum will be developmentally appropriate but it is not.

—Early childhood elementary teacher

LEARNING OUTCOMES

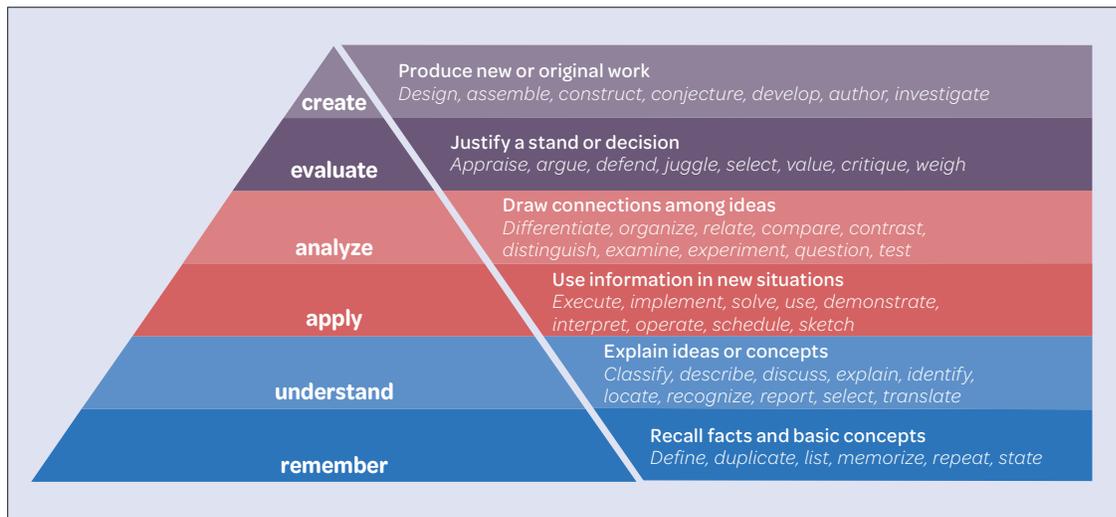
Teachers in the survey and at the Curriculum Circle were asked about the draft curriculum learning outcomes. The survey asked teachers if the draft curriculum is developmentally appropriate with high academic standards; 94 per cent of respondents disagreed that the curriculum is developmentally appropriate with high academic standards. Teachers were also asked, “Does the draft curriculum reinforce essential knowledge and skills across subjects (for example, books read aloud in elementary language arts and literature can reinforce content knowledge in social studies and science)?” Seventy-five per cent of respondents disagreed with that statement.

Many survey respondents commented on the draft curriculum learning outcomes in response to the question “What do you find least useful or dislike about the draft curriculum?”

- The draft curriculum is not age or developmentally appropriate for elementary students’ intellectual and emotional development. Content has been downloaded from higher grades.
- The draft curriculum is a prescriptive list of irrelevant knowledge and facts to be taught by the teacher with little opportunity to develop understanding and skills and to add local context to support student engagement.
- Too many outcomes. Impossible to teach and achieve in one year.

The Curriculum Circle teacher specialist groups reviewed the learning outcomes to determine if they are developmentally appropriate with high academic standards and logically organized. The teacher groups made the following observations:

- English Language Arts and Literature: The Learning Outcomes have a considerable focus on low-level recall, especially in K to Grade 2. The focus is on memorization, instead of developing deep understanding of concepts and modern literacy skills that apply to real life.
- English Language Arts and Literature: There is no discussion of literature in the present or future but instead focuses on the past. The curriculum requires students study dead language and literary practice by solely prescribing works of dead authors and ancient texts, instead of literature that is still alive and moving forward, such as Canadian and modern texts.
- Mathematics: Most of the learning outcomes are poorly constructed and do not describe what students should know and be able to do. The content in the Skills and Procedures section is very prescriptive and describes student assignments. The draft curriculum appears to be solely focused on rote knowledge and a move back to outdated pedagogy of worksheets and mad minutes.
- Mathematics: There appear to be too many concepts to learn in Grades 4–6 math. More depth would be better than more concepts covered. Students should be spending a greater amount of time working with concepts (particularly in problem-solving situations) before starting new concepts.
- Science: The Knowledge and Understandings sections of the curriculum are long lists of content that are intended to be “foundational to learning” and “show how the student has learned to organize and apply knowledge.” It is unclear if these are a suggested list of topics or whether they are required to be taught. Given the definition of these two categories, a teacher is to assume that all the content listed is required, which then limits teachers’ pedagogical decision making. The draft curriculum directs teachers’ pedagogy in the Skills and Procedures section by listing assignments or tasks that students should demonstrate.
- Science: With the content heavily loaded with *facts*, testing for low-level learning outcomes will be the primary mode of assessment. There will be limited formative assessment for learning and the shift will be to summative assessment of learning.
- Social Studies, K–Grade 3: The learning outcomes focus too much on factual learning, rather than applying higher-order thinking skills. The topics are not meaningful and engaging topics that support how young children think and learn.
- Social Studies, Grades 4-6: The learning outcomes do not challenge students with higher-level thinking using Bloom’s Taxonomy of thinking. In many areas of the draft curriculum, explicit tasks, which infringe on teacher’s pedagogical decisions, are stated, such as creating a business plan, writing a report, constructing a timeline and drawing a map.
- Social Studies: The draft curriculum has a heavy focus on definitions and symbolism. It is difficult for teachers to “decode” the curriculum to figure out “Is this information for me or for the students?”
- Physical Education and Wellness: The learning outcomes are not developmentally appropriate. Developmentally appropriate verbiage (*perform, explore, investigate, experience, participate, present, demonstrate, describe, reflect*) is random and not consistently used. The learning outcomes do not progress according to a Scope and Sequence. The progression and scaffolding

Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (2001)

Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy is a classification of the cognitive processes for learning.

Source: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>

from grade level to grade level do not follow Bloom's Taxonomy of thinking. Learning outcomes jump from investigating to evaluating without applying the knowledge.

- Fine Arts: The draft curriculum outcomes are based on rote learning when students should be learning by doing. There is too much emphasis on historical chronology, which detracts from the real power of arts education. *Artistry* and students' *agency* within the discipline are absent. The word *creative* is used; however, we find that the cognitive processes of creating *in* and *about* their art is seriously lacking, and learning seems completely uninformed by the vast, contemporary knowledge of Canadian arts education scholarship. In short, higher levels of learning are not supported in the Fine Arts drafts. The Arts curriculum is not experiential and it should be.
- Inclusive Education: The learning outcomes are not expressed in measurable terms. This information is usually clearly expressed in the current program of studies learning outcomes, but it is not in the draft curriculum.
- School Leaders: We need to keep in mind that kindergarten is not mandatory, and some students will come to Grade 1 without the skills in the kindergarten curriculum. This is a problem with the level of complexity of the kindergarten draft curriculum outcomes.

Critique

The draft curriculum architecture and design must be revised to provide a logical organization and show the relationship between the various dimensions of learning in each subject area. Teachers have identified that key components of some subject disciplines have not been included in the draft

curriculum, which will result in students not having the foundational knowledge they need to succeed in higher grades.

The draft curriculum documents must include information about how to interpret the Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills and Procedures outcomes. The current programs of study for mathematics (Alberta Education 2007) and social studies (Alberta Education 2005) are good examples of the type of information that is required for teachers and education stakeholders to understand and use the curriculum documents. Teachers and education stakeholders must be able to identify what is required learning for students, what is optional, what is the standard to be assessed and what content is information for the teacher.

The current programs of study contain learning outcomes that clearly define the grade level expectations in each subject. This is very important to teachers when they are designing learning and assessment strategies and reporting student achievement to parents. The Guiding Framework states “The learning outcomes describe what students are required to know, understand and be able to do by the end of the grade” (Alberta 2020b, 21). The draft curriculum learning outcomes do not meet this standard. The draft curriculum learning outcomes are predominantly a list of topics or “facts” without any indication of the level of learning expected for the student, and there is no guidance to the teacher on the grade level standard for assessment.

Social Studies, Grade 4, p 14:⁹	English Language Arts and Literature, Grade 5, p 50:¹⁰
Knowledge Outcome: “disappearance of the bison herds-depletion of bison (known as buffalo) population originally numbering some 15 million migratory animals”	Knowledge Outcome: “Dramatic works can stimulate imagination and tell us about human nature, human society in varied times and places, and conceptions of the supernatural or divine.”
Understanding Outcome: “One of the earliest endangered species was the prairie bison, decimated mainly by hunters shooting hundreds of bison on expeditions.”	Understanding Outcome: “Drama is a literary form the can artfully express stories and ideas.”
Skills and Procedures Outcome: “Drawing conclusions: What caused the near extinction of the Plains Bison? Who or what was responsible for the disappearance?”	Skills and Procedures Outcome: “Listen to, read, or view dramatic works to learn about artful expression of stories and ideas.”

(Editor’s note: excerpts are copied from the source without edits.)

As it is written, the draft curriculum is open to multiple interpretations. One of the strengths of Alberta’s current programs of study is that the grade level standards are clearly established and teachers know the level at which to assess student learning. These standards are provincially established and consistent across all schools and classrooms. The draft curriculum learning outcomes do not establish a grade level standard; thus, a teacher excited about history can select the topics they view as most important and teach those in great detail, while another teacher can use the

curriculum as a checklist of topics to be covered and teach all the topics with limited depth. The end result is that students in these two classrooms will be taught a very different curriculum, and both approaches can be defended as aligning with the draft curriculum.

Teachers in their survey comments and at the Curriculum Circle expressed frustration with the many topics of study and learning outcomes that are not age and developmentally appropriate. In social studies, teaching history from a chronological approach versus a concept approach results in having to teach the youngest students topics that are least relevant to them and inappropriate for their maturity level. In financial literacy, almost all the learning outcomes are not relevant or developmentally appropriate for elementary students. In mathematics and science, topics have been downloaded from higher grade levels. English specialist teachers voiced concern over the poetry, Shakespeare and historical texts that are prescribed in the draft curriculum and the fact that there is no mention of modern texts, Canadian authors and media.

This curriculum does not meet the standards of a legally mandated Alberta program of study. The previous programs of study are a key factor in the internationally recognized success of Alberta's public education system. This is because a well written Alberta program of studies allows for a tight alignment to the grade level standard in classrooms across the province; there is a careful articulation between grades; and teachers can choose different pedagogies to teach the same outcome, depending on their classroom context. This draft curriculum is a step backwards. The grade level standards are not clearly communicated, there is no apparent articulation between grades and there are many instances where pedagogy is embedded in the Skills and Procedures Column or implied in the Knowledge Column, reducing teachers' flexibility to respond to student needs.

One more point of clarification. The Guiding Framework states: "Alberta is well-known for an academically rigorous educational curriculum that is developmentally appropriate. The curriculum will continue to follow the best research in order to build on foundations shown to succeed in Alberta ..." (Alberta 2020b, 13). The accompanying footnote reads "Historically, international education scholars and other jurisdictions have recognized the strength of Alberta's curriculum. They have attributed the success of Alberta's students to programs of study that are specific about what students should know and be able to do, and the fact that detailed programs are supported by high-quality resources (Stewart 2012, 47)" (Alberta 2020b, 13). The authors of the Guiding Framework, in including this information in the footnote, neglected to include the other significant factor identified by Stewart in her assessment for Alberta's curriculum. "Teachers are involved in developing and assessing the provincial curriculum and have a great deal of freedom as to how they deliver it" (Stewart 2012, 47).

Memorizing is not learning for understanding.

—Math teacher

If we don't get things right in the early years and work with students to understand what things truly mean, then they will really struggle in high school and beyond.

—School leader

Research and Best Practices

The Foreword in the Guiding Framework stresses the importance of consulting research and best practices when developing a quality curriculum. “Alberta has a world-renowned tradition of educational excellence. This Guiding Framework builds on that strong history and applies the Ministerial Order on Student Learning in Alberta in light of research and best practices and successful innovations from other world-leading jurisdictions” (Alberta 2020b, 3).

Analysis

Many survey respondents commented on the disconnect with educational research when responding to the question “What do you find least useful or dislike about the draft curriculum?”

- The draft curriculum is not aligned with current research on children’s learning and effective pedagogy.

Teachers in the subject specialist groups at the Curriculum Circle commented on the draft curriculum not reflecting current research and best practices:

- English Language Arts and Literature: Phonological awareness in early grades is appropriate; however, it continues into upper grades and this is not research-based.
- Mathematics: There are many places where current junior high grade-level outcomes have been moved to the draft curriculum in Grades 4, 5 and 6 levels. As a result, these outcomes then become not developmentally appropriate, as elementary age children’s brain development is not sufficient for abstract thinking. Moving concepts down to a lower grade will not improve students’ numeracy skills. It will increase their anxiety and frustration. When students are continually frustrated and unable to see success, they shut down and learning does not occur. This curriculum will do just that. It is unrealistic for teachers to be asked to teach this proposed curriculum as well as unfair to expect younger students to understand these abstract concepts.
- Social Studies: The explicit and substantial focus on knowledge implies a particular teaching strategy. Outcomes requiring simple content recall is not an effective way to promote current research-based pedagogy that supports student learning, understanding and engagement.
- Physical Education and Wellness: The draft curriculum does not align with best practices in comprehensive school health and does not reflect current research on consent and eating disorders.
- Education Technology: The Learning and Technology Policy framework has not been integrated into the subject curricula. There is no scope and sequence for the development of technology knowledge, understandings, skills and procedures.

- School Leaders: Current research and best practices indicate that student engagement is a key factor in student learning. The way the draft curriculum is laid out lends itself to a *sit and get* approach in which student engagement is seriously lacking. The curriculum content is very limiting in terms of creating meaning for elementary students and will foster a teacher-driven, disseminator-of-facts approach. Teachers will no longer be a *guide on the side*, but a guru at the front of the room. Where is the importance of learning through play which is recognized worldwide as key for the younger students?

Critique

The draft curriculum does not reflect current research in neuroscience and learning science. Significant findings in learning science that should be reflected in a modern curriculum are as follows:

1. Learning is impeded by negative emotions and facilitated by positive emotions. This calls for holistic approaches that recognize the close interdependence of physical and intellectual well-being and the close interplay of the emotional and cognitive.
2. The dual importance in the brain of sounds (phonetics) and the processing of meaning (semantics) supports a balanced approach to literacy instruction with utilizing both phonetics and whole language learning.
3. With regard to numeracy, different instructional methods lead to the creation of neural pathways that vary in effectiveness: drill learning develops neural pathways that are less effective than those developed through strategy learning. Math anxiety results when students, being confronted with unrealistic demands, develop a fear of failure, lack of confidence and stress that negatively impacts their learning (OECD 2007).

The draft curriculum contains learning outcomes that can create situations in the classroom in which students of different cultures, races, religions and socioeconomic groups will feel embarrassed, singled out and vulnerable. This can lead to negative emotions, which will impede their learning. The English language arts and literature draft curriculum is very focused on the science of reading as the primary instructional approach, and the whole-language approach has been diminished. According to learning science, a balanced approach is probably the best. The mathematics draft curriculum mandates that students must learn math operations using standard algorithms. Learning science supports using a number of different instructional approaches when teaching math. The learning science research discussed above is not inclusive of the learning science research that needs to be considered when developing a modern curriculum for Alberta, but demonstrates that the draft curriculum is in conflict with basic understandings in learning science.

A review of the Guiding Framework bibliography and an analysis of the draft curriculum indicate that Alberta Education and the undisclosed curriculum writers have neither reviewed nor utilized Alberta's educational frameworks intended to support curriculum development. Teachers'

analysis of the draft curriculum identified many areas where the draft curriculum outcomes are not consistent with established Alberta education frameworks and best practices. The development of these frameworks has generally been a collaborative process involving other government departments, postsecondary representatives, education stakeholders and Alberta experts. A list of the frameworks that should be reviewed and reflected in the development of the draft curriculum appears in Appendix B.

Creativity, exploration and play while learning are nonexistent – where is the brain science about how children learn?

—Elementary teacher

Four Key Themes

The Overall Guidelines for Drafting the Curriculum state that the curriculum will identify opportunities where literacy and numeracy will be developed within and across subjects and will identify opportunities where competencies will be developed within and across subjects (Alberta 2020b, 7). The online survey asked questions on whether the literacy, numeracy and competencies are developed in the draft curriculum. Teachers at the Curriculum Circle analyzed how well the Four Themes—Literacy, Numeracy, Citizenship and Practical Skills—are developed in the different subjects.

LITERACY

The Guiding Framework identified literacy as a foundational theme. “Literacy will be taught across all subjects with age-appropriate targeted literacy education in language arts classes that meet the best global standards of literacy science (Alberta 2020b, 18).” The draft curriculum includes a fact sheet for the Literacy theme: “Mastering reading and writing to build a foundation for learning” (Alberta Education 2021b). The fact sheet promises that literacy competencies will be progressively developed and infused through all subjects and grades and that students will learn to think critically and solve problems, separate fact from opinion, and communicate in varied contexts (Alberta Education 2021b).

Analysis

Teachers were asked in the online survey to indicate their agreement with the statement that the K–6 draft curriculum identifies opportunities where literacy will be developed within and across subjects; 64.5 per cent of respondents disagreed that the draft curriculum identified opportunities where literacy is developed.

Teachers, in their survey comments and at the Curriculum Circle, expressed a number of concerns related to the literacy theme.

- The definition of literacy is narrow and out of date with current research and does not reflect the definition and standards of the International Literacy Association (www.literacyworldwide.org). There is no reference to digital literacy or media literacy.
- There is no scope and sequence provided for the literacy theme and no alignment with Alberta Education’s Literacy Progressions;¹¹ consequently, many outcomes are not developmentally appropriate.
- Many of the prescribed texts in the English language arts and literature and the visual arts curricula are not relevant or age appropriate for elementary students.

Critique

The draft curriculum is very heavily weighted towards the *science of reading* instructional approach, and some teachers expressed support for this approach. A large number of teachers, however, recognized that science of reading is only one pedagogy to teach reading, and it is currently being debated in the research. The International Literacy Association website has a collection of resources that highlight a range of perspectives on the science of reading instruction from some of the most influential researchers in the field.¹² Clearly, the science of reading is not the “silver bullet” of reading instruction, and teachers will still need to continue to use multiple strategies to teach reading for all students, including those with diverse learning needs.

Teachers expressed concern with the lack of focus on developing reading comprehension, which is key to understanding text and separating fact from opinion. The draft curriculum outcomes do not reflect the writing process and the development of writing across grade levels. The draft curriculum does not support crosscurricular connections for the development of literacy. The subject disciplines have a heavy emphasis on terminology, but there are very few outcomes that require students to use critical thinking or problem-solving skills. There are virtually no outcomes related to students using or communicating with digital media tools.

Language is richer than what is presented in this curriculum.

—School system leader

NUMERACY

The second theme described in the Guiding Framework is numeracy. “Numeracy involves acquiring and applying the mathematical knowledge and skills needed to engage with quantitative and spatial information in a variety of situations” (Alberta 2020b, 22). The draft curriculum includes a fact sheet for the Numeracy theme: “Math is necessary for daily life and can inspire curiosity” (Alberta Education 2021c, 1). The fact sheet promises that in the draft curriculum, numeracy competencies will be progressively developed and infused through all subjects and grades and include applying mathematical concepts, understanding and applying numbers in real life decisions, and making informed decisions (Alberta Education 2021c).

Analysis

Teachers in the survey were asked whether they agree with the statement that the K–6 draft curriculum identifies opportunities where numeracy will be developed within and across subjects; 67.4 per cent of respondents disagreed that the draft curriculum identified opportunities where numeracy is developed.

Teachers at the Curriculum Circle identified a number of issues with the numeracy theme.

- The draft curriculum demonstrates a narrow definition of numeracy. The mathematics curriculum is too focused on standard algorithms and fails to develop conceptual understanding.
- The draft curriculum, across all subjects, has very few opportunities for students to develop and apply critical thinking, problem solving and communicating with math. The numeracy theme is not developmentally appropriate and is too complex, as a number of concepts have been downloaded from higher grades.
- The numeracy theme is evident in the science curriculum; however, there is a fine line between being prescriptive and dictating pedagogy. Certain concepts require students to do calculations. The math curriculum does not align with the science [curriculum], which will make certain concepts hard to teach.
- Physical education and wellness teachers were very critical of many numeracy outcomes forced into the draft curriculum. Students should *not* be comparing personal body measurement, making judgments about body shape, tracking physical growth and tracking activity times. Comparing nutritional value of snacks, meals and daily meal planning should *not* be an activity for elementary students. These activities can be harmful to the physical, emotional and social well-being of students.
- Fine arts teachers acknowledge that numeracy skills can be developed through the arts; however, they stress that integrating and focusing on numeracy outcomes takes away from what should be the focus of fine arts.

Critique

The Numeracy theme is not well developed across the draft curriculum; however, teachers caution against forcing numeracy outcomes into subjects just to make a connection. A Scope and Sequence for mathematics would support crosscurricular numeracy connections, as other curricula expectations could be aligned. Integration of the numeracy progressions is strongly advised. The draft curriculum is heavily weighted to Knowledge learning outcomes, which limits the time available for hands-on activities that would naturally develop numeracy skills.

The Numeracy theme sounds good in theory but it does not play out in the draft curriculum.

—Math teacher

CITIZENSHIP

When the draft curriculum was released, Citizenship had been added as a new theme. “Students will build an appreciation of living respectfully in a pluralistic society in such a way that prepares them to one day lead our country to be a respected and responsible player on the world stage” (Alberta 2020b, 25). The draft curriculum includes a fact sheet for the Citizenship theme. The fact sheet promises that the draft curriculum will provide students with knowledge-rich content to promote understanding of and pride in our shared history. Students will develop a broad base of age-appropriate knowledge

of world, Canadian and Alberta history; Francophone histories and contributions; First Nations, Métis, and Inuit history and cultures; pluralism and multiculturalism; civic literacy; economics and geography (Alberta 2021a).

Analysis

The online survey invited teachers to comment on the Citizenship theme. There were 4,257 individual comments on the Citizenship theme, of which 65 were positive and 4,192 were negative.

Teachers, in their survey comments and in the Curriculum Circle subject specialist groups, identified a number of concerns with the Citizenship theme:

- The citizenship theme is not based on current research about developing citizenship. “Memorizing facts does not create engaged citizens.”
- Elementary students need first to learn how to be good citizens in their community. There is no development of civic virtues. Morals and ethical values in the current curricula have been omitted in the draft curriculum.
- The draft curriculum is lacking development of the Canadian and Albertan identity. The current curriculum does a better job of focusing on local community, province and country. There are large gaps in knowledge about Canada and Alberta.
- Canadian and Alberta content in the current curriculum is missing and has been replaced with a large amount of American content.
- The draft curriculum promotes themes of “othering,” “us vs them” and division rather than unity in a multicultural nation. This curriculum does not represent acceptance, but only tolerance of diverse cultures and ideas.
- The draft curriculum has Christian references and overtones throughout and is not respectful of Alberta’s diversity. Religion should not be taught in secular public schools.¹³
- The First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, contributions and perspectives are not respectfully included. The outcomes are worded in the past tense and disjointed, and appear to be included as tokenism.
- The francophone histories, contributions and perspectives are not respectfully included. The outcomes do not reflect the francophone diversity in Canada and make very little reference to the culture, contributions and perspectives of francophones in Alberta society.

Citizenship is much more than money.

—School leader

Critique

Elementary years are the time for students to start learning about being 21st-century global or world citizens. The themes of Global Connections and Current Affairs in the current curriculum have been eliminated from the draft social studies curriculum. Instead, students in Grades 1 to 3 are required to learn ancient history that is not relevant to them nor developmentally appropriate.

The draft social studies curriculum is written from a pro-business bias. The Economics strand starts in kindergarten with a discussion of needs and wants, and continues to production and sale of goods in Grade 1 and world trade and business enterprise in Grade 2. These topics are not relevant or developmentally appropriate. In addition to economics, social studies also has a new strand, financial literacy, that is included in all grades. In the five strands of the draft social studies curriculum, elementary students will spend 40 per cent of their time learning about economics and financial literacy.

The Citizenship theme is the area that generated the highest number of negative survey comments. A significant number of teachers' comments contained one or more of the words *Eurocentric*, *Judeo-Christian bias*, *Colonial*, *whitewashed*, *white supremacy*, and/or *white privilege*. Also, a significant number of teachers' comments contained one or more of the words *ridiculous*, *horrible*, *a joke*, *irrelevant*, *disappointing*, *a move backwards*, *an embarrassment*, *frightening*, *traumatizing*, *a disaster*, *appalling*, *horrifying*, *despicable* and/or *dumpster fire*.

PRACTICAL SKILLS

When the draft curriculum was released, Practical Skills had been added as a new theme. "Students will be equipped with tangible skills that will serve them in their personal lives and careers" (Alberta 2021d, 1). The draft curriculum includes a fact sheet for the Practical Skills theme, which promises that the curriculum will provide students with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills in financial literacy, computer science and public speaking and to clearly communicate consent with regard to personal space and sexual activity (Alberta 2021d).

Analysis

Survey participants were invited to comment on the Practical Skills theme. There were 1,263 individual comments on the Practical Skills theme; 109 comments were positive and 1,154 were negative.

Teachers, in their survey comments and in the Curriculum Circle subject specialist groups, identified a number of concerns with the Practical Skills theme:

- The Practical Skills theme is a narrow, antiquated view of what is "practical and useful for life."
- There is support for having a Practical Skills theme in the curriculum, but teachers believe the skills must be 21st-century, real-world skills.

- “Where are the information and communication technology skills outlined in the Information and Communications Technology framework?” The draft curriculum does not require students to become proficient with technology and use it as a tool for productivity, communicating, inquiring, decision making and problem solving. “This omission may indicate a particular bias or ideology.”

The Curriculum Circle education technology specialist group provided the following comments:

- Students in the 21st century live in a digital world and need a curriculum that has more knowledge, understandings and skills related to technologies than is presented in this draft.
- The draft curriculum is not organized for students to develop the foundational knowledge to use technology appropriately, effectively or efficiently.
- The Learning and Technology outcomes have not been integrated into the subject curricula.
- There is no Scope and Sequence that outlines the development of technology knowledge, understandings and skills.
- The draft curriculum technology knowledge, understanding and skills are redundant. Hands-on skills and procedures that students love to do in the current curriculum are not included in the draft curriculum.
- Computer science outcomes are treated in isolation. There are no crosscurricular connections.
- Science, Grade 3, computing science: creativity is mentioned 14 times, but students are never asked to use their creativity to create anything.
- Computer science is one unit included in the science draft curriculum, which has too much content for the time. Therefore, there is little time for hands-on science and computer science.

Critique

The definition and scope of practical skills is not based on current frameworks on personal and employability skills for the 21st century.¹⁴ The draft curriculum has very few practical skills embedded, and those that are included are scattered and not coherent. The elementary curriculum should begin the development of teamwork skills, critical thinking, problem solving, design thinking, and communication skills, including questioning, research and synthesis of information.

The draft curriculum has less focus on technology than the current curriculum. Students in the 21st century live in a digital world and need a curriculum that includes more knowledge, understandings and practical skills related to technologies than is presented in this draft. The learning and technology policy framework curriculum guidelines must be incorporated into the draft curriculum to prepare elementary students to use technology for their learning in higher grades.

The science inquiry and problem solving with technology skills in the current science curriculum are not evident in the draft curriculum. The current social studies skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, historical thinking, geographic thinking, decision making and problem solving, and

metacognition (Alberta Education 2005) have been omitted in the draft social studies curriculum and the Practical Skills theme.

The online survey included the question “What do you like or find most useful in the draft curriculum?” Ten per cent of survey respondents liked that financial literacy was included in the draft curriculum; however, most qualified their comments saying that the draft outcomes were not developmentally appropriate and were not respectful of lower-income families. Many teachers commented that the financial literacy outcomes are focused on business and not applicable to students’ lives (for example, business plans and loans).

On the same question, 5 per cent of survey respondents liked that *consent* was included in the draft curriculum; however, nearly all said that the outcomes need to be revised to reflect current research about teaching consent to elementary-age children. The physical education and wellness specialists at the Curriculum Circle were critical of the consent outcomes, which they viewed as blaming the victim. These teachers advise that *consent* needs to be clearly defined and the outcomes must be research based and in alignment with language being used in the community.

The physical education and wellness specialists also strongly believed that some of the wellness/health outcomes can be dangerous and harmful to elementary students, including body image, abstinence and the lack of age-appropriate human sexuality information. The draft curriculum outcomes relating to consent and sexuality education must be revised to reflect current research on teaching consent in elementary education and on reducing sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination. In 2019, the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) published the *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual and Health Education* (SIECCAN 2019), which replaced the earlier 2008 guidelines. The new guidelines outline the research-based core principles, goals and key components of sexual health education programs and curriculums for Canada. One of the core principles of these guidelines is that comprehensive sexual health education programs and curriculum must be accessible to all people inclusive of age, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and cultural or religious background.

Three per cent of survey respondents liked the addition of coding in the draft curriculum, but most of those were also critical of the Minister’s comment that students do not require computers for coding.

Although I like that consent is being addressed, I am very concerned with the lack of reference to responsibility. They should go hand in hand. Not all consent is in relation to sexual relationships.

—Physical Education teacher

Inclusive Education

The Guiding Framework describes the government's commitment to inclusion. "The *Education Act* recognizes the importance of an inclusive education system that provides each student with relevant learning opportunities and supports necessary to achieve success. Within an inclusive education system, the curriculum plays a vital role in preparing students to participate fully in a democratic system and civil society. Quality education of the highest academic standards is provided to all learners, with the focus on ensuring that our education system delivers the best possible outcomes for all children and students. Quality education is extended to all students without prejudice" (Alberta 2020b, 19).

The inclusive education policy states, "Alberta's education system is built on a values-based approach to accepting responsibility for all children and students. Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all children and students."¹⁵ "Inclusion is not just about learners with special needs. It is an attitude and approach that embraces diversity and learner differences and promotes equal opportunities for all learners in Alberta. Every learner has unique needs. Some learners have profound and ongoing needs and others have short-term or situation-based needs. This calls for flexible and responsive learning environments that can adapt to the changing needs of learners."¹⁶ (Note that referenced Alberta legislation, education policy and regulations are contained in Appendix C.)

CONTEXT

This section of the report will focus on inclusion as it relates to providing students with diverse learning needs with a quality education, as other aspects of learner diversity are addressed elsewhere in this report.

The Alberta student population statistics for 2018/19 report that there were 24,964 students in kindergarten and 85,176 students in Grades 1 through 12 identified as having special needs. In that school year, the total Alberta student population was 730,317. These data indicate that 15 per cent of the Alberta student population was identified as having special needs.¹⁷ Teacher and school leaders will also say that at least 10 per cent of students do not meet the criteria for being identified as having special needs but still require a modified or adapted learning support plan. In addition to English-speaking students with special learning needs, provincial schools have seen a significant increase in the number of English language learning students. Alberta Education does not report the number of English language learning students; however, a 2018 media report indicated that 15 to 16 per cent of the total Alberta student population are English language learning students (CBC News 2018). Given these

statistics, it is reasonable to believe that between 30 and 40 per cent of students in Alberta classrooms require a flexible, responsive learning environment with differentiated curriculum, and some of those will require an adapted or modified curriculum or individual learning support program.

Analysis

The online survey asked teachers to indicate their agreement with the statement “The draft curriculum supports opportunities for all students to reach their personal best”; 93 per cent of respondents disagreed with this statement. The survey also asked teachers to indicate their agreement with the statement “The draft curriculum reinforces essential knowledge and skills across subjects (for example, books read aloud in elementary language arts and literature can reinforce content knowledge in social studies and science)”; 75 per cent of respondents disagreed with this statement.

This is a rank-and-sort style of curriculum.

—Science teacher

The teachers at the Curriculum Circle were asked, “Does the draft curriculum support an inclusive education system that provides each student with relevant learning opportunities and supports necessary to achieve success?” The subject specialist groups’ feedback provides the teachers’ perspective on how the draft curriculum supports instructional planning for students with special needs:

- The draft curriculum does not support instructional planning for students with diverse learning needs in an inclusive classroom. The draft curriculum does not provide a scope and sequence or progression of skills for any of the subjects. The curriculum outcomes provide few opportunities for scaffolding and spiralling of content, and all students are expected to learn and demonstrate their learning in the same way.
- Many concepts are moved down from higher grades and as such are not developmentally appropriate for most students; this will create barriers to learning.
- The language in the curriculum is prescriptive and does not provide the flexibility teachers need to differentiate for a range of student needs. “There have always been students who struggle with learning in one or more subjects, and with implementing this draft curriculum, there will still be students who struggle.” Teachers need a curriculum that provides the flexibility to differentiate their instruction and student learning activities to meet the needs of these students and bring them from where they are to meeting the grade-level standard.
- Mathematics: The draft curriculum directs that students will learn standard algorithms for basic mathematics operations and recall of basic number facts. The term *standard algorithm* is used 68 times in the mathematics overview and draft K–6 curriculum. The mathematics teacher specialist group submits that “using standard algorithms is a sure way to see struggling students lose all confidence in their abilities and fail miserably.” It is also true that students who are gifted and talented in mathematics will be frustrated with the limitations of using standard algorithms to solve math problems.

Critique

The draft curriculum does not support opportunities for all students to reach their personal best. There is far too much content in most sections to provide students with time to practise, ask questions and develop their understanding. Before they are able to do their best, it's time to move on to a new topic. Alberta's schools are diverse, and the draft curriculum has more than twice as many learning outcomes as the current program of studies and is heavily weighted on learning "facts" and on rote memorization.

The draft curriculum does not support teachers to adapt or create individual learning support plans to address the need of diverse learners, including English language learners. The literacy and numeracy progressions have not been integrated. Subject curricula do not have scope and sequence or continuum of learning. There are few crosscurricular connections. The learning outcomes are written in prescriptive terms, which does not support differentiation and building on student strengths and interests. Information and communication technologies outcomes are not integrated, which disadvantages students with diverse learning needs.

The content and language in the draft curriculum are not inclusive of students who are neuro-atypical and who are not able bodied. With the goal of establishing a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment for all students, these students need to see themselves in the curriculum. All students need to accept, understand and celebrate the gifts and potential of students, and people in Alberta society, with diverse needs. The provincial curriculum must demonstrate and develop universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all children and students in public education, and the draft curriculum does not.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Histories, Cultures and Perspectives

The Alberta government reaffirmed its commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action on March 27, 2014. This promise included

- mandatory content for all Alberta students on the topics of residential schools and treaties,
- a kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum development standard and
- professional learning opportunities for all teachers.¹⁸

Guidelines for Drafting Curriculum state that the curriculum will respectfully include First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, contributions and perspectives, with explicit core knowledge about treaties and the history and legacy of residential schools, with age-appropriate content (Alberta 2020b, 7).

This curriculum development process included five Indigenous representatives as Advisors on Draft Curriculum. These individuals did not write the curriculum. Their role was to provide advice and recommendations during the drafting step, August 2020 to November 2020. Participation in this step does not indicate endorsement of the curriculum.¹⁹ It is also assumed that these individuals, like all others involved in the development process, were required to sign a nondisclosure agreement that prevents them from making any comments about their experience in the development process, whether or not their input is reflected in the draft curriculum, or their assessment of the draft curriculum.

Analysis

Teachers were asked in the online survey to indicate their agreement with the statement “The draft curriculum respectfully includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, contributions, and perspectives (with explicit core knowledge about treaties and the history and legacy of residential schools, with age-appropriate content)”; 85 per cent of respondents disagreed with this statement.

Teachers at the Curriculum Circle in subject specialist groups were very critical of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit content in the draft curriculum:

- The First Nations, Métis and Inuit content is not authentic and does not always encourage a positive perspective toward these cultures.
- There are no modern perspectives of Indigenous peoples and no opportunity to build a sense of inclusion and community.
- The First Nations, Métis and Inuit content seems to have been added in after the curriculum was finished. The tacking on of “describe how First Nations, Métis and Inuit use ...” to every outcome shows a sheer lack of understanding of the Indigenous use of mathematics and is offensive.

- There is no honouring of how Indigenous people do and use science. The draft curriculum presents very western Eurocentric ideals.
- In the draft social studies curriculum, Indigenous peoples are a historic novelty to be studied and observed.
- The First Nations, Métis and Inuit content comes across as tokenistic, disrespectful and a disingenuous add-on.

The Indigenous Education teacher group at the Curriculum Circle provided the following comments:

- “When we are teaching treaties, we can teach from a western First Nations perspective; we don’t teach from a pan-Indigenous perspective.”
- The draft curriculum lacks Indigenous world view, Indigenous ceremonies and spirituality, and an understanding of their intertwined nature.
- The language in the draft curriculum relegates First Nations knowledge to tokenism. First Nations peoples “did this and that” in the past, or made these crafts. This relegates our knowledge to legends. It is superficial. There is no credibility given to Indigenous ways of knowing and world views. In the draft curriculum, we can learn from Westernized ways of knowing, but equal credibility is not given to Indigenous ways of knowing.
- The draft curriculum always seems to address they “did,” as if everything is in the past. It does not recognize the vibrancy of the cultures and the continuity of Indigenous culture into the present and future.
- We do not see Indigenous voices in this curriculum. In Grade 6, regarding the War of 1812 or the Plains of Abraham, why are Indigenous perspectives missing from these events? If Indigenous perspectives are not covered, the absence is a bias.

Critique

Government officials have defended the draft curriculum and the inclusion of respectful, age-appropriate content related to First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, contributions and perspectives. They point to the curriculum advisors that included five Indigenous representatives and the comments made by Indigenous leaders at the press conference when the draft curriculum was released as proof that the draft curriculum is supported by First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Alberta. Since the release of the draft curriculum, the public reaction from the Indigenous communities has been swift, almost complete rejection, including demands for a rewrite of the entire draft curriculum.

The Indigenous teachers at the Curriculum Circle provided feedback that offers a perspective on the underlying issues with the draft curriculum and its portrayal of Indigenous people. Their report included the following comments:

- The draft curriculum needs lots of eyes on it, much reviewing, etc. This should all have been done before it was released. Now it is up to us to do that work.
- We cannot just tweak this and fix it to make it work. It needs to be rewritten collectively, not with five consultants or just a panel. Their advice also needs to be integrated. It needs to be written by educators, by practising teachers. They need to go to the Indigenous peoples across Alberta and outside of Alberta to get their perspectives and not just base the curriculum on what they heard from a small number of individuals.

It appears that the underlying issue is how one defines “respectfully include.” The Government of Alberta believes that “respectfully include” means we will include Indigenous people as advisors on curriculum; we will respectfully listen to their stories and perspectives; the curriculum writers will incorporate this information into the curriculum in a way that is respectful and age appropriate; the advisors on curriculum will review what has been written; and Alberta Education officials and the undisclosed curriculum writers will take this feedback and decide what should be incorporated into the final draft curriculum prior to release. The advisors on curriculum are *advisory*; they do not write the curriculum. The Government is in control of what is written in the curriculum.

Now let’s consider “respectfully include” from the perspective of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Alberta. Indigenous peoples’ perspective is shaped by their culture and their years of experience with the dominant, and some would use the term *colonial*, governments. These historical experiences include governments and their representatives making laws concerning Indigenous people without their involvement; deciding what’s best for Indigenous people; imposing western ideology and governing practices on Indigenous leaders; controlling and interpreting Indigenous stories and perspectives; and not acting on or respecting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and many other reports on injustices toward Indigenous peoples.

The Government of Alberta and Alberta Education have Indigenous staff members who understand the cultural protocols and what *respectful* participation in curriculum development means to Indigenous peoples. Respectful participation requires that Alberta Education approach the communities and ask for Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Cultural Advisors to participate in the process. The community leaders decide who will speak for them. It is not the role of the undisclosed curriculum writers and Alberta Education staff to determine the Indigenous histories, contributions and perspectives that should be included in the curriculum. These stories belong to the Indigenous people, and they must decide what and how this information is shared with Alberta students. When the draft curriculum is being written, the Indigenous representatives must endorse the content, or make recommendations for improvement that must be incorporated. Finally, the Indigenous communities must endorse the curriculum prior to its publication; this may include ceremony to release the Indigenous knowledge into the public domain.

Indigenous scholars have written about the need to bridge the divide between western society and Indigenous peoples. Dwayne Donald, PhD, of the University of Alberta, urges us to work together

to develop a new story with which to renew Aboriginal–Canadian relations on more ethical terms. “Such a story would be inspired by the treaties which teach that we are called to work together in ways that will benefit all people who live on the land together. These teachings place emphasis on learning from each other in balanced ways and sharing the wisdom that comes from working together in the spirit of good relations” (Donald 2013). Willie Ermine, First Nations University of Canada and member of the Sturgeon Lake First Nation, writes about “the ethical space that is formed when two societies, with disparate worldviews, are poised to engage each other. It is thought about diverse societies and the space in between them that contributes to the development of a framework for dialogue between human communities” (Ermine 2007). The writings of Donald and Ermine help us to understand the divide and take steps to bridge it.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action guide us to what “respectfully include” First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, contributions and perspectives means. The voices of Indigenous peoples must be respectfully included in the development, content and publication of curriculum documents. Under the Joint Commitment to Action, funded initially by Alberta Education, the provincial education partners have produced materials, with support from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, to guide school leaders and teachers to respectfully engage Alberta’s First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities in activities that support student learning. These resources provide background information on how the government should start the process to respectfully and authentically involve Indigenous peoples in curriculum development.

Indigenous people look at this curriculum and ask what has changed ... Little to nothing.

—First Nations teacher

Respectfully Engaging First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples

Alberta Teachers' Association. 2021. Elder Protocol.	www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/For%20Members/ProfessionalDevelopment/Walking%20Together/PD-WT-16g%20-%20Elder%20Protocol.pdf
“Teachings.” March, 24, 2020. Alberta College of School Superintendents.	www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw9n2O6o2i4
“Seven Sacred Teachings.” Empowering the Spirit website. 2021. Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortium	https://empoweringthespirit.ca/cultures-of-belonging/seven-grandfathers-teachings/

Francophone Histories, Cultures and Perspectives

The Ministerial Order on Student Learning (2020) states that students “will understand Canadian and world history, our debt to previous generations, and our obligations to future generations. All students will see themselves, their families, and their communities in the curriculum, with space in the curriculum for the study of local traditions, history, and geography, including Alberta’s Francophone history” (Alberta 2020a, 2). The Guidelines for Drafting Curriculum set out the requirement that the curriculum will respectfully include Francophone histories, contributions, and perspectives (Alberta 2020b, 7). The subject-specific guidelines for language arts and literature include the expectation that multiple perspectives can be provided through enduring traditional and classic works and contemporary texts where all children engage with complete texts from Anglophone, Indigenous, and Francophone traditions as well as global texts from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East (Alberta 2020b, 9). The social studies subject-specific guidelines also make reference to including histories, contributions and perspectives from local Indigenous and Francophone communities; Albertans of European, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern descent; and newcomers from various parts of the world (Alberta 2020b, 10). As well, the Fine Arts subject-specific guidelines state that students will learn respectful, complex, and nuanced portrayals of Anglophone, Francophone, Indigenous, and world traditions of the fine arts (Alberta 2020b, 12). The Guiding Framework includes a section on Francophone Perspectives that acknowledges Canada’s linguistic duality and the Francophone language rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In this section, the vibrant Francophone communities integral to Alberta are described as growing and actively contributing to Alberta’s economy, cultural mosaic, and society as a whole (Alberta 2020b, 20).

The K–6 draft curriculum development process included one Francophone curriculum advisor. The advisor did not write the curriculum; their role was to provide advice and recommendations during the drafting step, August 2020 to November 2020. Participation in this step does not indicate endorsement of the curriculum.²⁰

Analysis

Teachers were asked in the online survey to indicate their agreement with the statement “The draft curriculum respectfully includes Francophones histories, contributions, and perspectives;” 75 per cent of respondents disagreed with this statement.

Teachers in the Francophone specialist group at the Curriculum Circle were very critical of the Francophone content across subjects in the draft curriculum:

- There is a significant lack of Francophone presence and content in the draft curriculum. The first reference to Francophone people is the arrival of people from Nouvelle France (Grade 3 social studies).
- References to Francophone people consist of historic events and are mostly from Eastern Canada.
- Article 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides parents with the opportunity to educate their children in one of two official languages; however, the Charter is not introduced until Grade 6 social studies.
- There is a false assumption that all students who attend Francophone schools already have a sense of belonging to their community (Français, Grade 1, p 21).²¹
- The Francophone perspective and the development of identity are not evident in the draft curriculum.
- Although French is one of two official languages in Canada, Francophones are perceived in this curriculum to be simply one more contributor, like many other cultural groups.
- The curriculum writers could have purposefully included references and resources of Francophone authors, but rather chose to simply translate English titles into French. Many references/resources are a direct translation (for example, in Grade 3, translated Longfellow poem about the deportation of Acadians).
- There is a total disregard for learning in a linguistic minority setting. Teachers must promote reading, writing and oral communication in French and also support the development of Francophone identity within Alberta.

Critique

The Draft Curriculum does not celebrate and acknowledge Francophone history and the contributions and perspectives. By using *Francophone* in a pan-Francophone way, the curriculum actually lumps Francophones in with all French-speaking people currently living in Canada. Francophones were/are part of Canadian history and culture from the settlement of New France. The Draft Curriculum treats the Francophones as a “special interest stakeholder,” not a true partner in the development of this country. This perpetuates the cultural divide in Canada between French- and English-speaking Canadians. The curriculum should emphasize a commitment to a bilingual Canada.

The lack of Francophone perspectives is insulting.

—Francophone teacher

The Francophone history, culture and perspectives must be present in all grades and subject matter. Francophone resources and references need to be included explicitly and intentionally across the curriculum. The draft curriculum must highlight the history, culture and past contributions of the Franco-Albertan community, and those of the current strong, vibrant and diverse community. The current draft depicts Francophones as those that speak French; however, there are several

elements that unify Francophones other than the French language: various celebrations and rallies, community organizations, arts and culture.

For over 40 years, the Government of Alberta maintained a Francophone branch within the Ministry of Education called the French Education Branch or *La Direction de l'éducation française* (DEF), formerly known as the French Language Services Branch (FSB). This branch was staffed by 40 teachers, both permanent and seconded, with subject matter expertise as well as minority language and second language acquisition pedagogy. They were responsible for the development and implementation of curriculum, resources and supports for both Francophone schools and French immersion programs and ensuring the Francophone perspectives in all provincial curriculum. Francophone teachers and community members are calling upon the Government of Alberta to re-establish the French Education Branch (*Direction de l'éducation française*) as an effective means to ensure implementation of *Affirming Francophone Education, Foundations and Direction* (Alberta Education 2001), a framework for Francophone education, and to ensure the Francophone perspectives within the Alberta K–12 curriculum. The expected outcomes stated in the Alberta Education policy *Affirming Francophone Education: Foundations and Directions* (2001) are not evident in the draft curriculum.

The draft curriculum advisors included one Francophone with expertise in Francophone literature (Alberta 2021a); however, there was no representation from the Franco-Albertan community nor were there certificated teachers with experience in Francophone public education.

Content, Not Pedagogy

The Guidelines state that the curriculum will focus on content (curriculum), not teaching methods (pedagogy) (Alberta 2020b, 7). The Guiding Framework section “What to Teach, Not How to Teach” offers an explanation of this guideline. “Teachers learn how to teach in their post-secondary teacher preparation programs and through ongoing professional development according to research and best practices. Teachers need the flexibility to do what works best for their students in a variety of contexts. To be clear, a curriculum that sets out sequenced essential content does not imply that the content should be taught using any one method by all teachers and for all students” (Alberta 2020b, 16).

Analysis

The online survey asked teachers to indicate their agreement with the statement “The curriculum focuses on content (curriculum), not teaching methods (pedagogy)”; 54 per cent of teachers disagreed and 42 per cent agreed with this statement.

Teachers at the Curriculum Circle analyzed the curriculum to determine whether it focuses on content and not teaching methods.

- English Language Arts and Literature: the draft curriculum is prescriptive and limits professional autonomy. Many prescribed texts are “written by old, white men” and are not developmentally appropriate for or relevant to elementary students.
- Mathematics: The focus on “standard algorithms” is prescribing pedagogy that is not based on current research on teaching and learning mathematics.
- Science and Social Studies: The draft curriculum directs teachers’ pedagogy in the skills and procedures section by listing assignments or explicit tasks that students should demonstrate, such as creating a business plan, writing a report, constructing a timeline or drawing a map.
- Science and English Language Arts: The increased volume of content severely limits the time available to design learning activities where the students can practice, develop understanding and apply their knowledge.

This draft curriculum is an American type of curriculum, which is a teacher resource that needs to be followed instead of a group of learning outcomes that can be interpreted by trained professionals who know their students and classroom context.

—Social studies teacher

Critique

The draft curriculum learning outcomes do not describe what the students should know and be able to do to meet the grade-level standards. The Knowledge and Understanding learning outcomes read like a shopping list of ideas and topics. There is no direction as to the depth that teachers should teach the content. Most of the Skills and Procedures outcomes in the draft curriculum are learning tasks or assignments that direct pedagogy. Many of the Skills and Procedures tasks do not reflect research-based, current pedagogy and are not developmentally appropriate. The Skills and Procedures outcomes should focus on the procedural skills that are core to the discipline and student learning. If the learning outcomes were written to meet the standards of Alberta programs of study, teachers would have the flexibility and information necessary to develop teaching and learning strategies that meet the needs of their students.

Civic Participation

The Vision for Student Learning reads, “Students will gain the knowledge and skills to form the foundation for successful and fulfilling lives, and make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world” (Alberta 2020b, 5). The Guiding Framework expands on the meaning of civic participation: “[Students] will recognize the impact of their actions and demonstrate an understanding of our rights and freedoms, which are secured by Canadian law and reflect our shared history and traditions, as well as the social and organizational skills required for civic participation” (Alberta 2020b, 6). “Students will learn the value of the Charter’s fundamental freedom, open and orderly institutions, and peaceful pluralism to Alberta’s prosperous economy and free society” (Alberta 2020b, 19).

The Alberta Education website page for “K to 12 education legislation and regulations” states that the requirements set out in the following acts and regulations apply in addition to the *Education Act*: Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; and *Canadian Human Rights Act*. Other provincial acts and regulations, while not specific to ECS to Grade 12 education, must also be followed, including the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.²²

Analysis

A preliminary review of the survey data indicated that teachers were concerned about the lack of support for inclusion and respect for diversity in the draft curriculum. These issues then became part of the curriculum analysis at the Curriculum Circle.

Teachers at the Curriculum Circle made the following observations about the lack of support for inclusion and respect for diversity:

- Social Studies, Kindergarten, Guiding Question, p 5: “How do rules or expectations contribute to a sense of belonging to family, community, or the wider world?” The focus is on rules, expectations and fairness.
- Physical Education and Wellness, Kindergarten and Grade 1, Guiding Questions, p 7: “What is fair play?” and “How does fair play contribute to engagement in physical activity?” The focus is on importance of fair play and following rules.
- Physical Education and Wellness, Kindergarten and Grade 1, Guiding Questions, p 13: “What are healthy relationships?” and “How can connections support healthy relationships?” The focus is on

Diversity isn't viewed as a positive aspect of Albertan or Canadian society in this draft curriculum.

—Diversity, Equity and Human Rights
Committee member

being respectful and caring with people who are *your* friends and with whom you have a common interest. There is no expectation that students learn how to reach out to people who are not their friends or who are different from them.

- Physical Education and Wellness, Grade 3 and 4, p 22: Learning outcomes relate to problem solving and resolving conflict in relationships including “identify respectful and positive interactions with others” and “identifying actions that can be taken when bullying occurs.” Again, the focus is on effective communication within *your* relationships and does not include how to communicate and resolve conflict with people different from you.

Teachers comments from the Curriculum Circle identified a lack of inclusion and respect for diversity throughout the draft curriculum:

- Children will not see themselves in this curriculum.
- The draft is not inclusive. Inclusion requires the avoidance of *othering* of marginalized individuals, and representation of all students who make up Canada’s cultural diversity.
- There are 2SLGBTQ+ students and families within our community and they are not reflected in this draft curriculum. There is one outcome about different family structures, in Grade 3. Students from diverse families arrive at school in kindergarten. Nowhere else in the curriculum does it support students’ curiosity about gender identity and sexual orientation. These topics should also be included when teaching about bullying (Grades 4 and 6) because research shows that 2SLGBTQ+ persons in Alberta and Canada are bullied because of their uniqueness.
- Research on diverse identities shows that inclusive visibility of 2SLGBTQ+ persons reduces the high rates of self-harm and suicide in this community. The intentional erasure of diverse identities in this draft curriculum is frightening and alarming, and will result in harm.
- The *Alberta Human Rights Act* speaks to welcoming others and creating a sense of belonging. This curriculum largely ignores diverse people and perspectives.
- There is no mention of disabled people who think and view the world differently.
- Where are the 2SLGBTQ+, disabled and neurodiverse groups? Where are Indigenous and racialized groups mentioned? It’s always as the *other*. Diversity isn’t viewed as a positive aspect of Alberta or Canadian society in this draft curriculum.

Critique

The Guiding Framework promises that students will value our democracy, rights and freedoms, yet there is only one mention of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (with no requirement to learn about the Charter) and no mention of the *Alberta Human Rights Act* in the draft curriculum.

The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* of 1988 established multiculturalism as a fundamental principle of Canadian society and was the first government legislation of its kind in the world. The act sought to protect the cultural heritage of Canadians, reduce discrimination and encourage the implementation of multicultural programs and activities within institutions and organizations.²³

The *Alberta Human Rights Act* defines multiculturalism as “the diverse racial and cultural composition of Alberta society which is a fundamental principle and a matter of public policy.”²⁴ The values of multiculturalism and human rights are enshrined in the culture of public education in Alberta and echoed in the *Education Act*. Section 16, Diversity and Respect, requires that all courses or programs of study and instructional materials used in schools must reflect the diverse nature and heritage of society in Alberta.²⁵ Section 33, Board Responsibilities, requires the board to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging and to develop a code of conduct that includes one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.²⁶

Alberta Education’s Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments policy is based on the *Alberta Human Rights Act*. The prohibited grounds for discrimination in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* are race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation.²⁷

Government legislation is the foundation on which all Alberta programs of study and curriculum must be developed.²⁸ The draft curriculum, however, makes *no* reference to and *does not reflect* the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the *Multiculturalism Act*, or the *Alberta Human Rights Act*. There is one slight reference to multiculturalism in Social Studies, Grade 6, p 32 comparing Canada’s histories and policies related to religious and ethnic *pluralism* to those of the United States:²⁹

“Compare the myth and the realities of the Canadian mosaic and the American melting pot”; and

“Contemporary Canada and modern-day Alberta aspire to be open, welcoming, and inclusive societies, exemplifying multiculturalism and acceptance of differences.”

The *Alberta Human Rights Act* is the legislation in Alberta designed to protect all persons from discrimination and to eliminate discrimination and racism in our society. The draft curriculum makes *no* reference to the *Alberta Human Rights Act* or the protected grounds. Teachers have identified this as a fault in the draft curriculum, specifically referencing the lack of content related to

gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation, which, by omission, discriminates against 2SLGBTQ+ students and their families. There are two outcomes in the draft physical education and wellness curriculum³⁰ that give passing reference to 2SLGBTQ+ people:

- Grade 3, p 20, Knowledge outcome: “Family structures can vary, may include extended family, and may consist of a single parent, a mother and a father, two fathers, or two mothers.” The corresponding Skills and Procedures outcome is “Investigate how personal talents and potential are influenced by role models.” While the Knowledge outcome does mention a range of family structures, the corresponding Skills and Procedures outcome seems narrow and does not promote a connection with the various family structures and allow recognition of the potential for role models within them.
- Grade 5, p 45, Understanding outcome: “The way individuals think of themselves, and describe themselves to others, is unique and should be respected.” This outcome is parachuted into the section “Students investigate maturation and identify changes during adolescence,” so the teacher could assume that this outcome relates to gender identity and/or gender expression. However, this is the only mention of gender identity or gender expression in the entire draft curriculum, and there are no previous outcomes to develop knowledge and understanding of the *Alberta Human Rights Act* to provide context.

The Government of Alberta has a social contract with its citizens to provide free public education *for all children* aged 6 through 19. Students in our public schools and classrooms represent all the rich diversity of Alberta’s communities, and they are entitled to have a K–12 curriculum that will support them to achieve successful and fulfilling lives. The draft K–6 curriculum does not support students to develop an acceptance of diversity, a sense of belonging, empathy and the development of community—what it means to be a member of a diverse, inclusive community that is welcoming, caring, respectful and safe.

Pluralism

The Guidelines state that the curriculum will encourage students to examine a rich variety of ideas and viewpoints; and be scientifically rigorous while representing a variety of beliefs in our pluralistic society (Alberta 2020b, 7). These guidelines are not specifically discussed within the Guiding Framework; however, the Guiding Framework does make reference to representing Alberta's diversity and supporting a peaceful pluralistic society. "Albertans from varied backgrounds will see themselves in the curriculum, regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expressions, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, or any other factors" (Alberta 2020b, 18). "A peaceful pluralistic society and an energized civilization requires respect and mutual understanding among people of different faiths, experiences and backgrounds" (Alberta 2020b, 17).

Analysis

The online survey asked teachers to indicate their agreement with the statement "The K–6 draft curriculum encourages students to examine a rich variety of ideas and viewpoints"; 86 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement. Teachers were also asked to indicate their agreement with the statement "The K–6 draft curriculum is scientifically rigorous while respecting a variety of beliefs in our pluralistic society"; 88 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement.

The teachers' reaction to how well the curriculum examines a variety of ideas and viewpoints, diversity, and pluralism can be found in their comments about what they dislike or find least useful about the K–6 draft curriculum:

- The social studies content is horrendous. Many outcomes are Eurocentric and seem to promote xenophobia and racism.
- Religion should not be taught in secular public schools. The draft curriculum has Christian references and overtones throughout. It's not respectful of Alberta's diversity.
- The draft curriculum is not inclusive of Albertan and Canadian human diversity and not consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Many students will not see themselves or their families in this curriculum.

A significant number of teacher survey comments included one or more of the words *bias*, *political bias*, *colonial*, *Eurocentric*, *Judeo-Christian*, *racist*, *promotes white supremacy*, *white-washed*, *Orientalism*, *Americanized*, "othering" and/or *white privilege*.

Teachers at the Curriculum Circle subject specialist groups discussed whether the draft curriculum supports the development of a peaceful society that shows respect, mutual understanding and empathy among people of different faiths, experiences and backgrounds. The following responses were provided by the subject specialist groups:

- English Language Arts and Literature: *Othering* or making everyone the same is not a pluralistic view. Anything included in this curriculum that is not white is from the prehistoric, historical or past perspective—never a modern understanding of anyone who is not a white European. The students' role in this curriculum is to be passive, not active, engaged learners. The curriculum does not allow for difficult conversations or talking about current controversial issues. The curriculum uses the word *empathy* in the knowledge outcomes; however, the desire of engendering a growing sense of empathy in students for others will likely not be achieved.
- Mathematics: Planning a party in kindergarten, grocery shopping for “good food” and examining a family bank account or an example from elsewhere are all inappropriate. Students are most likely to turn to a parent for assistance with these exercises. The exercises are insensitive to families who are economically disadvantaged.
- Science: There is no reason to include diverse perspectives in the draft science curriculum. Science should be based on facts and evidence. Perspectives and responses to issues identified by science are better discussed as current events within the social studies curriculum. As well, the inclusion of pluralistic society and different faiths in science will set up contradictions and unresolvable differences, which could be completely avoided by simply keeping nonfactual faith-transmitted traditional knowledge out of it entirely.
- Social Studies: There is some mention of mosques, but mostly in an architectural sense. If they want students to understand this architecture, they could have the students study the architectural influence of many different cultural groups that immigrated to Canada. There needs to be inclusion of the perspective of non-Christian experience in Alberta history. The curriculum should include further exploration of Indigenous beliefs and traditional ways of living.
- Social Studies: All mention of people of different faiths, experiences and backgrounds does not acknowledge the continued existence of racism and discrimination in today's society. It claims that many people overcame racism, but that does not mean that racism has disappeared. *Overcoming racism* means that people have simply learned how to survive in its continued presence. The curriculum does not lead students to critically examine racism and develop concrete ways in ending systemic racism in our province/country.
- Fine Arts: The draft curriculum does not support the development of peaceful society. It presents play, safety practices and collaboration in a way that is really promoting conformity, control and collegiality. This dangerously threatens a future citizenry of individuals who never learn to question, ponder or challenge society. On the surface, this may seem like the formula for a peaceful society, one that exemplifies *beauty, goodness and truth*, but one need only look at

societies of control where ideology is spoon fed into the system to see that such peace is rarely achieved through lies dressed up as beautiful truth. The curriculum teaches about others from the perspective of *us*, while many students in the classroom may actually be or relate to the others. It minimizes non-Christian practices, and provides very little opportunity to explore different perspectives in a way that could foster mutual understanding or empathy. Peaceful societies provide platforms for individuals to express themselves and be heard. That limited opportunities to learn how to do this are provided by this curriculum is cause for grave concern. Worse, the potential for perceived exclusion of students who do not identify with the Eurocentric agenda, coupled with lacking representation of the diversity in the classroom, is the recipe for civil unrest.

- Physical Education and Wellness: There is an attempt to develop character education in the draft curriculum. However, without any understanding of all peoples 2SLGBTQ+, First Nations, Métis, Inuit and francophone, how can there be any *mutual understanding and empathy*? The Guiding Framework references *our civic institutions and our history*. We wonder whose history and institutions? Whose virtues and values? We find it offensive that in the description in the Citizenship Theme, p 4, Indigenous people are solely referred to in a *historical perspective*. Indigenous peoples are the first inhabitants and *are still here*.
- Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Group: Terms such as *truth, beauty and goodness, high arts, and high literature* are used throughout. Whose truth? Whose beauty? Whose goodness? Who determines *high*? These terms demonstrate that the draft curriculum is promoting one view of the world. There is no realization of the importance of understanding diverse students, their contexts and what is meaningful and beautiful to them.
- Diversity, Equity and Human Rights group: The draft curriculum does not mention all of the human conditions referred to on p 18 of the Guiding Framework. It has denied all Albertans from seeing themselves in this curriculum and it does not promote diversity as a valuable contribution to Alberta's shared human inheritance.
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education group: There are outcomes in the draft curriculum that are contrary to providing welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments. For example, in Grade 2, students are to bring money to purchase grocery items; in Grade 3, they discuss how much money is spent on them in a day, week and month; Grade 4 asks questions such as "How is your family like or unlike a business plan"; Grade 5 students discuss borrowing money from others vs a bank; in Grade 6, they make a *wise* decision between buying figure skates or a hockey card... All these outcomes will expose and create divisions along socioeconomic class lines. This may not be the intention, but it will be the result. How do these financial literacy outcomes contribute to a safe learning environment for all students? Why is pedagogy prescribed in the draft curriculum?
- School Leaders: The draft curriculum outcomes for financial literacy and religion do not recognize the range of diversity in public schools. These outcomes will be very difficult for many

students, their families and the teachers who will be tasked to navigate through those elements with their students.

- School Leaders: When *virtues* are referenced, are they shared in the classical sense, or a western religious sense? Perhaps a curriculum based on a more secular world view would be more appropriate.

Critique

The data collected in the survey and the Curriculum Circle strongly indicate that the draft curriculum does not meet the overall guidelines of representing Alberta's diversity and supporting a peaceful, pluralistic society. Teachers have described the language in the draft curriculum as Eurocentric, colonial, racist and othering. The social studies teacher specialist group reported, "This curriculum assumes all students come from an English language-speaking, middle/upper class, Christian, European/Canadian background with extremely supportive, cis-gender, highly educated parents. In reality, most students do not fit into this category."

Until recently, Alberta Education administrative policy required all curriculum resources to undergo a Recognizing Diversity and Promoting Respect review prior to publication. This was to ensure that the contents and the language in all Alberta Education curriculum resources were not biased, discriminatory, racist or offensive to Albertans. Obviously, the draft curriculum did not have a Recognizing Diversity and Promoting Respect review prior to its public release. Given the serious human rights concerns with the draft curriculum, it must undergo a complete review and rewrite with input from experts and scholars in human rights. Prior to the draft curriculum going to pilot it must receive an endorsement from these same experts and scholars in human rights that it is suitable for public release.

Racism, Bigotry and Intolerance

The introductory paragraph of the Visions Statement (Ministerial Order on Student Learning) in the Guiding Framework closes with the sentence “[Students] will become life-long learners, who will cultivate the virtues of wisdom, courage, self-control, justice, charity, and hope” (Alberta 2020b, 5). The section on Character Development reads, “Students will demonstrate a commitment to the common good by exercising compassion, empathy, and support for each other in our diverse society” (Alberta 2020b, 5). “Truth overcomes the ignorance and lack of empathy and imagination that lead to racism, bigotry, and intolerance, and which stand as a barrier to reconciliation with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Canadians” (Alberta 2020b, 17). To address racism, sexism and other forms of bigotry, students will directly engage with enduring works of diverse authors in English language arts and literature. In social studies, students will be directly engaged with the greatest enduring works of diverse authors and the study of history, civics and economics to address racism, sexism and other forms of bigotry (Alberta 2020b, 9, 11).

Analysis

The teachers’ analysis of the draft curriculum has identified that racism, sexism and other forms of bigotry have *not* been addressed and, in fact, the curriculum language promotes racism, sexism and bigotry.

- The draft curriculum does not reflect antiracism educational practices. Antiracism knowledge, understandings, skills and procedures outcomes must be included in the curriculum. One of the biggest things to recognize is that racism has occurred and still occurs.
- The draft curriculum is written from a biased, white male perspective. The lack of reference to women is appalling, and Indigenous women are presented stereotypically. For example, in Grade 4 Social Studies, the statement “Women, mostly Métis, were present in the fur trade country and many intermarried with traders ...” does not emphasize Indigenous matriarchies and/or the important role of Indigenous women, specifically Métis women. The use of past tense in the Grade 5 Social Studies curriculum when speaking about women as matriarchs in the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy suggests that this is something of the past and does not exist in the present day. In Social Studies, Grade 4, p 18, students are required to “explore the life of Klondike Kate.” This will be a stretch because students will first find references to her being a vaudeville dancer, which the teacher will have to explain and defuse.
- The content provides token examples of racism, prejudice and the treatment of immigrants in Alberta. Learning about one specific individual of a different race/cultural background does

not teach children how minority people have been treated, the long-lasting effects of racial discrimination or how racism continues to exist in our society.

- This curriculum is not inclusive or accessible to all Albertans. Only some of the varied backgrounds mentioned on p 18 of the Guiding Framework can be found within it. That there is no reference to 2SLGBTQ+ in the entire document is a concern.

Critique

Recent incidents of racism and hate crimes in Alberta demonstrate that the draft Alberta curriculum must provide elementary students with the knowledge to recognize racism, sexism and bigotry; the understanding that these actions are prohibited in Alberta and that their communication and actions can impact others; and the skills to address these issues in their schools and community.

The Guiding Framework states that the draft curriculum will “address racism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry” (Alberta 2020b, 9, 11). The only references to racism appear in Social Studies Knowledge outcomes related to arrival of the KKK and racism in Alberta in the 1920s (Grade 4); immigration policies in 1896–1914 (Grade 5); and comparing immigration policies of the United States and Canada (Grade 6).³¹ At no time does the curriculum address the racism, sexism and bigotry that exist in Alberta communities today.

The draft curriculum must reflect current research about human rights education. Teachers, university scholars, human rights organizations and local community members must be included in the development process to address racism, sexism and bigotry in age-appropriate curriculum outcomes. The government’s Anti-Racism Advisory Council³² called for Alberta’s public school curriculum to address these issues.

In 2019, the Government of Alberta established the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council, consisting of 24 individuals from different walks of life, representing Alberta’s diverse communities. In 2021, the current government named new members to replace some members whose term had expired. The Anti-Racism Advisory Council now advises the Minister of Culture and Status of Women and provides advice on efforts to combat racism and promote more inclusive and accepting communities across Alberta. In February 2021, the Anti-Racism Council submitted a report with 48 recommendations to the Minister. Theme 4, Advancing human dignity in education, was developed on the belief that “teaching respect for each other is about recognizing that human dignity is inviolable” (Alberta Anti-Racism Council 2021, 10). Recommendations in Theme 4 include the following:

1. Decolonize education by developing and providing access to curriculum with a specific focus on anti-Indigenous racism, systemic racism, and other forms of discrimination, and by supporting teachers in understanding and teaching about racism as well as the history and impact of racism embedded in teaching.

2. Reframe Canadian values to include Indigenous and non-Eurocentric ways of knowing, living, and relating—values that uphold human dignity in alignment with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is accomplished by:
 - Updating content in the K–12 curriculum to include the history of racialized peoples.
 - Embedding an anti-racism lens in the curriculum to promote understanding of the impact of historical racism on present-day experience and the necessary resilience racialized communities in facing barriers and systemic structures (i.e. residential school survivors). (Alberta Anti-Racism Council 2021, 10).

Learning Outcomes on World Religions

After a public consultation period, the Ministerial Order on Student Learning was approved on August 6, 2020. The Ministerial Order makes no reference to students learning about world religions.

The Guiding Framework (December 2020) mentions *world religion* or *religion* in three places:

- Subject Specific Guidelines for K-12 Social Studies: Students will learn “about world religions, philosophy, and belief systems, with an emphasis on reading age-appropriate foundational original texts that provide a basis for the origin of ideas, alternative ideas, and how ideas continue and change over time to become culturally literate and informed citizens” (Alberta 2020b, 11).
- Considerations for the Development of the Curriculum: “Students will learn rigorous and up-to-date science while also respecting freedom of religion so as to not undermine faith and cultural traditions that are important to parents and consistent with virtue and knowledge” (Alberta 2020b, 13).
- Essential Core Knowledge for Critical Thinking and Civic and Cultural Literacy: “Learning this essential content of language, mathematics, fine arts, sciences, sports, history, geography, philosophy, economics, and religions will enable students to fully participate in the complexity of civic discussions in today’s world and to love lifelong learning” (Alberta 2020b, 14).

The draft curriculum was released to the public on March 29, 2021. The draft curriculum supporting documents include fact sheets on the new Four Key Themes. The Citizenship theme includes a component titled “Pluralism and Multiculturalism.” Within this component, there is a paragraph on world religions:

Because much prejudice stems from ignorance, students will learn about world religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. They will also learn about how different communities can work together, such as the story of the first mosque in western Canada, which was built with mutual support across religious lines. (Alberta 2021a, 2)

Analysis

While the online survey did not ask a specific question on religion, many teachers expressed their concern in response to the question on what they found least useful or disliked about the draft curriculum.

- Religion should not be taught in secular public schools. Christian references and overtones throughout. The religious content is not respectful of Alberta’s diversity.

When asked in the survey to comment on what they find most useful (or like) about the K–6 draft curriculum, less than 1 per cent, or 29, of the 3,024 teachers who provided comments to this question believe that students should learn about world religions and ancient civilizations some time in K–12.

Even though I am a Christian, I believe that families should be the ones to teach their children about their belief system. It would make me very uncomfortable to teach what is in the new curriculum.

—Elementary teacher

Teachers in the Curriculum Circle specialist groups also commented on the world religions content in their analysis of the draft curriculum:

- First-year university courses in religious studies look a lot like the content in the draft curriculum. “My university course in Western religion didn’t cover a whole lot more than p 13–14 in Grade 2 SS. Being in that course was hard and othering. Expecting this sort of content to be discussed in K–6 in an objective sort of a way is problematic.” A lot of diversity is excluded/homogenized; it’s like there is one Christian or one Muslim perspective.
- Religious content is problematic for a public school environment. For example, it is not appropriate for a teacher to interpret or appear to interpret a religion’s holy book.
- School Leaders group: We are trying to understand how teaching about world religions in elementary school builds community. When religions are brought into the classroom, it opens the door to talking about others’ beliefs in disrespectful manners. Parents may not appreciate the knowledge that students will take home. The school will not be able to teach a few different select religions and make all parents happy.
- School Leaders group: The current provincial mandatory programs of study do not include content on world religions. There is an optional high school World Religions 20 course. In Catholic schools, and religious-based programs of choice, world religions are studied in earlier grades. The provincial elementary curriculum should focus on what makes people similar and how to live in a multicultural community, not identifying religions and beliefs that will explore how people are different. Emphasizing differences does not build community.
- School Leaders group: The *Education Act*, section 58, gives parents the right to exclude their child from religious instruction. Students who are excluded by their parent will leave the classroom. The draft curriculum for Social Studies Grades 2 and 6 will require that parents have the right to exclude their child from instruction about religion in each of those years, and someone else in the school will have to supervise those students during that time. A provincial core subject curriculum must be inclusive and accessible to all students. A curriculum that requires instruction about a select group of religions is not appropriate in public elementary schools. What about the families whose faith is different from the ones included in this curriculum? What about the atheists?

Development of the Draft K–6 Curriculum (2021)



Critique

The current *Social Studies Program of Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12* includes the same Program Rationale and Philosophy information across all grade levels. Religion is mentioned in the definition of social studies: “Social studies is the study of people in relation to each other and to their world. It is an issues-focused and inquiry-based interdisciplinary subject that draws upon history, geography, ecology, economics, law, philosophy, political science and other social science disciplines.” Religion is also included in the definition of pluralism: “A pluralistic view recognizes that citizenship and identity are shaped by multiple factors such as culture, language, environment, gender, ideology, religion, spirituality and philosophy” (Alberta Education 2005). Even though religion is included in the social studies program of studies Rationale and Philosophy, the topic of religion is not included in any mandatory social studies program K–12. The study of world religions is left until high school, in the optional course World Religions 20, when students have developed critical thinking skills to support learning and communication skills for respectful and safe discussions.

The Alberta Education website provides a timeline of the activities for the curriculum development. The first step in the process was to update the Ministerial Order on Student Learning 2013. After the Minister received the Curriculum Advisory Panel report, on December 20, 2019, a new vision for student learning was drafted. A public consultation to gather input on the vision for student learning included an online survey with 8,000+ respondents, and in-person and virtual engagement sessions, in which 300 individuals and education stakeholder organization gave input. The public consultation closed on February 24, 2020. On August 6, 2020, the Minister held a press conference to publicly release the new Ministerial Order on Student Learning.³³ The word *religion* does not appear in the Ministerial Order. The first time that the public learned that world religions is being included in public education across Alberta was when the draft curriculum was released, in March 2021. Why is the timeline important?

The draft curriculum is the first time, in kindergarten through Grade 12, that instruction about world religions will be included in a mandatory core subject. This decision has infringed on the religious freedoms of Alberta parents who do not want their children to be taught the main ideas and beliefs of various religions in secular public schools. The Minister of Education did not behave in an ethical manner when the public consultation on the vision for student learning failed to disclose the Minister’s intention to include the study of world religions in the mandated curriculum for public schools.

On May 28, 2020, the Premier and Minister of Education announced Bill 15, which would amend the *Education Act* “to affirm that parents have the right to choose the kind of education they feel is best for their children. It will strengthen Alberta’s successful history of education choice, including public and separate schools, Francophone schools, charter schools, independent schools, home education and early childhood education.”³⁴ With the passage of Bill 15, parents in Alberta have many options available to them to choose a school where their children can receive instruction on world religions

and/or education in a religious schooling context. Even prior to the passage of Bill 15, many secular public school districts offered parents a variety of programs of choice through which students have religious instruction and/or learn in a particular religious context.

The draft K-6 social studies curriculum contains learning outcomes about world religions in Grade 2 and Grade 6. If this curriculum is implemented, parents who do not want their child taught religion in public education have only two choices: home schooling or exempting their child from the classroom when the lessons on religion are taught.³⁵ The *Education Act*, section 58, allows parents to exclude their child from religious instruction. In Social Studies Grade 2, approximately 8 days of social studies lessons would be devoted to covering the world religions learning outcomes. In Social Studies Grade 6, approximately 19 days, almost 4 weeks, of social studies lessons would be devoted to covering the world religions learning outcomes.³⁶

School leaders at the Curriculum Circle discussed the potential impacts of including world religions content in elementary schools. They have already experienced many parents not wanting their child to celebrate Christmas, a Christian holiday, in public school because their family has other beliefs. All the school leaders in the group reported that on school days that include holiday celebrations, many of these parents choose to keep their child home from school for the entire day rather than have their child singled out by not participating in the classroom activities.

With the implementation of the draft curriculum, parents can choose to exercise their rights under section 58 and exempt their child from this instruction.³⁷ The school principal will have to make alternate supervision or instructional arrangements for all these students. What will these children be learning instead of religion? Where will they go in the schools and who will supervise them? When students are opted out of 14 per cent of the Grade 6 social studies curriculum, what does that mean for provincial achievement exams? Will parents choose to keep their child home from school for the days that world religions content is being covered? Will the instruction on world religions become a mandatory component of social studies in the secondary grades? And if so, how much time will these students be exempted from classroom instruction?

The learning outcomes related to world religions must be deleted from the draft curriculum. Including learning outcomes on religious studies in a provincially mandated program of studies violates the freedom of religion and freedom from religion human rights of Alberta students and their families.

Free from Bias, Ideology and Educational Jargon

The Guiding Framework outlines government's commitment to produce a curriculum that is clear and concise, avoiding specialized jargon so it is understandable to parents and teachers alike. "Where possible, *The Guiding Framework* avoids currently fashionable jargon and abstract language. It recommends that the curriculum be written without needless technical language so that the findings of the research can be more easily accessed and used by teachers and parents alike" (Alberta 2020b, 4). "The curriculum is to provide clear guidance and support for teachers and accessible information for parents who have the right of oversight and choice in the education of their children. For these reasons, the curriculum must be clear, concise, and as free as possible from ideology, pedagogy, and jargon" (Alberta 2020b, 21).

Analysis

In the survey, teachers were asked if they agreed with the statement "The draft curriculum is clear, concise, avoiding specialized jargon so it is easily understandable to parents and teachers alike"; 73 per cent of respondents disagree with this statement. When the survey closed, a review of the comments indicated that teachers had identified bias in the draft curriculum. In an effort to understand this issue further, teachers at the Curriculum Circle were asked to report on whether the draft curriculum is free from bias, ideology, pedagogy and educational jargon.

- English Language Arts and Literature: The draft curriculum includes ideologically centring traditional European stories by white males and *greatest and most influential writers*. The subject overview promises the draft curriculum will develop *real world skills* but there is no real-world context and no modern viewpoints. There is only lip service paid to Indigenous cultures. Free from jargon means that some of the words used are *things*. Language of the disciplines is not jargon and this language is needed to develop rigour and disciplinary knowledge.
- Social Studies: The current social studies "Land: People and Places" theme, which contains concepts of environmental stewardship, has been removed in the draft curriculum and a second history theme has been added. The draft social studies curriculum is structured with two "money" themes: economics and financial literacy. Global citizenship has been dropped from the social studies draft curriculum, and world religion has been added. These structural changes in the elementary social studies draft curriculum indicate a bias.
- Social Studies: Some learning outcomes are biased toward business and do not reflect reality for many students. Social studies, Grade 2, p 11: "Employment *is created by entrepreneurs* in the form of jobs paying wages and salaries." This outcome is very biased toward private business and not inclusive of the jobs parents have in the service industry, public service, professions, etc. All

the financial literacy outcomes K–6 are not considerate of the cultural and economic diversity in Alberta schools. The outcomes are not age appropriate for children and are not appropriate for families whose cultural values and norms do not favour children discussing family finances. As well, the most serious concern is that all the financial literacy outcomes set up situations that violate family privacy and will lead to families being ranked by socioeconomic status.

- Science, Scientific Methods: There is a false distinction between scientists communicating to each other and how scientists communicate with the public. From the perspective of science teachers, this false distinction would only serve to further encourage mistrust of the scientists by the public. More alarming is the inclusion of “Ways to share explanations of natural events include: written texts, traditional knowledge, visual forms, verbal presentations, stories and legends”(Science Grade 6, 53). This outcome clearly belongs in the social studies curriculum. Perhaps it is included in the science curriculum to provide a back door for antiscience doctrine found most often in religious traditions. For example, creationism is a religious belief explaining the origin of the Earth and humanity as we know it, but the scientific consensus does not support this belief. This is only one example. If the intent was to support traditional Indigenous ways of knowing ... it needs to be far more explicit in the description; otherwise, these outcomes can be used to indoctrinate students.
- Science: There are factual inaccuracies in the draft that can be interpreted as bias or ideology. The climate change sections downplay the human impact of global warming. And why has the terminology of renewable and nonrenewable energy resources (Grade 5) been changed to *processed energy resources* (Grade 6)? The science draft curriculum is lacking in critical thinking skills, it's lacking innovation, and is very Alberta-centred in its viewpoints.
- Mathematics: Some of the vocabulary used in learning outcomes is high school level or even university level. This draft curriculum is focusing on making parents more comfortable because there is less *new math* and more rote memorization of algorithms instead of deep learning. This thinking represents an ideology about mathematics that is best described as *back to the basics*. Students need to increase their ability to recall basic facts in order to perform higher-level math. However, the methods used to achieve this goal will benefit a small portion of the population who think and learn math in the same way it was taught in the 1950s through the 1980s. This approach will not benefit anybody else and runs the risk of leaving a huge swath of people behind.
- Fine Arts: The complex nature of fine arts learning requires that each arts discipline be articulated by discipline-specific vocabulary and acquired through creative practice with the distinctive elements and principles of art, dance, drama and music. Language within this draft curriculum contains some relevant vocabulary, albeit disconnected from sequential or constructed logic, and at times is misplaced, incorrectly used and seemingly arbitrary where it arises at each level.
- School Leaders group: “Whose world view is represented and why? The curriculum has too many references to American patriotic exemplars rather than Canadian examples or ideas.”

Critique

As stated in the Guiding Framework, “Teachers learn how to teach in their post-secondary teacher-preparation programs and through ongoing professional development according to research into best practices” (Alberta 2020b, 16). The first audience for a program of studies are the more than 40,000 professional teachers and school leaders in Alberta who must teach the program of studies. A well designed, rigorous and research-based curriculum must include language of the discipline and the education terminology needed to communicate with the education professionals. The language of subject disciplines is not educational “jargon.” Alberta Education has produced parent handbooks to explain the current program of studies so that parents can support their child’s learning. If the parent needs more information, these handbooks can be enhanced, and if the parent still needs more information, they are advised to talk to their child’s teacher.

The only jargon this draft curriculum is free from is current pedagogy and educational research.

—Inclusive education teacher

Teachers have identified numerous examples of implicit and explicit examples of bias and ideology in the draft curriculum. If the draft curriculum had been developed using the development stages and processes used for past curriculum, there would have been many individuals reviewing the draft material. In the spirit of collaboration, these issues would have been raised, discussed and reworked to produce a better product. A thorough reading of the document would lead most readers to the conclusion that the draft curriculum was written by a small number of individuals who are not members of the public education sector in Alberta; the process was rushed; and many quality control steps for publishing in Alberta Education have been skipped. It’s embarrassing to everyone involved in education in Alberta to have the public pointing out inaccuracies, errors in content, grammatical errors, and examples of plagiarism, bias and ideology.

Conclusion

This report is the result of a professional analysis and critique of the draft K–6 curriculum that has involved more than 6,500 teachers from across the province. The survey data, specialist council written submissions and participant feedback from the Curriculum Circle are consistent and overwhelming: the K–6 draft curriculum is fundamentally flawed. The teachers’ conclusion is that the draft curriculum does not meet any of the guidelines for development set out by Alberta Education.

We are also concerned about the negative impact on our students of taking an education system that is in the top-ranked jurisdictions worldwide and trying to fix it with this draft curriculum. What is the problem that the government is trying to solve here?

—School Leaders group

This draft curriculum was motivated by a political timeline, and the development process was designed to limit input and restrict dialogue. The Minister has repeatedly said that more than 100 teachers were involved in the development of this curriculum; however, the involvement of the 102 teachers was limited to a two-day Zoom meeting to review a draft. The feedback and recommendations provided during that meeting are not “open and transparent” to the public because these teachers were required to sign a nondisclosure agreement.

Alberta’s world-class public education system has been developed over decades by dedicated public officials in Alberta Education, system and school leaders, teachers, and faculty in Alberta teacher preparation programs. The underlying philosophy of the draft curriculum is diametrically opposed to the philosophy of Alberta curriculum over the last 40 years. The undisclosed curriculum writers seem to have no awareness of the purpose of curriculum in the Alberta education system and seem to have total disregard for the education legislation, policy and frameworks that are the foundation for public education in this province.

The draft curriculum does not meet the standards of Alberta program of studies (curriculum) and is not suitable for piloting or implementation in Alberta elementary classrooms.

Notes

1. David Perkins, professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Quoted in Hough, L. 2015. "What's Worth Learning in School?" *Harvard Education Magazine*. Winter. Available at www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/15/01/whats-worth-learning-school (accessed July 16, 2021).
2. "Alberta Anti-Racism Council." Government of Alberta website. www.alberta.ca/anti-racism-advisory-council.aspx.
3. Critique: a) to evaluate in a detailed and analytical way; b) a detailed analysis and assessment. www.lexico.com/en/definition/critique.
4. The *Technical Briefing: Draft K-6 Curriculum* was provided by Alberta Education to education stakeholders at the public release of the curriculum, on March 29, 2021.
5. *Teacher* means a person who holds a certificate of qualification as a teacher issued under the *Education Act (Education Act, SA 2012, c E-0.3)*. www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/e00p3.pdf.
6. The 11 programs are English Language Arts and Literature, French Language Arts and Literature, French Immersion Language Arts and Literature, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Physical Education and Wellness, Visual Arts, Drama, Dance, and Music.
7. *Education Act, SA 2012, c E-0.3*. www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/e00p3.pdf.
8. *Education Act, SA 2012, c E-0.3*. Preamble, 11. www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/e00p3.pdf.
9. *2021 Draft Kindergarten–Grade 6 (K–6) Curriculum*.
10. *2021 Draft Kindergarten–Grade 6 (K–6) Curriculum*.
11. *Literacy Progressions*. <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3402194/lit-progressions.pdf>.
12. "The Science of Reading." International Literacy Association. www.literacyworldwide.org/get-resources/making-sense-of-the-science-of-reading.
13. Twenty-nine survey respondents (0.9 per cent) believe that students should learn about world religions at some time in K–12.
14. See "Employability Skills," Conference Board of Canada website (www.conferenceboard.ca/edu/employability-skills.aspx) and "Essential Skills Resources," Government of Canada website (www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success.html).
15. "Inclusive Education." Alberta Education website. www.alberta.ca/inclusive-education.aspx.
16. "Inclusive Education." Alberta Education website. www.alberta.ca/inclusive-education.aspx.
17. "Student Population Statistics." Alberta Education website, www.alberta.ca/student-population-statistics.aspx. Note: 2018/19 is the most recent year for which student population statistics are available.
18. "Education for Reconciliation." Alberta Education. www.alberta.ca/education-for-reconciliation.aspx.

19. "Curriculum development." Alberta Education. www.alberta.ca/curriculum-development.aspx.

20. "Curriculum development." Alberta Education. www.alberta.ca/curriculum-development.aspx.

21. *2021 Draft Kindergarten–Grade 6 (K–6) Curriculum*.

22. "K to 12 education legislation and regulations." Alberta Education website. www.alberta.ca/K-12-education-legislation-and-regulations.aspx.

23. "Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988." Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21. <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canadian-multiculturalism-act-1988>.

24. *Alberta Human Rights Act*, RSA 2000, c A-25.5, p 2.

25. *Education Act*, SA 2012, c E-0.3. www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/e00p3.pdf. Section 16.

26. *Education Act*, SA 2012, c E-0.3. www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/e00p3.pdf. Section 33.

27. *Alberta Human Rights Act*, RSA 2000, c A-25.5.

28. "K to 12 education legislation and regulations." Alberta Education website. www.alberta.ca/K-12-education-legislation-and-regulations.aspx.

29. *2021 Draft Kindergarten–Grade 6 (K–6) Curriculum*.

30. *2021 Draft Kindergarten–Grade 6 (K–6) Curriculum*.

31. *2021 Draft Kindergarten–Grade 6 (K–6) Curriculum*.

32. "Alberta Anti-Racism Council." Government of Alberta website. www.alberta.ca/anti-racism-advisory-council.aspx.

33. "Vision for Student Learning Engagement." Alberta Education website. www.alberta.ca/vision-for-student-learning-engagement.aspx.

34. "Protecting Choice in Education." Alberta Education website. www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=71459A1642543-0985-9A93-C18D61E2A25252C5.

35. "Draft K-6 Curriculum, Have your say." Alberta Education website. www.alberta.ca/curriculum-have-your-say.aspx#topics (accessed July 10, 2021).

36. Grade 6 Social Studies: 28 of 36 outcomes, or approximately three-quarters of the theme "Alberta and Canada's ethnic and religious diversity," are devoted to world religions. Seven themes in social studies taught over a 180-day school year is approximately 25 days of instruction per theme. Three-quarters of one theme is approximately 19 days of instruction.

37. "Draft K-6 Curriculum, Have your say." Alberta Education website. www.alberta.ca/curriculum-have-your-say.aspx#topics.

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- . 2020b. *The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum*. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Education. Available at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/guiding-framework-design-development-k-12-curriculum> (accessed July 16, 2021).
- . 2021a. *Citizenship*. Key Themes Fact Sheet. Available at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/draft-k-6-curriculum-fact-sheets> (accessed July 16, 2021).
- . 2021b. *Literacy*. Key Themes Fact Sheet. Available at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/draft-k-6-curriculum-fact-sheets> (accessed July 16, 2021).
- . 2021c. *Numeracy*. Key Themes Fact Sheet. Available at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/draft-k-6-curriculum-fact-sheets> (accessed July 16, 2021).
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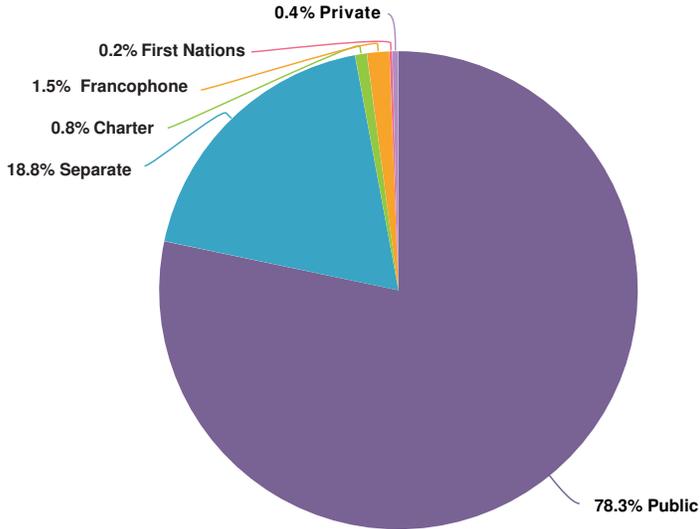
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APPENDIX A

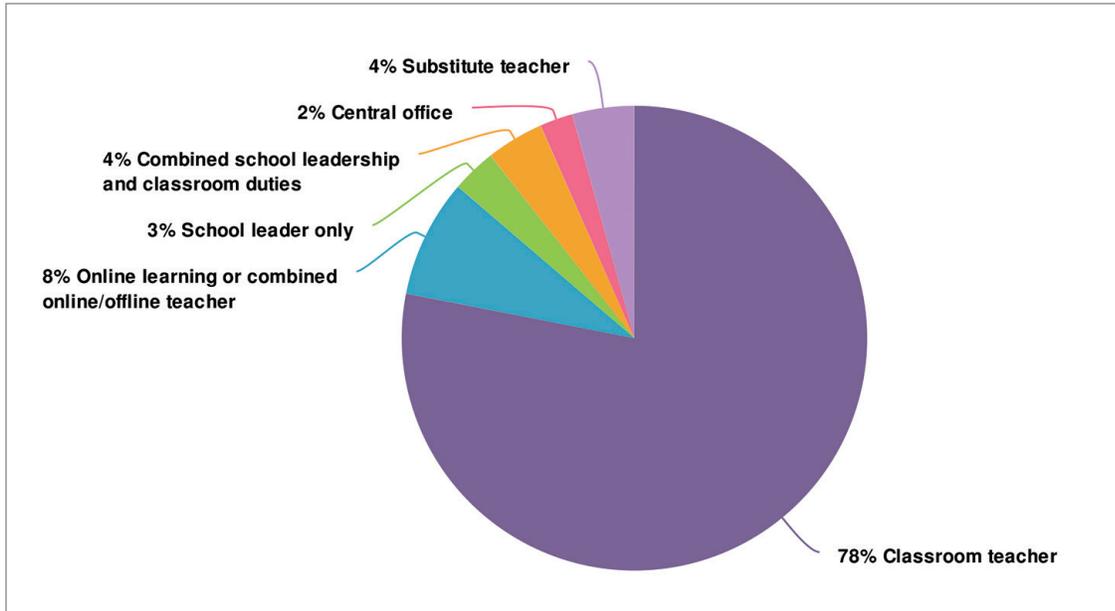
SURVEY RESULTS

Demographics

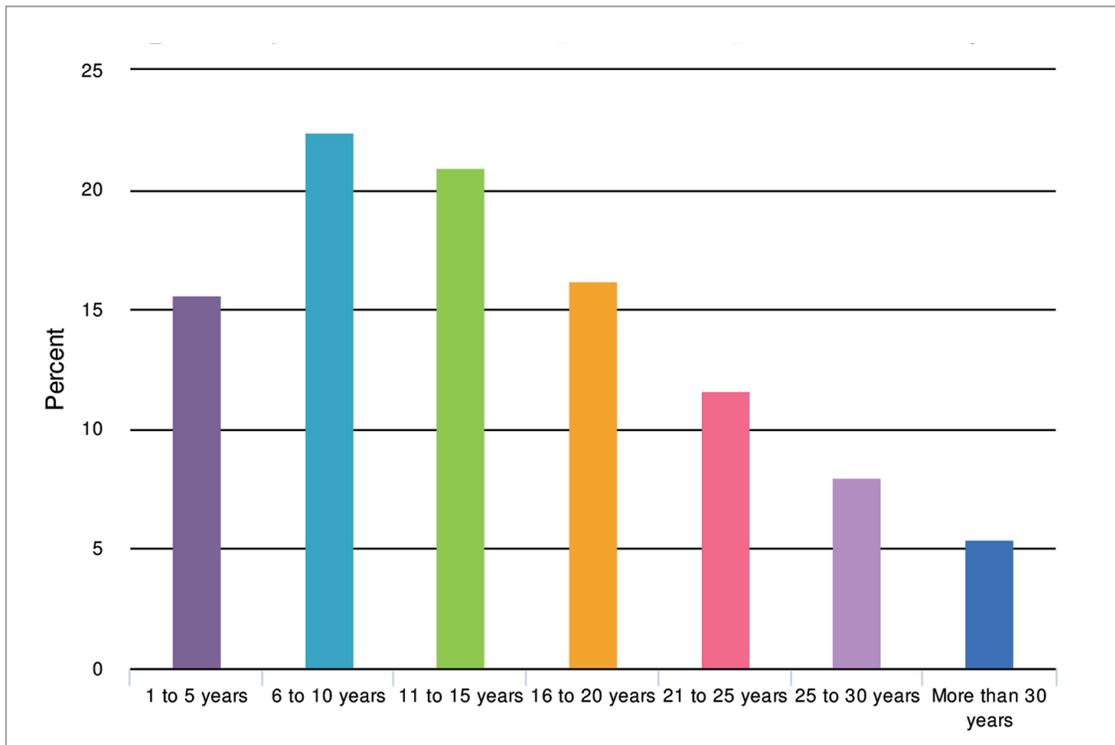
Question 1 – With which type of school authority are you employed?



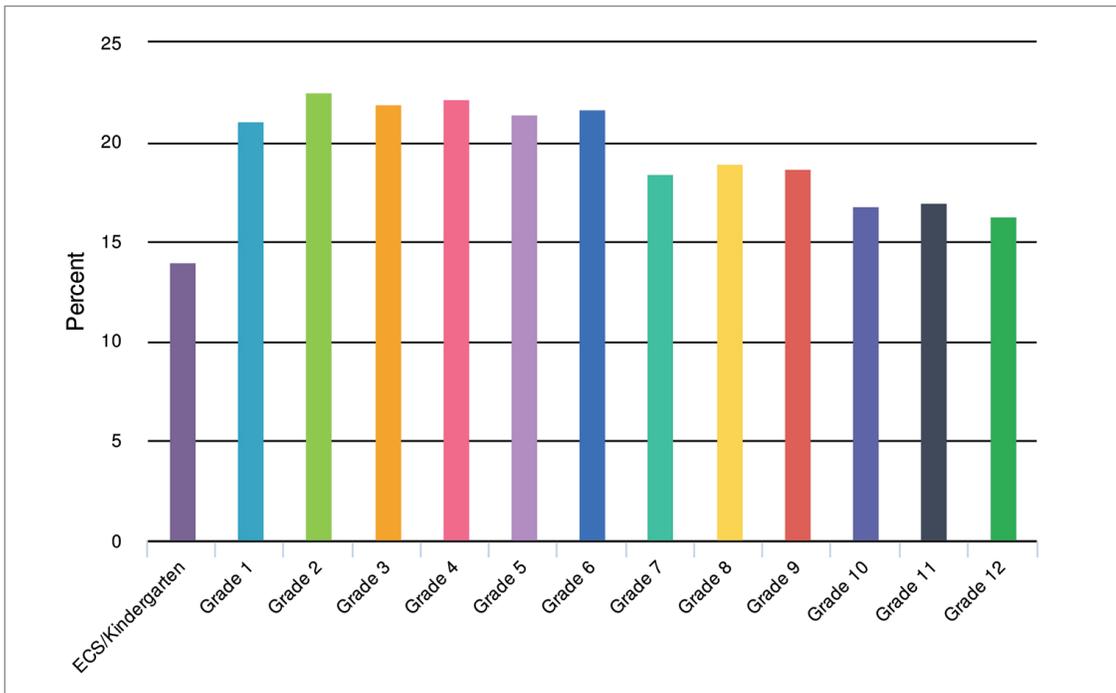
Question 2 – Your current assignment



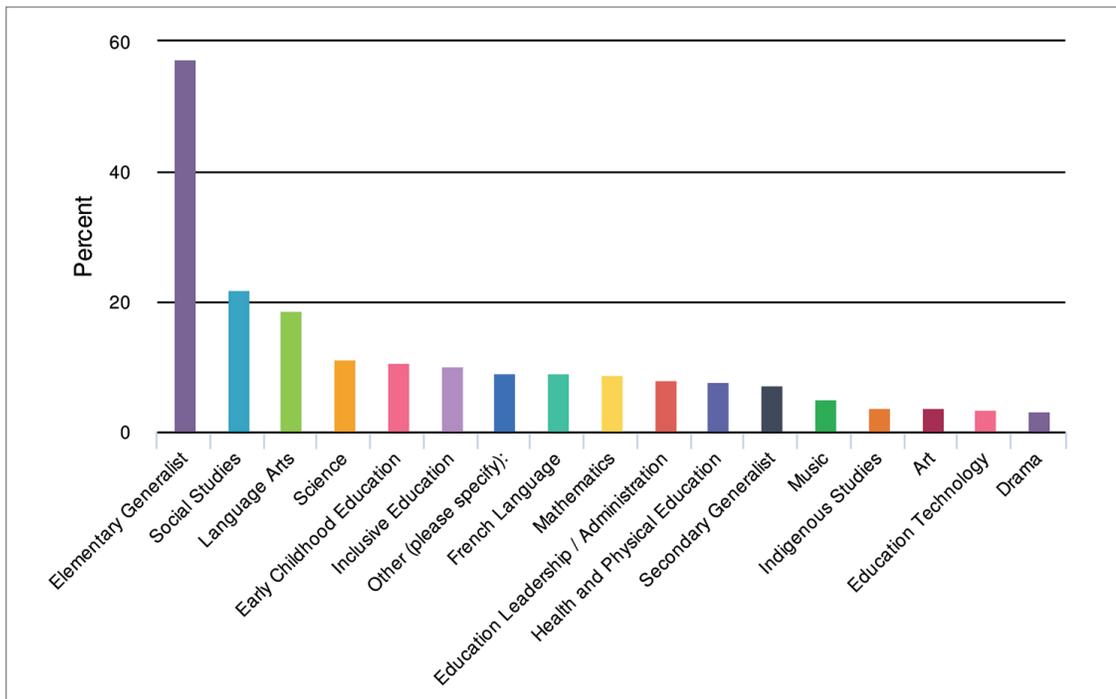
Question 3 – How long have you been teaching, including this current year?



Question 4 – What grade level(s) are you currently teaching? Please check all that apply.

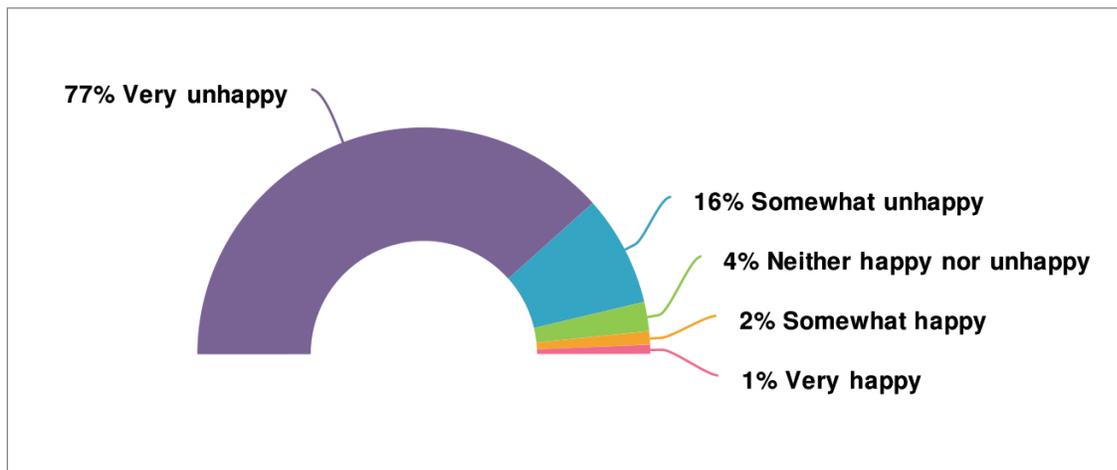


Question 5 – What is your university teaching specialization?



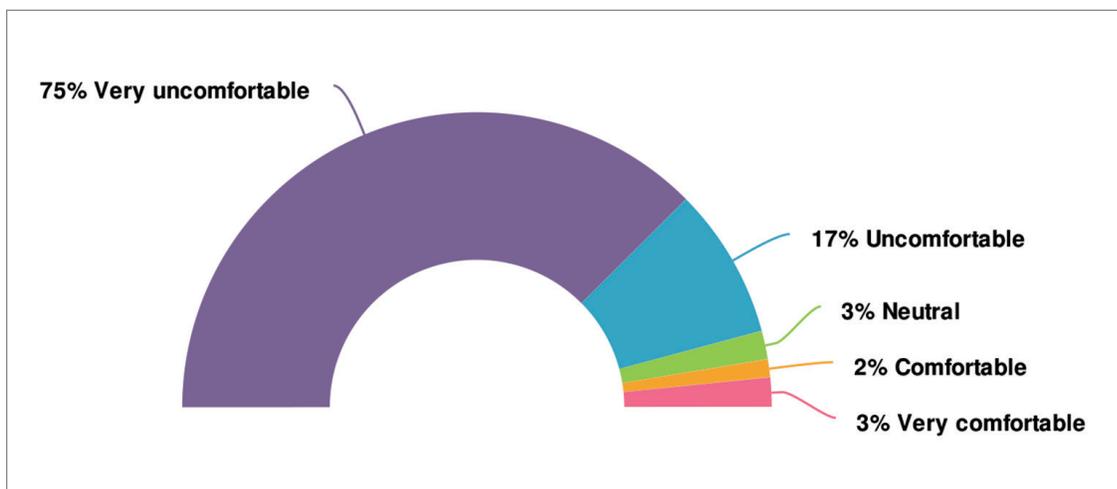
Impressions

Question 6 – In general how do you feel about this new K-6 draft curriculum?



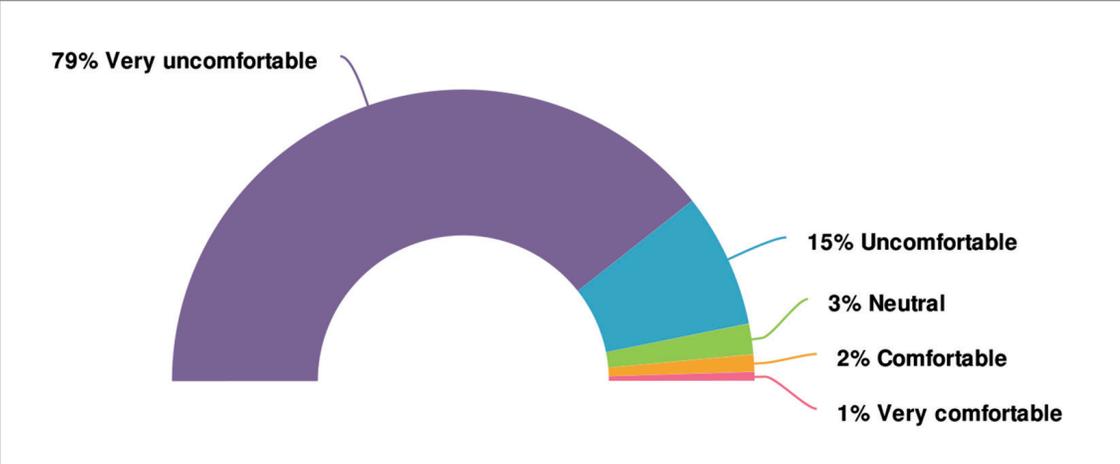
Ninety-three per cent of teachers are unhappy and 3 per cent are happy with the K-6 draft curriculum.

Question 7 – TEACHER RESPONSE – What is your level of comfort moving ahead into the future to teach this new K-6 curriculum?



Ninety-two per cent of teachers are uncomfortable moving ahead to teach the K-6 draft curriculum and 5 per cent are comfortable moving ahead to teach the K-6 draft curriculum.

Question 8 – SCHOOL LEADER RESPONSE – What is your level of comfort moving ahead into the future to support this new K-6 curriculum in your school and/or school community?



Ninety-four per cent of school leaders are uncomfortable and 3 per cent are comfortable with moving ahead into the future to support the K–6 draft curriculum in their school community.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE GUIDELINES FOR DRAFTING CURRICULUM

Alberta Education published the Overall Guidelines for Drafting Curriculum in *The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum* (Alberta 2020b). The Guidelines consisted of 16 points, of which 13 were included in the survey questions. The teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement that the K–6 draft curriculum met the Guidelines set out by Alberta Education. The aggregated results are reported in the table below.

Question 9 - Please rate the following statements. The new K-6 draft curriculum is:

	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree Mostly	Agree
...consistent with the Vision for Student Learning as set out in the Ministerial Order for Student Learning.	66.9%	14.9%	7.7%	2.4%	2.6%
...developmentally appropriate with high academic standards.	87.7%	6.2%	2.2%	1.3%	2.2%
...supports opportunities for all students to reach their personal best.	83.2%	9.8%	2.8%	0.9%	2.3%
...provides age appropriate content that is logically sequenced within each grade and from grade to grade.	90.4%	4.8%	1.5%	0.9%	1.9%
...encourages students to examine a rich variety of ideas and viewpoints.	70.7%	15.7%	8.5%	1.5%	3.1%
...respectfully includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, contributions, and perspectives (with explicit core knowledge about treaties and the history and legacy of residential schools, with age-appropriate content).	70.9%	13.9%	8.4%	2.3%	3.3%
...respectfully includes Francophone histories, contributions, and perspectives.	57.4%	17.1%	12.1%	2.7%	3.2%
...is scientifically rigorous while respecting a variety of beliefs in our pluralistic* society. * "A peaceful, pluralistic society and an energized civilization requires respect and mutual understanding among people of different faiths, experiences and backgrounds." Alberta Education. 2020. <i>The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum.</i>	74.1%	13.5%	5.7%	1.8%	2.4%
...reinforces essential knowledge and skills across subjects (for example, books read aloud in elementary language arts and literature can reinforce content knowledge in social studies and science).	55.8%	19.1%	13.7%	3.5%	3.0%
...is clear and concise, avoiding specialized jargon so it is easily understandable by parents and teachers alike.	60.2%	17.0%	13.6%	4.3%	3.5%
...focuses on content (curriculum), not teaching methods (pedagogy).	38.4%	15.5%	19.7%	9.3%	13.1%
...identifies opportunities where literacy will be developed within and across subjects.	43.1%	21.4%	21.1%	4.3%	3.9%
...identifies opportunities where numeracy will be developed within and across subjects.	43.9%	23.5%	19.0%	3.8%	3.3%

FOUR KEY THEMES

The Draft K-6 Curriculum (released in March 2021) included four Key Themes—Literacy, Numeracy, Citizenship and Practical Skills. Alberta Education provided information sheets on the four Key Themes that provide a description of the elements included under each theme. The elements of the four Key Themes are embedded in learning experiences across all subjects and grade levels.

Question 10 – Please comment on the ‘Literacy’ theme in the new K-6 draft curriculum.

Percentage	Number	Comment Themes
23.49%	230	Literacy expectations are not age or developmentally appropriate. Poetry is too sophisticated for upper elementary.
11.64%	114	Ancient civilizations and mythology are not relevant or age appropriate to elementary students. Who decides what is “great literature”? Focus on European and American text is disappointing and outdated (white, Anglo-Saxon, racist texts in the list). Shakespeare and Homer are not age appropriate for Grade 6. Lacking Canadian content.
7.66%	75	Lacks scope and sequence. Not aligned with the Literacy Progressions. Literacy is lacking cross-curricula connections. Writing outcomes do not reflect the writing process. Missing key skills. Does not focus on basic reading and comprehension.
7.05%	69	The focus is on memorizing facts rather than understanding and critical thinking. Teachers will resort to spelling tests and grammar worksheets.
6.54%	64	Draft curriculum seems out-dated and does not reflect current research on literacy for the 21st century. The draft does not reflect current research about reading development.
5.82%	57	Prescribes pedagogy. Limits teacher and student choice. Controlling.
5.72%	56	Like the focus on phonemes and phonological awareness, spelling and grammar.
5.11%	50	Teachers are currently teaching phonics and literacy strategies; to imply they are not is disrespected and naive.
5.01%	49	The definition of literacy is outdated and not consistent with International Literacy Association definition. Literacy is more than skills to read and write.
	979	Total number of participants who commented
	1132	Total comments on 21 distinguishable themes. On average, participants referenced one to two themes in a single comment.
19.69%	223	Total positive comments
80.30%	909	Total negative comments

*The remaining 13 comment themes each had less than 5 per cent or 49 participants.

Question 11 - Please comment on the 'Numeracy' theme in the new K-6 draft curriculum.

Percentage	Number	Comment Themes
37.50%	177	The numeracy theme is not developmentally appropriate, too complex and has downloaded content from higher grades. Pushing down concepts to lower grades will create high levels of math anxiety and students will hate math.
20.76%	98	The draft curriculum numeracy is lacking critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills and communicating about math. Narrow definition of numeracy. The draft is too focused on standard algorithms and fails to build conceptual understanding.
14.83%	70	Too much content to learn, practise skills and develop understanding in the time available. Memorizing is not learning and understanding.
5.72%	27	Standard algorithms don't work and are not the most simple and efficient for all students. Does not support diverse learning needs.
5.72%	27	Numeracy is not cross-curricular. Outdated concepts and forced integration of mathematics.
5.51%	26	Financial literacy is focused on business and not applicable to students' lives. Financial literacy outcomes are not respectful of lower-income families.
5.08%	24	No scope and sequence. Big gaps in knowledge and skills between grades.
	472	Total number of participants who commented
	539	Total comments on 16 distinguishable themes. On average, participants referenced one or two themes in a single comment.
9.09%	49	Total positive comments
90.90%	490	Total negative comments

*The remaining nine comment themes each had less than 5 per cent or 23 participants.

Question 12 - Please comment upon the 'Citizenship' theme within the new K-6 draft curriculum.

Percentage	Number	Comment Themes
27.34%	623	The content is not age or developmentally appropriate
13.16%	300	An American perspective. Why are we focusing on American and not Canadian history and government?
12.59%	287	Comments included the words: Eurocentric. Judeo-Christian bias.
10.49%	239	Lacking development of Canadian and Albertan identity. Leaves gaps in knowledge about Canada and Alberta. The current curriculum does a better job of focusing on local community, province and country.
10.40%	237	Memorizing "facts" is not developing citizenship. No opportunity for students to be engaged with the world around them.
10.18%	232	There is no citizenship in this curriculum. This is not education for developing Canadian citizens.
9.78%	223	Citizenship is more than being focused on business and monetary topics. Pro-business agenda.
9.17%	209	Disregards Indigenous perspectives and history, including Residential Schools. Does not reflect the TRC Calls to Action.
8.38%	191	Comments included the words: Racist. Colonial. Whitewashed. White supremacy. White privilege.
8.16%	186	Comments included the words Ridiculous. Horrible. A joke. Irrelevant. Disappointing. A move backwards. An embarrassment. Frightening. Traumatizing. A disaster. Appalling. Horrifying. Despicable. A dumpster fire.
7.90%	180	Elementary students need to first learn how to be good citizens in their community. There is no development of civic virtues. Morals and ethical values have been cut out.
7.77%	177	Religion should not be taught in secular public schools.
6.67%	152	Not inclusive of Alberta's or Canada's cultural, religious and human diversity. No mention of LGBTQ2+.
5.97%	136	Does not focus on developing the critical thinking skills that will serve citizens in the modern world.
5.97%	136	No mention of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
5.22%	119	The draft curriculum promotes themes of "othering," "us versus them" and division rather than unity. This curriculum does not represent acceptance but only tolerance of diverse cultures and ideas in Alberta communities.
	2279	Total participants who commented
	4257	Total comments on 35 distinguishable themes. On average, participants referenced two to three themes in a single comment.
1.52%	65	Total positive comments
98.47%	4192	Total negative comments

*The remaining 19 comment themes each had less than 5 per cent or 113 participants.

Question 13 - Please comment upon the 'Practical Skills' theme within the new K-6 draft curriculum.

Percentage	Number	Comment Themes
22.99%	255	Skills are not age appropriate. Students will be bored and frustrated with learning content that is not applicable to them. Where is the joy, creativity, inspiration and curiosity?
17.85%	198	Memorization, rote learning and worksheets don't develop practical skills for postsecondary, career and life.
12.62%	140	These are not skills for 21st century, real world. Where are the technology and digital citizenship skills? Narrow, antiquated view of "practical and useful for life." Outdated skills.
12.44%	138	Not evident. Very few practical skills included. Social studies does not have a skills focus as in the current curriculum. The skills have been taken out. Science practical skills have been removed.
6.49%	72	The curriculum needs to develop critical thinking, problem solving, skills to work in teams, design thinking, questioning, research and synthesis of information.
6.04%	67	No scope and sequence. Not coherent. Scattered. Not research based.
	1109	Total number of participants who commented
	1263	Total comments on 25 distinguishable themes. On average, participants referenced one to two themes in a single comment.
8.63%	109	Total positive comments
91.36%	1154	Total negative comments

*The remaining 19 comment themes each had less than 5 per cent or 55 participants.

FINAL COMMENTS

Question 14 - If possible, please share what you find MOST USEFUL (OR LIKE) about the new K-6 draft curriculum?

Percentage	Number	Comment Themes
31.55%	954	Comments include the words: Nothing. I don't like anything. The entire draft is garbage. The current curriculum serves us better.
10.91%	330	Inclusion of financial literacy; however, the draft outcomes are not developmentally appropriate. Needs to be embedded in more meaningful ways.
10.65%	322	Literacy and ELA outcomes are specific.
9.13%	276	ELA includes phonic, morphology, spelling and grammar. Including the Science of Reading.
8.20%	248	The website layout. Format of guiding questions, knowledge, understanding, skills, outcomes. Like seeing three grades across.
6.81%	206	Easy to read. Simplified, structured outcomes and in some cases practical.
5.79%	175	French First Language is well built.
5.72%	173	English language arts is ok. Not terrible.
5.16%	156	Consent is included although it needs to be revised.
	3024	Total number of participants who commented
	2786	Total comments on 29 distinguishable themes. On average, participants referenced one or two themes in a single comment.
65.75%	1832	Total positive comments
34.34%	954	Total negative comments

*The remaining 21 comment themes each had less than 5 per cent or 151 respondents.

Question 15 - If possible, please share what you find LEAST USEFUL (OR DISLIKE) about the new K-6 draft curriculum?

Percentage	Number	Comment Themes
34.78%	1286	Not age or developmentally appropriate for elementary students' intellectual and emotional development. Content has been downloaded from higher grades.
31.83%	1177	Social Studies content is horrendous. Outcomes are not age appropriate. Historical outcomes cover information that is not age and developmentally appropriate (Ancient Greece, Silk Road, American Slavery, KKK). Eurocentric, xenophobic and racist perspective. Social Studies skills developed in the current curriculum have been eliminated.
16.63%	615	The draft curriculum is a prescriptive list of irrelevant knowledge and facts to be taught by the teacher with little opportunity to develop understanding, skills and add local context to support student engagement.
13.85%	512	The draft curriculum does not meet the standards for an Alberta Provincial Program of Studies. Underlying philosophy is flawed. Lacks current research base. Subject disciplines do not have front matter, goals, scope and sequence, cross-curricular connections, integration of literacies and competencies. Wording of some outcomes lacking verbs, incomplete and containing errors. Teachers and education experts were not authentically involved in the development. Lack of robust public consultation. Literacy and numeracy progressions were not integrated and are not evident.
	3698	Total number of participants who commented
	6657	Total comments on 21 distinguishable themes. On average, participants referenced one or two themes in a single comment.
0.50%	29	Total positive comments
99.50%	6628	Total negative comments

*The remaining 16 comment themes each had less than 5 per cent or 184 respondents.

Questions 16 - Do you have any other questions or comments regarding the new K-6 draft curriculum?

Percentage	Number	Comment Themes
19.30%	263	Scrap it. Start over. The 2018 draft curriculum is better.
13.06%	178	Needs to be revised. Government needs to revise and listen to teachers and university curriculum specialists. Why were teachers not involved or consulted?
11.15%	152	Not age or developmentally appropriate. Content moved from high grades.
9.39%	128	Comments include the words: Disappointed. Disgusted. Insane. Terrible. Embarrassing. Garbage. Disaster. Dumpster fire.
9.10%	124	How can we protest and stop pilot / implementation? Mobilize. Work with parents.
7.41%	101	Concern about implementing a new curriculum during a pandemic, implementing all subjects, lack of resources, lack of PD, budget cuts, logistics.
6.90%	94	Why are the identities and qualifications of the curriculum writers secret? Those who developed this curriculum do not understand child learning. What is the educational research base for this curriculum?
5.58%	76	What was the development process? Why was it done in secret? When and how did teachers give input?
5.50%	75	I'm disheartened because students, teachers and Albertans deserve better.
	1363	Total number of participants who commented
	1751	Total comments on 30 distinguishable themes. On average, participants reference one to two themes in a single comment.
2.17%	38	Total positive comments
97.82%	1713	Total negative comments

* The remaining 22 comments themes each had less than 5 per cent or 68 respondents.

APPENDIX B

Key educational frameworks that should be reflected in the draft curriculum include the following:

- Alberta Education. 2009. Curriculum Branch. *Framework for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Wellness Education*, Available at https://education.alberta.ca/media/160218/framework_kto12well.pdf (accessed July 19, 2021).
- . 2010. *Literacy First: A Plan for Action*. Available at <https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626397/literacyfirst.pdf> (accessed July 19, 2021).
- . 2013. *Learning and Technology Policy Framework*. Available at <https://education.alberta.ca/media/1046/learning-and-technology-policy-framework-web.pdf> (accessed July 19, 2021).
- . nd. “Trauma-Informed Practice.” Available at www.alberta.ca/trauma-informed-practice.aspx (accessed July 19, 2021).
- . nd. *Literacy and Numeracy Progressions*. Available at <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3402192/lit-and-num-progressions.pdf> (accessed July 19, 2021).
- . “Social-Emotional Learning.” www.alberta.ca/social-emotional-learning.aspx (accessed July 19, 2021).
- Alberta Family Wellness. nd. *Brain Story Toolkit*. Available at www.albertafamilywellness.org/brain-story-toolkit (accessed July 19, 2021).
- Alberta Health Services. “The Comprehensive School Health Approach.” Available at www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/csh.aspx (accessed July 19, 2021).
- Conference Board of Canada. “Employability Skills.” www.conferenceboard.ca/edu/employability-skills.aspx. (Note: Alberta Education is a founding member of the Conference Board of Canada.)
- Government of Canada. “Skills for Success.” www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success.html (accessed July 19, 2021).
- Makovichuk, L, J Hewes, P Lirette and N Thomas. 2014. *Flight: Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework*. Available at www.flightframework.ca (accessed July 19, 2021).
- PolicyWise for Children and Families. “Resources: Supporting Every Student.” Available at https://policywise.com/resource/?jet-smart-filters=epro-posts/default&_tax_query_category=16 (accessed July 19, 2021).

APPENDIX C

ALBERTA HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Section: Discrimination—goods, services, accommodation, facilities

4 No person shall:

- (a) deny to any person or class of persons any goods, services, accommodation or facilities that are customarily available to the public, or
- (b) discriminate against any person or class of persons with respect to any goods, services, accommodation or facilities that are customarily available to the public, because of the race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation of that person or class of persons or of any other person or class of persons.

Source: www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/A25P5.pdf

WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL AND SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Education Act, sections 1(1)(d), 31, 32, 33, 34

Students are entitled to welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self.

Section 1(1)(d) of the *Education Act* states that:

“bullying” means repeated and hostile or demeaning behaviour by an individual in the school community where the behaviour is intended to cause harm, fear or distress to one or more other individuals in the school community, including psychological harm or harm to an individual’s reputation.

Student Responsibilities

Section 31 of the *Education Act* states that a student, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to:

- (c) ensure that the student’s conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging,
- (d) respect the rights of others in the school,

(e) refrain from, report and not tolerate bullying or bullying behaviour directed toward others in the school, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the school day or by electronic means.

Board Responsibilities

Section 33 of the *Education Act* states that a board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to:

(1) (d) ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

(2) A board shall establish, implement and maintain a policy respecting the board's obligation under subsection (1)(d) to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that includes the establishment of a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour.

Source: *ECS to Grade 12 Guide to Education, 2020-2021*, 15–16.
www.alberta.ca/guide-to-education.aspx

DIVERSITY AND RESPECT

Education Act, section 16

16(1) All courses or programs of study and instructional materials used in a school must reflect the diverse nature and heritage of society in Alberta, promote understanding and respect for others and honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans. (2) For greater certainty, the courses or programs of study and instructional materials referred to in subsection (1) must not promote or foster doctrines of racial or ethnic superiority or persecution, social change through violent action or disobedience of laws.

BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES

Education Act, section 33

Board Responsibilities

33(1)(d) ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging

33(2) A board shall establish, implement and maintain a policy respecting the board's obligation under subsection (1)(d) to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that includes the establishment of a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour.

33(3) A code of conduct established under section (2) must

(d) contain the following elements:

- (i) a statement of purpose that provides a rationale for the code of conduct, with a focus on welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments;
- (ii) one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the Alberta Human Rights Act;

NOTICE TO PARENT

Education Act, sections 58, 58.1, 58.2

Section 58

(1) A board may:

- (a) prescribe religious instruction to be offered to its students;
- (b) prescribe religious exercises for its students;
- (c) prescribe patriotic instruction to be offered to its students;
- (d) prescribe patriotic exercises for its students;
- (e) permit persons other than teachers to provide religious instruction or exercises to its students.

(2) Where a teacher or other person providing religious instruction or exercises or a teacher providing patriotic instruction or exercises receives a written request signed by a parent of a student that the student be excluded from religious instruction or exercises or patriotic instruction or exercises, or both, the teacher or other person shall, in accordance with the request of the parent, permit the student

(a) to leave the classroom or place where the instruction or exercises are taking place for the duration of the instruction or exercises, or

(b) to remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the instruction or exercises.

Section 58.1

(1) A board shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.

(2) Where a teacher or other person providing instruction, teaching a course or program of study or using the instructional materials referred to in subsection (1) receives a written request signed by a parent of a student that the student be excluded from the instruction, course or program of study or use of instructional materials, the teacher or other person shall, in accordance with the request of the parent, permit the student, without academic penalty,

(a) to leave the classroom or place where the instruction, course or program of study is taking place or the instructional materials are being used for the duration of the part of the instruction, course or program of study, or the use of the instructional materials, that includes the subject-matter referred to in subsection (1), or,

(b) to remain in the classroom or place without taking part in the instruction, course or program of study or using the instructional materials.

(3) This section does not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes or human sexuality in a course, program of study, instruction or exercises or in the use of instructional materials.

Section 58.2

(1) If a board, teacher or other person fails to comply with section 58 or 58.1, that failure to comply is deemed to be a decision that may be appealed in accordance with section 42.

(2) A decision of the board under section 42 with respect to an appeal relating to subsection (1) is final.

Source: *ECS to Grade 12 Guide to Education 2020–2021*, 18–19.
www.alberta.ca/guide-to-education.aspx

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

Alberta's education system is built on a values-based approach to accepting responsibility for all children and students. Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all children and students.

To support children and students in attaining the goals as stated in the Ministerial Order on Student Learning, school authorities must ensure that all children and students (Kindergarten to Grade 12), regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, or any other factor(s), have access to meaningful and relevant learning experiences that include appropriate instructional supports.

Source: *ECS to Grade 12 Guide to Education 2020–2021*, 27.
<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/1496-7359>

Principles of Inclusive Education

- Anticipate, value and support diversity and learner differences—Welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments create a sense of belonging for all learners and their families.
- High expectations for all learners—Creating a culture of high expectations begins with an accessible curriculum and meaningful and relevant learning experiences. Educators and families act on the idea that, with the right instructional supports, every learner can be successful.
- Understand learners' strengths and needs—Meaningful data is gathered and shared at all levels of the system—by teachers, families, schools, school authorities and the Ministry—to understand and respond to the strengths and needs of individual learners.
- Remove barriers within learning environments—All education partners work together to remove barriers within the learning environment so that all learners are successful and can participate in the school community.
- Build capacity—Government, school and system leaders, teachers, education professionals, families and community partners have ongoing opportunities, relationships and resources that develop, strengthen and renew their understanding, skills and abilities to create flexible and responsive learning environments. Capacity building takes place at the personal, school and system levels.
- Collaborate for success—All education stakeholders, including school and system staff, families, community partners, post-secondary institutions, teacher preparation programs and government are committed to collaboration to support the success of all learners.

Source: www.alberta.ca/inclusive-education.aspx

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Program Planning

Education Act, Preamble, Section 33(1)(e) Inclusive Education Policy

The *Education Act* recognizes the importance of an inclusive education system that provides each student with relevant learning opportunities and supports necessary to achieve success.

Inclusive education demonstrates universal acceptance and belonging of all learners, values choice and promotes equity of educational opportunities for all. Anticipating, valuing and supporting diversity requires schools to accept responsibility for all learners, adapt and respond to learner differences, and incorporate diverse cultural perspectives and ways of knowing.

In addition, the *Education Act* sets specific obligations for school boards (public, separate and Francophone regional authorities), charter schools and designated special education private schools

to provide a continuum of supports and services that can be accessed by any student in a manner consistent with the principles of inclusive education.

Alberta Education has produced a number of resources, videos, templates and tools that include information and strategies for supporting diverse learning and that support the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy.

Source: *ECS to Grade 12 Guide to Education 2020–2021*, 35.
<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/1496-7359>

FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT EDUCATION

Program Planning

Alberta Education is committed to improving education outcomes and creating opportunities for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in Alberta. First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are supported by an education system that works to meet their programming and learning needs from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

Alberta Education supports First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success with a number of key strategies, including establishing collaborative partnerships with First Nations and Métis communities; supporting school authorities to build relationships and engage with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents and families; developing culturally relevant learning resources and program supports; increasing the number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit professionals in the education workforce; and providing professional learning in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education to ensure that all students, teachers and school leaders learn about First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives and experiences, treaties and the history and legacy of residential schools. Outcome 2 from Alberta Education's Business Plan 2020/23 provides a basis for the ministry to work collaboratively with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, governments, organizations and other partners to be an international leader in Indigenous education. Alberta Education supports First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in prospering through their learning journeys. The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework also supports the implementation of student-focused strategies to improve outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

Information about First Nations, Métis and Inuit education, partnerships with First Nations and Métis communities and other initiatives and resources is available on Alberta.ca. For additional information, contact the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Directorate.

Alberta Education collaborates with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Elders, Knowledge Keepers, teachers and representatives from governments, organizations, communities and other partners to advance reconciliation and honour the government's commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and to implement the United Nations Declaration on the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the context of Alberta law and the Canadian Constitution. Alberta is committed to supporting the advancement of Education for Reconciliation through the inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives and experiences, in historical and contemporary contexts, throughout Alberta's Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) curriculum. As described in the Teaching Quality Standard, schools are required to use learning and teaching resources that ensure that Alberta students and teachers are knowledgeable, respectful and have understanding of the rich diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit experiences and perspectives, cultures and contributions in historical and contemporary contexts, including understanding residential schools and their legacy, and treaties and agreements.

Source: *ECS to Grade 12 Guide to Education 2020-2021*, 38.
<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/1496-7359>



The Alberta
Teachers' Association