The Courage to Choose

Emerging trends and strategic possibilities for informed transformation in Alberta schools: 2010-2011

LANE ENDS

Alberta's Future

A vision is not just a picture of what could be, it is an appeal to our better selves, a call to be something more.

—*Rosabeth Moss Kanter*

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Preface

We are now past the much-anticipated release of Alberta Education's report *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans* (Alberta Education 2010a) and its follow up, *Inspiring Action on Education: A Discussion Paper* (Alberta Education 2010b). The months ahead give us a timely opportunity to step back and ask some important questions about education in Alberta. How effective will current provincial education policies be in transforming the teaching and learning process, and what is the legacy of those policies? What is the shared understanding we need to develop by using phrases such as *personalized learning, inclusion, shared leadership* and *informed transformation*? Do schools have the resources, information and technology to equip today's students with the skills they will need to fulfill their career ambitions and develop the attributes to become engaged citizens in a vibrant democracy?

This publication provides an analysis of current teaching and learning in Alberta schools that will inform the important policy decisions that need to be made in the months and years ahead. Prepared by Dr J-C Couture, Executive Staff Officer, Government, who coordinates the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA) research programs, this publication draws on a number of ongoing research studies and initiatives over the past year.

The data and analysis included in this publication suggest that we require a more sophisticated and thoughtful approach to learning that recognizes Alberta's complexity and uniqueness. To this end, this publication moves from a discussion of emerging trends to consideration of implications and recommendations for change that will help us achieve the vision set out in *Inspiring Action*.

The latter part of this publication, titled "Informed Transformation: The Design Challenge for 2010/11 and Beyond", provides a framework for change based on extensive research, analysis and the views of leading experts on educational policy and school reform. Reflecting some of the priorities outlined in the Association's Strategic Plan, these recommendations focus on advancing the professional role of teachers into public leadership in learning, actively addressing the need to remove obstacles to students' readiness to learn, and improving teaching and learning conditions in Alberta schools. The recommendations are presented not as an expression of specific Association policies but in the spirit of sparking a public dialogue about the key immediate and long-term steps needed to accomplish our goals.

Alberta has an opportunity to become a global leader in learning. The conversations we need to have are fundamentally about learning and leadership; some argue that the two are synonymous. Whatever one's view, there is little doubt that what is most fundamental of all is the answer to the question: What kind of society do we want to create in Alberta and what kind of teaching and learning will get us there?

Gordon R. Thomas
Executive Secretary

Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta Schools— Current Paradoxes and Possibilities

Alberta's K–12 education system sits at a critical watershed—it can either cross into a period of transformation and renewal, or remain caught in the mire of continued short-term planning and reactive responses to the vagaries of the government's dependency on primary resource revenues. The challenges we face in education reflect the deeper collective choices Albertans face as a province: there is no turning back from the incredible opportunities we have and the complexity of the challenges we face.

The leadership shown by Minister Hancock in his efforts to advance public dialogue through the Setting the Direction and Speak Out initiatives and *Inspiring Education* cannot be squandered on debates about how to create better versions of yesterday in Alberta schools. With the recent release of *Inspiring Action*, education partners are faced with fundamental choices on the road ahead.

The only safe ship in a storm is leadership.

—Faye Wattleton

Though the minister is seeking ways to transform education, there is little evidence that a complicated array of system-level reforms can have a significant impact in already high-performing jurisdictions like Alberta (Sahlberg 2010). Instead, we need both courageous policy decisions that will remove obstacles to local decision making and a sustained commitment to providing classroom resources to ensure schools' ability to meet the challenges of ever-increasing complexity. Also, as policy analyst Stephen Murgatroyd (2009) has noted, in growing and dynamic systems such as Alberta's, the locus of control and influence for enhancing learning is the school, not the government.

In this context, the classroom and school characteristics outlined in this document are significant, in light of the government's ongoing *Class Size Initiative*, which, though launched in 2004 has stalled considerably. As well, despite the hopes and expectations engendered by the recent public release of *Inspiring Education* and *Inspiring Action*, the challenge for school authorities to maintain adequate funding for schools remains, despite an eleventh-hour reprieve by the minister in July 2010, when he announced that the government would provide funding in accordance with its contract with the Association.

Without addressing the realities of school life, policy pronouncements extolling "informed transformation" must move beyond mere chatter and be grounded in deliberative thought and dialogue in our communities. We need an open and thoughtful discussion about the purposes of schooling and the kind of citizens we want our schools to produce. Rather than deploying distractions including catchphrases such as *technology leadership, 21st-century skills, customized learning* and *learning anytime, anywhere and at any pace*, education partners need to focus on how the current industrial model of schooling needs to fundamentally change to more accurately reflect today's realities.

The pages that follow draw on a variety of Association research efforts conducted over the past few years that assess the quality of teaching and learning conditions in Alberta schools. A number of significant trends identify a need for continued attention to these conditions in light of the impending recommendations related to the minister's recent public policy reviews.

No dreamer is ever too small; no dream is ever too big.
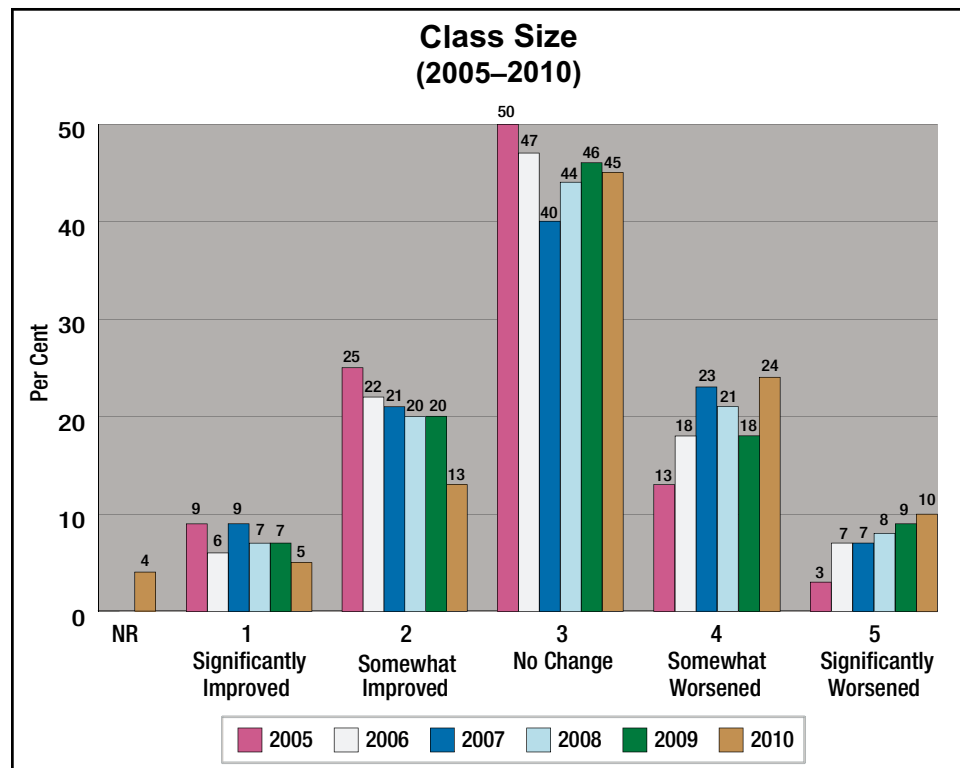
—Anonymous

Class Size

While the data on class size suggests a slow but slight improvement since 2005, there has been significant erosion in the marginal progress first indicated at that time. Variations in class-size improvements do exist and require closer monitoring at the local level—an important ongoing function for local bargaining committees. Even though the government committed significant resources to reducing class sizes, provincial trends show limited improvements over the past five years. In fact, while 16 per cent reported worsened class sizes in 2005, this number rose to 34 per cent in 2010. As well, there was a slight decrease in degrees of improvement between 2009 (27 per cent) and 2010 (18 per cent).

As in previous years, junior and senior high school teachers are more likely than others to report worsening conditions, and ECS and Grades 1–6 respondents to report improved conditions.

In 2009, the greatest improvement was reported in the Mighty Peace and Calgary City convention areas, where, in both jurisdictions, over 36 per cent indicated that class size has significantly or somewhat improved, compared to the overall average of 27 per cent. This trend shifted slightly in 2010, when Northeast and Calgary City teachers indicated degrees of improvement (24 per cent) compared to the provincial average (18 percent). This is the second year that significant improvements in class size have been indicated in Calgary schools. Mighty Peace and Central Alberta teachers reported the highest levels of worsened conditions (in the 40 per cent range). Significantly, this was the second year that Central Alberta teachers indicated worsened conditions.

**Class Size
(2005–2010)**

Category	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
NR						4
1 Significantly Improved	9	6	9	7	7	5
2 Somewhat Improved	25	22	21	20	20	13
3 No Change	50	47	40	44	46	45
4 Somewhat Worsened	13	18	23	21	18	24
5 Significantly Worsened	3	7	7	8	9	10

*Per Cent* (y-axis)

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Class Composition

Alberta's population continues to grow and diversify. Between 1988 and 2008, the number of identified ESL students in Alberta more than tripled, from 14,673 to 48,346. In the 12 months leading up to April 2008, the city of Calgary alone saw an average of 27 babies born and 34 people moving to the city every day (*Globe and Mail*, Tuesday, July 27, 2008, A8).

Despite the 2009 economic downturn, Alberta will continue to experience growth in the coming years. Calgary remains a preferred destination for immigrants. It has the fourth-largest immigrant population in Canada, and immigrants account for more than 18 per cent of its population. Citizenship and Immigration Canada estimated that between 9,000 and 10,000 immigrants moved to Calgary from other countries starting in 2005.

Given this demographic reality, class composition continues to be a significant concern. Only 9 per cent of teachers reported improvements in this area in 2008, 11 percent in 2009 and 8 per cent in 2010. With 37 per cent of teachers reporting worsened conditions with respect to classroom composition, clearly much work still needs to be done. When looking at specific cohorts of students, the data reveals mixed progress. In 2010, 18 per cent reported improved support for English language learners, —no significant change from 2009. Support for the growing First Nations, Métis and Inuit student population remains inadequate, though in 2010 there was some improvement in centres such as Edmonton City, where 30 per cent of teachers reported improvements compared to the provincial average of 17 per cent.

Support for meeting the needs of diverse student populations must remain a strategic priority if the vision of *Inspiring Action* is to be realized.

Class Composition (2005–2010)
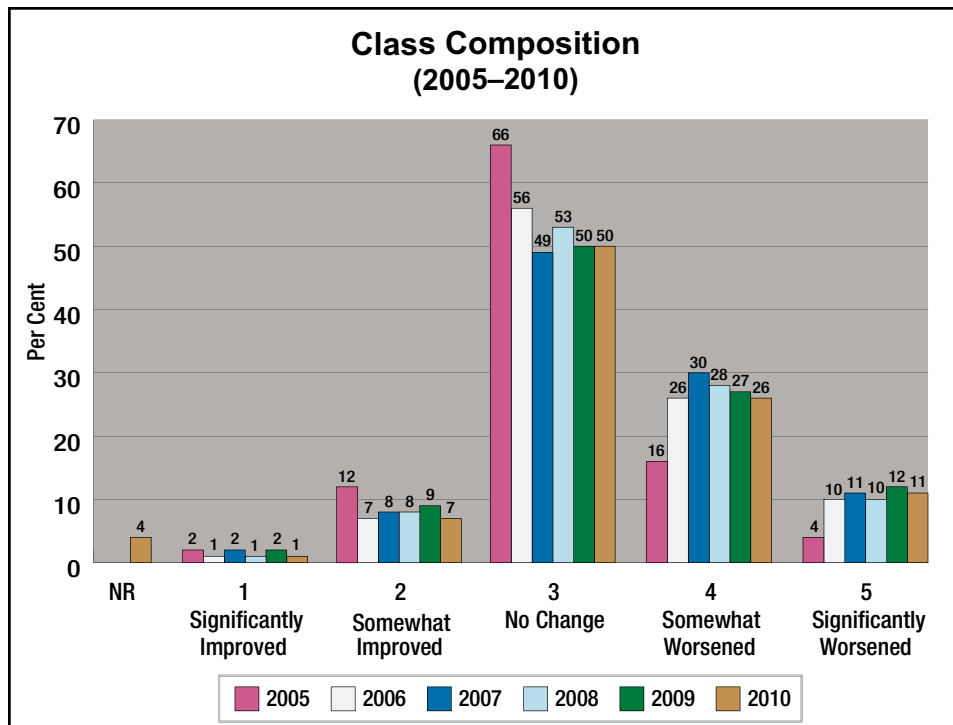
Significant Erosion in Support for Students with Special Needs

Of all of the classroom indicators tracked by the Association's research unit in the past years, support for students with special needs has shown the most dramatic decline. Previous improvements in support for students with special needs are disappearing in the face of cost cutting and declines in support staffing, a trend exacerbated this past year as support staffs were cut in the face of impending budget shortfalls.

In 2005, 25 per cent of teachers reported worsened support for students with special needs. This number rose to 39 per cent by 2008, to 41 per cent in 2009 and to 43 per cent this past year.

Analysis of the data by region suggests that the erosion in support for students with special needs has been consistent across the province. In 2008, 45 per cent of Grades 1–6 teachers reported worsened conditions, compared to 26 per cent of Grades 10–12 teachers. Most disturbing this year is that teachers in Grades 1–6 are twice as likely to report worsened conditions as teachers overall.

The data affirms ongoing efforts by the Association to raise the issue of support for students with special needs, which included a major research project, *Success for All*, which examined the impact of individual program plans (IPPs) and supports for students with special needs. Undertaken by Dr Joan Jeary, *Success for All* concluded that "no single teacher can be expected to have the expertise and skills necessary to teach and assess all students in a highly diverse classroom. Education is a shared responsibility, especially in the area of inclusive/special education" (ATA 2009). Without reallocating resources, no amount of policy tinkering or attempts to introduce innovations such as learning coaches will lead to improvement.

Despite the release of *Setting the Direction* and the policy focus on inclusion, there continues to be significant erosion of support for students with special needs. As one teacher said, "No end in sight of the policy talk but no signs yet of real support for our students" (Couture etal). Another teacher commented that "no matter what the government policy framework is going to be, the reality is that without adequate resources and trained personnel in place the rest is all window-dressing" (Couture etal). Indeed, some school boards report spending two to three dollars in special education support for every dollar received in provincial funding.

Failure to provide ESL students with equitable linguistic education will not only jeopardize Canada's advantage in the global, knowledge-based economy, but also risk incurring social costs. Learners who are denied the opportunity to develop literacy and realize their full educational potential do not simply fade away. They may rely heavily on our social assistance programs and community services.

—*Coalition for Equal Access to Education*

Special Needs Support
(2005–2010)
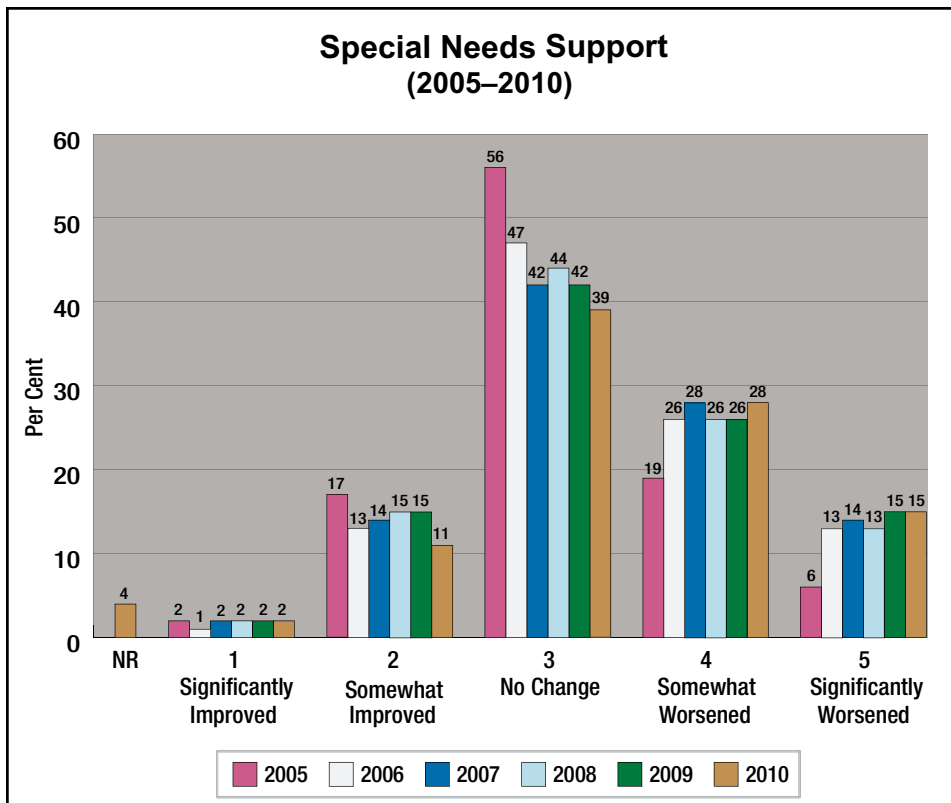
Improving Support for Emerging Technologies

In contrast to lack of government support for inclusion, the data clearly indicates the government's willingness to invest in information technologies. Respondents to the 2010 Member Opinion Survey said they saw a sustained improvement in access to information technology. In 2008, significant improvement was reported by just over 8 per cent of respondents, compared with 17 per cent in 2009 and 12 per cent in 2010. In 2009, 35 per cent indicated that the overall situation had somewhat improved; this year, 37 per cent so reported.

Alberta has spent more than $1.5 billion during the past 15 years developing a technology infrastructure for education, of which $600 million was spent on the Alberta SuperNet, a broadband network connecting public institutions across the province. The remainder has been used to equip schools, develop learning objects, provide teachers with professional development and support Alberta Education's technology branch. In the last four years,

> Technological determinism, with its promise of "learn anywhere/any time," can never lead to sustained transformational change.
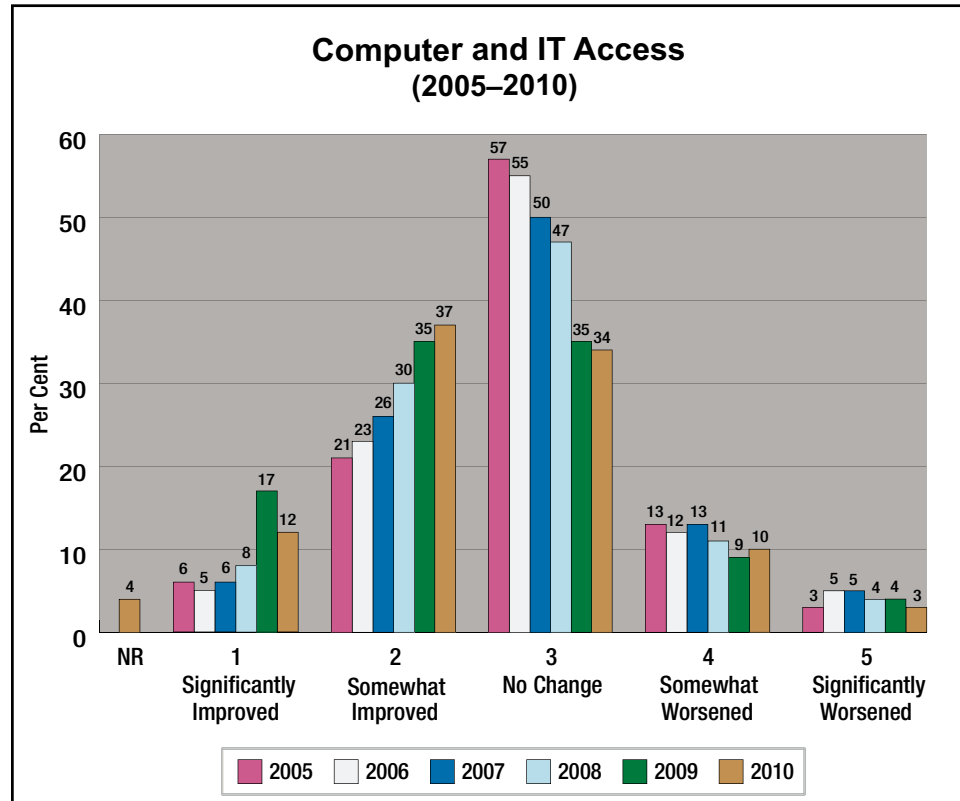>
> —*Murgatroyd and Couture 2010 p 28.*

approximately $250 million has been invested in a variety of technology initiatives, such as SuperNet, $4 to $5 million for video conferencing, and $18.5 million has been dedicated for each of the next two years for the purchase of data projectors and display devices for classrooms.

Although government continues to see investment in technology as a priority, it is clear that other investments must remain high on the list of priorities. As well, continued investments in learning technologies will be needed to sustain the total cost of ownership for such things as tech support and evergreening in order to achieve the vision set out in *Inspiring Action.*

Computer and IT Access
(2005–2010)

Bar chart showing "Per Cent" on the y-axis (0 to 60) and categories on the x-axis: NR, 1 Significantly Improved, 2 Somewhat Improved, 3 No Change, 4 Somewhat Worsened, 5 Significantly Worsened. Legend: 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010.

NR: 2010 = 4
1 Significantly Improved: 2005 = 6, 2006 = 5, 2007 = 6, 2008 = 8, 2009 = 17, 2010 = 12
2 Somewhat Improved: 2005 = 21, 2006 = 23, 2007 = 26, 2008 = 30, 2009 = 35, 2010 = 37
3 No Change: 2005 = 57, 2006 = 55, 2007 = 50, 2008 = 47, 2009 = 35, 2010 = 34
4 Somewhat Worsened: 2005 = 13, 2006 = 12, 2007 = 13, 2008 = 11, 2009 = 9, 2010 = 10
5 Significantly Worsened: 2005 = 3, 2006 = 5, 2007 = 5, 2008 = 4, 2009 = 4, 2010 = 3

Modest Improvements in Access to Print and Text Resources

Perhaps indicative of the uncertainties of school board budgeting, support for print materials declined significantly this past year. The 2009 results for opinions about access to print and text resources showed some improvement over 2008 (29 per cent, compared with 23 per cent in 2008). This past year saw 18 per cent of teachers reporting improved access. There is a corresponding rise in the proportion indicating no change over last year and a slight increase in the percentage seeing worsened conditions (14 per cent in 2010, compared to 11 per cent in 2009).

It is worth noting that though teachers have seen gradual improvement in access to print resources from 2006 to 2009, the reverse this past year is consistent across the province. One of the difficulties in sustaining
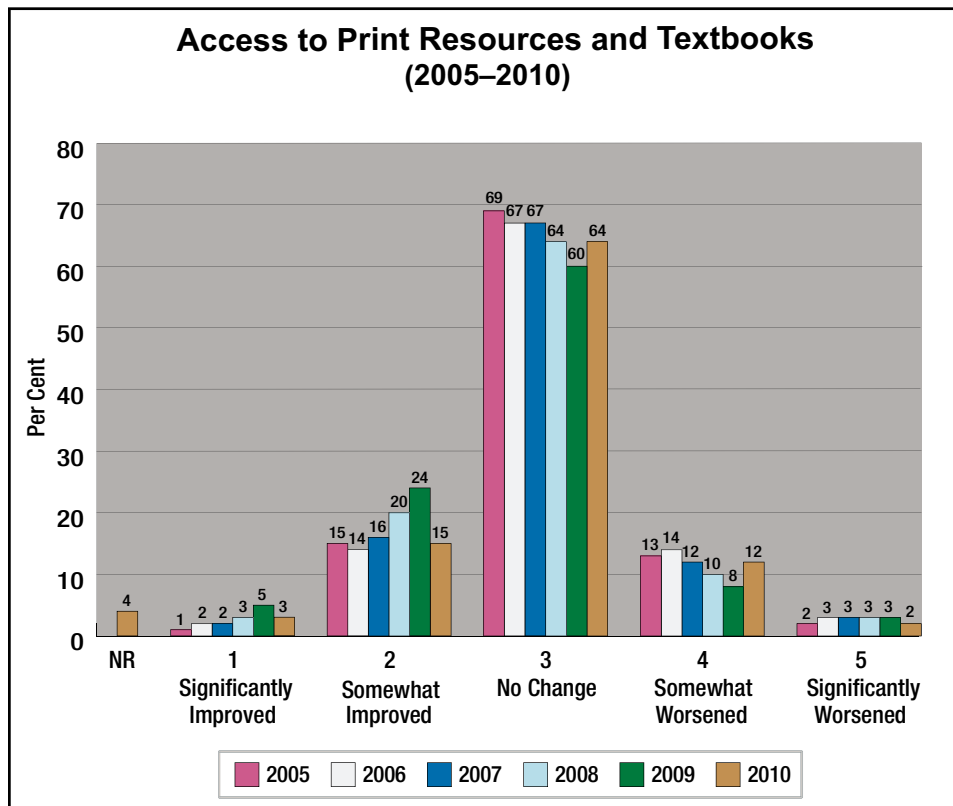
improvements in access to classroom resources is community fundraising, which has increased significantly in past years and continues to be, as one administrator said, "the small difference that makes a big difference for our students."

Another teacher said, "While I support the need for differentiation and meeting the individual needs of students, I find myself scrambling for basic resources. And technology is even more expensive to keep up with" (Couture et al, forthcoming).

Though such statements are easy to discount as mere anecdotes, Alberta teachers continue to pay about $900 a year out of their own pockets to buy school and classroom resources and materials (Alberta Teachers' Association 2007). In 2009, 60 per cent of teachers reported that they could not carry out their teaching assignment without buying materials with their own money. This number rose to 67 per cent in 2010. The numbers do not begin to capture the additional time and effort teachers spend on troubleshooting and maintaining aging technology in schools.

Access to Print Resources and Textbooks (2005–2010)

Younger female respondents with early childhood services and elementary assignments and classroom-only responsibilities are the most likely to report a need to subsidize their school's budget with their own money. If one approximates the average out-of-pocket expenditures of Alberta's 30,000 full-time teachers and 4,700 part-time teachers at $800 per teacher, the figure works out to $28 million—the equivalent of what it would cost to support full-day kindergarten.

"While I am intrigued by visions such as 'personalization of learning,' I also wonder who will support all of this. Last year, I spent $1,260 out of my own pocket for basic resources."

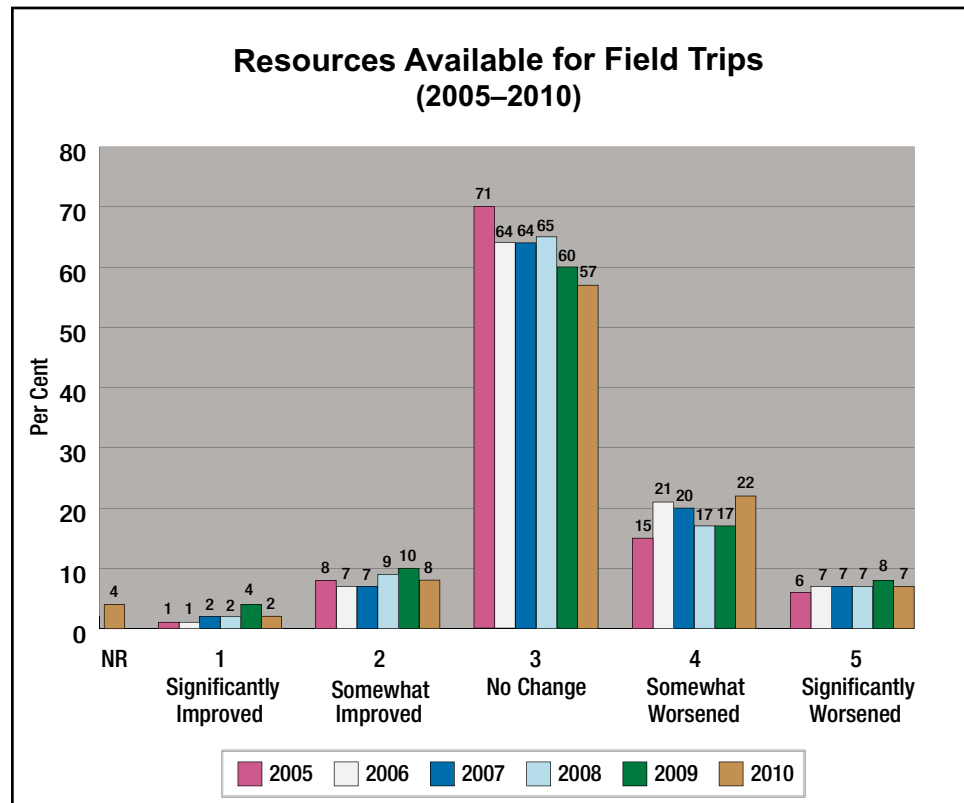*—Future of Teaching Project Focus Group 2010*

Declining Support for Field Trips in the Face of Calls to Enhance Student Engagement

Access to field trips dropped from 14 per cent in 2009 to 10 per cent in 2010. This comes after an improvement reported in 2009 over 2008 levels. Junior high teachers continue to report the most significant levels of deterioration in access.

While there has been little variation in access to field trips over the past five years, the drop this year points to a larger set of indicators related to so-called discretionary funding and support in schools across the province. With 29 per cent reporting decreased access in 2010 over 25 per cent in 2009, the shift is again an indication of pressures on school-based funding.

After the initial funding cuts of the early 1990s, perhaps no other aspect of school life was more unacknowledged than the gradual reduction of school field trips and cocurricular activities such as participation in athletic competitions and creative and performing arts festivals. With the promise of the fourth cycle of Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) including "student engagement" as a key element of improving student learning, it was anticipated that a focus on cocurricular activities might become a greater priority across the province.

As with access to emerging technologies and print resources, school fundraising remains a key source of support for this vitally important component of school life. As well, teachers continue to be pressured to facilitate fundraising efforts and/or subsidize field trips out of their own pockets.

Don't regard spending on culture as an indulgence—it is a critical investment in the future of Alberta and will produce profound and poignant social and economic returns.

—*Gwynne Dyer*

Resources Available for Field Trips (2005–2010)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
NR						4
1 Significantly Improved	1	1	2	2	4	2
2 Somewhat Improved	8	7	7	9	10	8
3 No Change	71	64	64	65	60	57
4 Somewhat Worsened	15	21	20	17	17	22
5 Significantly Worsened	6	7	7	7	8	7

Assessing the Effectiveness of Current PD Opportunities

One of the most significant focuses of Association advocacy for its members is improving professional learning opportunities for teachers. To this end, the Association's Professional Development (PD) program area conducts an annual assesment of PD throughout the province.

Included in the analysis of PD programs in the province's 62 school authorities is the commitment to work with education partners to find strategic opportunities for collaboration to make best use of resources. For example, the Association worked with education partners on the development of *A Guide to the Essential Conditions to Support Implementation*. This publication underscores the need to understand that successful implementation of education policies, priorities, programs, curriculum and initiatives requires the collaborative efforts of all education partners working towards a shared vision of teaching quality practice. In the coming year, this partnership will explore ways to address the lack of understanding of the complexities and challenges of assessing successful program implementation. This follow-up framework will help to meet some of the key policy challenges posed by *Inspiring Education* and *Inspiring Action*.

There has been some improvement in access to PD over the past five years, but this past year has seen a distinct decline. Improvement was noted by 31 per cent of teachers in 2005, 32 per cent in 2008 and 38 per cent in 2009, but that figure dropped to 29 per cent in 2010. Declines in access to PD were noted by 14 per cent in 2010, compared to 12 per cent in 2009. Considering the need to address the diverse needs of Alberta's changing teaching force, this data suggests considerable challenges. Given the growing number of new teachers and the succession of school principals, it is imperative that any policy priorities emerging from *Inspiring Action* address this fundamental reality.

Targeted professional development for teachers new to the country or province should be an area for further exploration and development, considering that teachers educated out of province and out of country who submitted applications to the Teacher Qualifications Service comprised 43 per cent of first-time applications over a one-year time frame in 2009/10.

—2010 ATA PD Survey

Access to Professional Development
(2005–2010)
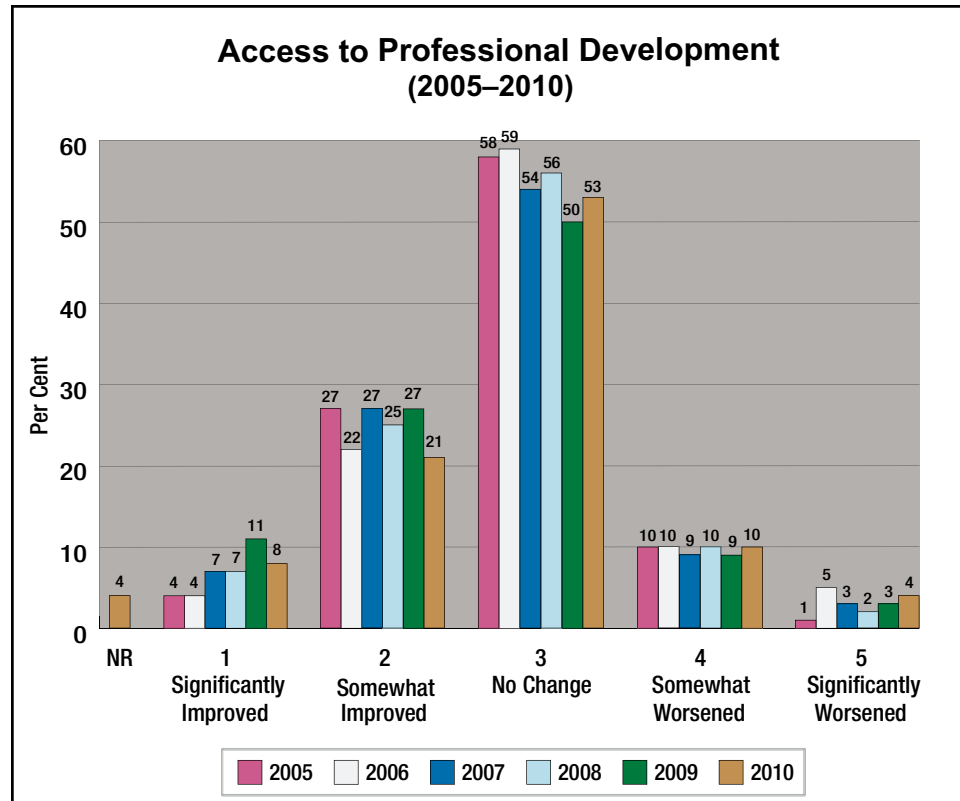
Highlights of the 2010 PD Survey

As with other indicators reviewed in this publication, this school year saw significant fiscal restraints manifesting themselves in reduced spending and access for most forms of professional development. However, there was some increase in teachers' participation in collaborative teams and professional learning communities—evidence of a significant attempt to embed professional development within the school day.

Yet efforts such as the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI), while advancing principles of collaboration and shared leadership, appear to be sidelined by some school authorities who are unwilling to advance these principles. As PD committees report, AISI projects continue to shape professional development opportunities for teachers, with both positive and negative effects. There continues to be lower-than-expected teacher influence in the AISI priority setting process, particularly at the jurisdictional level, with nearly half of respondents (47 per cent) indicating limited influence in determining project priorities. Clearly, work needs to continue in not only improving resources for PD but also in how these resources are managed and prioritized.

Key highlights of this year's PD Survey of the Association's 54 PD committees include the following.

• 22 per cent (10 of 46 responding) of PD committees indicated a decrease in spending at the school level for professional development, 29 PD committees (63 per cent) indicated that spending was generally stable

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compared to the previous two years, and 7 (15 per cent) indicated that spending had increased.

- In the 2009 ATA PD Survey, 16 respondents indicated increased access to professional development, 39 indicated that access was about the same and no respondents said there was a decrease over the previous year. In contrast, in 2010, 20 per cent (9 of 46) of respondents noted decreased access, while 67 per cent (31 of 46) indicated that access is about the same and 13 per cent (6 of 46) indicated increased access.

- 44 per cent (20) of PD committees reported that teachers felt a high degree of autonomy and choice in pursuing growth plan goals, whereas 7 per cent (3) felt that teachers had little autonomy and choice and 49 per cent (22) noted some degree of autonomy and choice. These numbers revealed a troubling slippage from the results in last year's ATA PD Survey, which reported combined 2008/09 data in which 28 responses indicated high autonomy and choice, 27 indicated some autonomy and choice and no respondents indicated little autonomy.

- 17 per cent of respondents reported that PD was consistently embedded in the workday, though only 13 per cent reported that it was consistently evident that professional development is determined by the teacher.

- 32 per cent of respondents indicated that it was only sometimes evident that school and/or jurisdiction PD opportunities support teacher growth plans.

- 89 per cent indicated that it was often evident or consistently evident that professional development supports school improvement goals.

Further details on specific PD programming directed at beginning teachers and administrators are provided in the 2010 PD Survey, available from the Association.

Addressing the Growing Workload of Teachers

The data continues to clearly illustrate that Alberta teachers enjoy their work, and find students and colleagues the greatest source of satisfaction. Yet, the passion and intensity of teaching are too often undermined by teachers' heavy workloads and the growing number of distractions and noninstructional requirements introduced into their work. As one teacher remarked, "As a teacher with 25 years of experience, I continue to be amazed with the ability of people who are not in the classroom to come up with more and more ways of describing what I should be doing more of—from reporting student progress with the latest new software package to how to introduce a so-called new literacy program" (Alberta Teachers' Association 2010a).

In 2010, 79 per cent of Alberta teachers indicated that teaching is satisfying; 27 per cent indicated that they would choose teaching as a career if they could start over again. In 2009, only one-third see teaching as a lifelong career to be recommended to others. In 2009, 40 percent of teachers reported that they were unable to balance personal and work life; in 2010 this number rose to 47 per cent. While it is clear from the trend data collected over the past five years that more experienced teachers are more likely to successfully balance personal and work life, there are complex variables that play into the

demographic differences in this area. For example, female teachers report more difficulties with work–life balance, and relatively little is known about the working hours and workloads carried by more experienced teachers compared to younger teachers. A major research effort should be undertaken on the attitudes towards work and personal life among different demographic cohorts of the teaching profession (Duxbury and Higgins 2001).
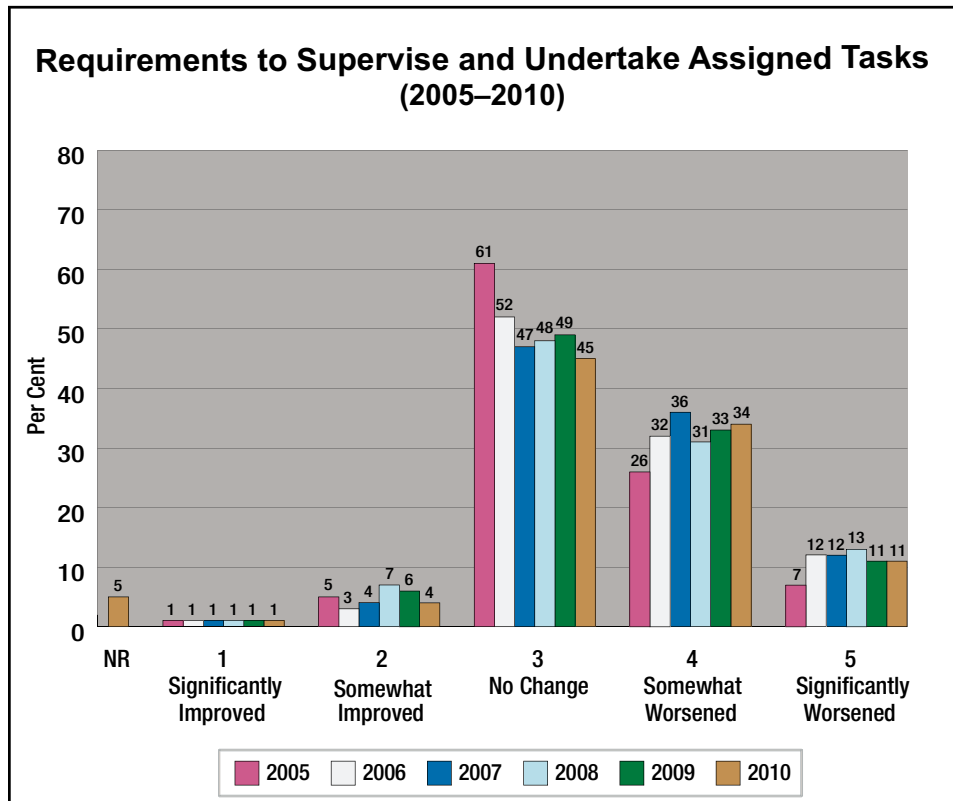
Alberta teachers work an average of 53 hours per week; in 2010, 73 per cent reported that they work more than 50 hours per week. This is more than other full-time teachers in Canada, who reported an average workload of almost 49 hours a week (Clark et al 2007). Forty-two of Alberta teachers' work hours were spent in school working directly with students and undertaking related tasks, such as preparation, marking, supervision and administration. In addition, extrapolating from recent national data, Alberta teachers spend six hours a week involved in formal professional development activities—bringing their work week close to 60 hours.

As have teachers across North America, Alberta teachers have been caught up in waves of various educational reforms that have had the cumulative effect of deprofessionalizing teaching in ways that no one imagined possible. For example, as Clark (forthcoming) notes, there was a national trend to more task autonomy in the general labour force between 1982 and 2004, and the national Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) survey showed that 89 per cent of teachers reported a great deal of control over their own job, highest among professional groups. However, by 2009, 35 per cent of all teachers and 40 per cent of those with high seniority reported a decreased level of autonomy in the previous five years; only 14 per cent reported any increase in autonomy over that time period. In addition, when compared to other professions, a relatively low number of teachers reported having any control over their work organization (ie, the school or school board) (Clark, forthcoming, p 219).

As high-profile and well-intentioned policy leaders continue to call for "system improvement" and "enhanced professional practice" by Alberta teachers, the reality is that a growing part of a teacher's day involves attending to noninstructional duties that contribute little to improving teaching and learning.

Consistent with national trends noted above, our data shows a significant erosion of the boundaries that define the professional roles and responsibilities of Alberta teachers. Consider the dramatic increase in 2007 in the requirements for teachers to supervise and undertake other assigned tasks over and above their regular classroom teaching. In 2007, teachers reported that these requirements had somewhat worsened (36 per cent) or significantly worsened (12 per cent). It is also important to note the variations by region; for example, in 2008, 56 per cent of Calgary teachers reported increased expectations in this aspect of their work. (Note that a recently completed large-scale survey of Calgary Public teachers provides further background. This survey will be further analyzed and published this fall.)

In 2010, these numbers continue to remain high. When 45 per cent of teachers report increased expectations to assume tasks over and above their primary professional duties, their ability to focus on their primary responsibilities to students is diminished. An effort to ensure that teachers' work remains focused on instruction must be a key component of school development policies.

Requirements to Supervise and Undertake Assigned Tasks (2005–2010)

| Category	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
NR						5
1 Significantly Improved	1	1	1	1	1	1
2 Somewhat Improved	5	3	4	7	6	4
3 No Change	61	52	47	48	49	45
4 Somewhat Worsened	26	32	36	31	33	34
5 Significantly Worsened	7	12	12	13	11	11

Per Cent (y-axis)

Increasing requirements to document and report student progress is perhaps the single greatest source of growth in the workload of teachers in the past five years. Certainly the move by many school jurisdictions to require the increased use of digital student report tools has contributed in some ways to this phenomenon.

While the chart on the next page shows a plateau effect in terms of the requirements to report student progress, significant issues remain. Providing quality assessment information to parents is an integral part of teachers' work, yet as the data from the past three years shows, these requirements have taken on a life of their own because of the ever-increasing prescriptive policies of government associated with initiatives such as Grade Level of Achievement reporting and prior reporting of Grade 6 and provincial achievement test results. For example, teachers are being required to mark and report on provincial achievement tests and submit these marks to the government, activities that limit the time they have to apply their own classroom-based assessments.

The difficulties that teachers face in improving their assessment and reporting strategies are further driven by the government's exclusive reliance on its outdated accountability reports that exclude teacher-assigned grades. This exclusion of school-based measures of student learning creates a gulf—as teachers attempt to enhance their assessment practices, the ministry continues to rely on paper-and-pencil tests administered in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12.

Although teachers have the professional responsibility to access and report on student progress, they continue to experience external interference in this regard. While there appears to be slight improvement with respect to teachers' obligations to report student progress to parents, 26 per cent of teachers in 2010 report that they faced unreasonable pressure in this aspect of their work. Although the numbers are fairly consistent over time, assessing student progress and effectively communicating with parents remain major tasks that require significant time. Schools need to build time into the school calendar to allow teachers to carry out this important duty.

Given that Alberta students are subjected to more externally imposed testing than any other students in Canada, it is imperative that government address the need to support, rather than minimize, the professional judgment of teachers in assessing student progress at the classroom level.

Expectations to Report Student Progress to Parents (2005–2010)
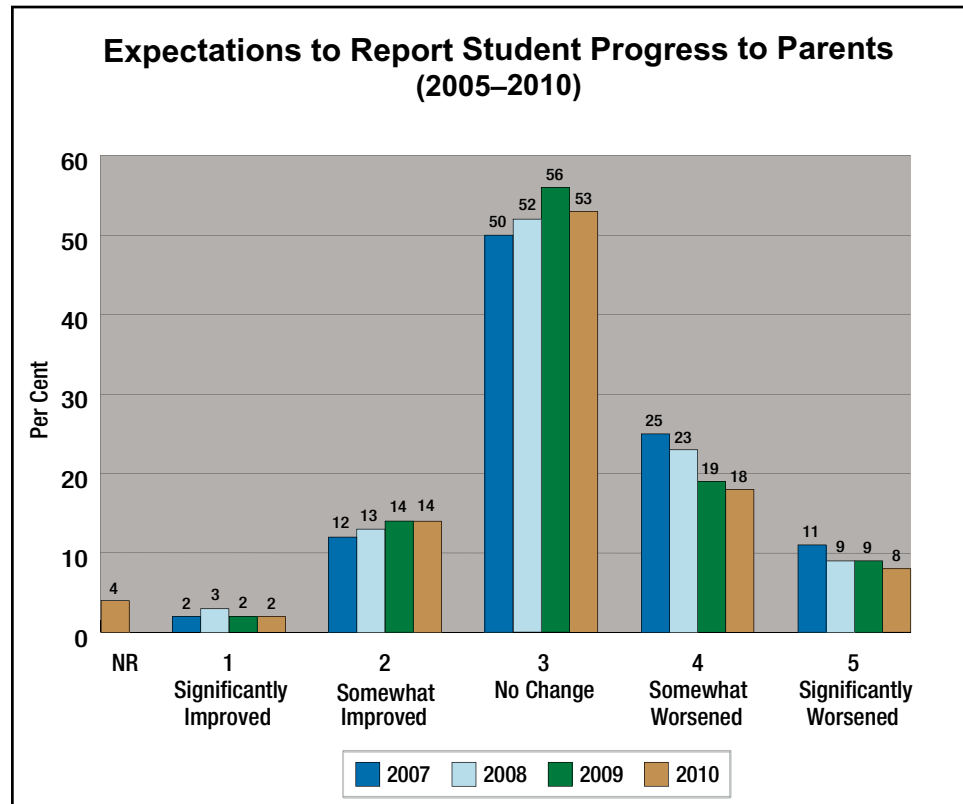
The Early Years of Teaching—Progress Report on a Five-Year Longitudinal Study of Beginning Teachers in Alberta

Study Overview

With thousands of new teachers expected to enter the profession in the coming years, there is a growing need to develop leadership abilities in young and mid-career teachers as their veteran colleagues retire. Further, high attrition rates among new teachers represent lost investment in the future of Alberta's public education. The exodus of trained young professionals is a loss for parents, students and veteran colleagues, all of whom benefit from the enthusiasm, energy and knowledge that new teachers have to offer.

Assessment of the professional growth needs and working conditions of new teachers is a research priority for the ATA. In addition to regularly surveying teachers who attend the annual Beginning Teachers' Conferences, in 2008, the ATA began a five-year longitudinal study of beginning teachers. A key objective of this study is to track new-teacher attrition and mobility. While the ATA, like other professional organizations, has recognized the significance of high attrition rates among new teachers and is able to track overall attrition rates, the particulars of how and why new teachers leave are not well researched. The study also offers insight into the factors that shape new teachers' professional identities, attitudes about professional learning and attitudes about the teaching profession as a whole during the crucial, formative years of their teaching careers.

The study was started in the summer of 2008, with an initial sample of 135 teachers. Twenty- to thirty-minute, individual telephone interviews were conducted. Beginning teachers were queried about their employment status, working conditions, participation in mentorship programs and other induction activities, and perceptions of the rewards and challenges of being a new teacher.

The findings of the 2008 survey confirmed the validity of empirical findings and recommendations in a range of studies that have examined causes of attrition among new teachers (Ingersoll and Smith 2004; Kardos and Johnson 2007) and effective induction practices that not only retain beginning teachers, but cultivate high quality, long-term professional growth (Glassford and Salinitri 2007; Kardos and Johnson 2007; Whisnant, Elliot and Pynchon 2005). If one clear theme emerges from the study to date, it is that despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the cohort of 135 respondents are happy and satisfied teachers, disparity in access to resources, reasonable class sizes and access to support for students with special needs remain problems.

The beginning teachers in this study experienced high levels of stress and uncertainty in their first year. Induction practices to ease the challenges of first-year teaching varied widely, from strong infrastructures providing collaboration and mentorship, to little or no targeted professional development or support. First-year teaching was made more difficult when new teachers had no collegial collaboration at their grade level or subject area, when teachers faced large classes and/or large numbers of special needs students, and, particularly at the secondary level, when new teachers had a large number or range of different subjects to prepare for.

Year Two: Settling In or Struggling?

The 2009 study followed the 2008 sample into their second year of teaching. Year-two telephone interviews, which were 15 to 20 minutes in length, revealed dramatic increases in teachers' levels of self-confidence, decreases in their overall stress levels and growth in professional identity. Eighteen respondents from year one could not be reached, reducing the second-year sample to 117.

If there is one overarching theme that best captures the year-two study, it is the effects of continuity versus change. Teachers who experienced greater continuity from year one to year two in their school communities and/or teaching assignments described the benefits of an increasing sense of mastery of practice, and of developing relationships with colleagues, students and parents. This sense of community is clearly an important element of the early years of teaching. At the opposite end of the spectrum, teachers who were continuing to experience change and uncertainty by the end of their second year were more likely to be discouraged about the profession and considering alternative work and career routes.

Sources of Support

Mentorship

Access to formal mentorship dropped off in the second year of practice. Fifty per cent of respondents had access to a mentor in year one, but only 30 per cent had a formal mentor in year two. Responses suggest that an effective mentoring program should still be a central facet of professional development beyond the first year. Regardless of whether they had a mentor, 54 per cent of the sample rated mentoring as a very high priority in year one, and 43 per cent chose this ranking in year two. Mentorship as a moderate priority was almost unchanged (34 per cent in year two vs 33 per cent in year one).

Professional Learning

New teachers continued to regard informal exchanges with their peers as their most significant source of support and professional development. As in year one, three-quarters of respondents ranked informal support from staff in the school as very helpful. Fewer teachers evaluated formal professional development activities as very helpful in year two (26 per cent vs 38 per cent in year one). One explanation for this change, suggested by the teachers'

comments, is that new teachers were becoming more discerning about their professional development, and placed more value on opportunities that had a direct bearing on their needs in the classroom. This finding reinforces the intuitive and highly relational nature of peer learning and complex interplay between the cognitive and affective dimensions of workplace learning, a conclusion reinforced by the recently released study of mentorships in the Toronto School Board (Smaller, forthcoming).

A Sense of Community

Respondents' sense of community emerged from relationships with colleagues, parents and students. As one teacher said, "I think I became a bigger part of the community this year and knew more people, could invite more people to my classroom. I think people had more confidence in me, knew who I was." This feeling of being recognized as a professional was an important and consistent theme in teachers' accounts of their second year. Some developing teachers had already assumed leadership roles in their schools by acting as AISI, technology or special education coordinators. Collegial relationships and "feeling part of the whole school group" were central to teachers' sense of belonging and identity.

Recurring Challenges

Stress

Overall, developing teachers surveyed experienced considerably less stress in their second year of teaching. Getting to know staff, parents and students, and gaining skills in the classroom contributed to reduced stress levels. For teachers with greater continuity in their teaching assignments, knowing the curriculum and having lesson plans from the previous year decreased the time pressure they experienced in the first year.

Change and uncertainty were likely to increase respondents' stress levels and compromise their professional satisfaction. Drastic changes in teaching assignments, uncertainty about the future, and school and administration changes were all noted as stressors. Some teachers experienced last-minute changes in assignments or mid-year changes that created stress. For a small but significant number, another source of dissatisfaction was student behaviour, particularly when new teachers felt that they lacked the support and leadership to manage problematic behaviours effectively. With many school authorities making staff cuts in the last months of the 2009/10 school year, the additional stress on several of the respondents was evident. As one teacher observed, "We will lose two teachers on our staff next year, and we've got a tighter budget for supplies and resources." For another, the uncertainty created by funding cuts exacerbated her simmering concerns about her employment future: "I don't want to be stuck in this rut forever with maternity leave positions and temp positions. I really like it here, but this may be my last year of really getting out there and trying. I don't want to be 35 years old without a permanent position. It just doesn't feel fair ... someone who wants it so bad to have to keep subbing, and never feel like you belong."
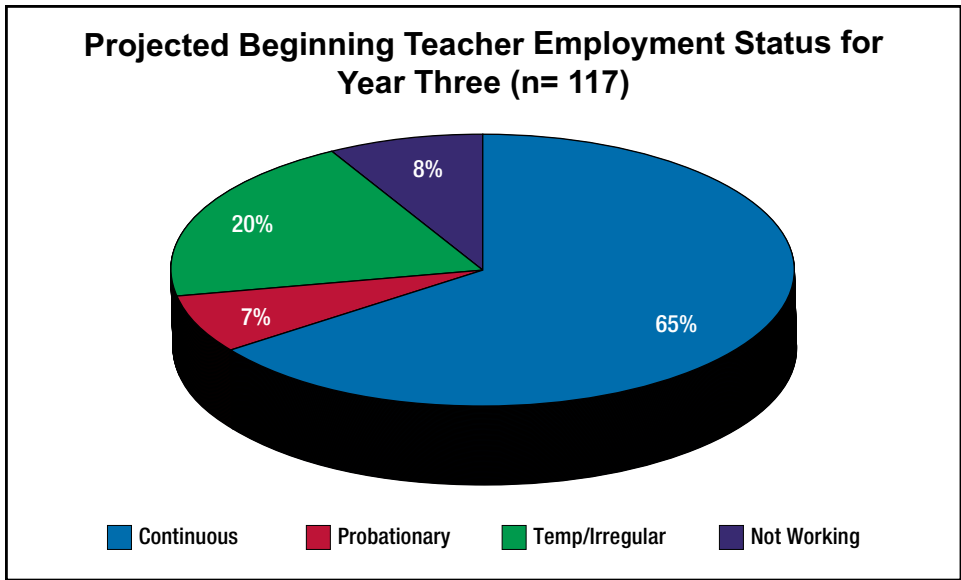
A Disparity in Working Conditions

Although the majority of the respondents found most conditions satisfactory, a significant minority experienced conditions that negatively affected their teaching. Of greatest concern were class sizes and special needs supports. "Good support for special ed but not enough of it" summarizes participants' comments about supports for special needs students. One teacher, for example, stated that her school had been "cutting educational assistant (EA) support time and integrating more kids, both coded and uncoded. When you have a class of 33 kids with 3 ESL kids and one EA, you have to work very proficiently at differentiating your instruction to take care of those kids. This year they are cutting back even more EAs, so I'm worried."

Percentage of Beginning Teachers Ranking Working Condition as "Very" or "Somewhat" Satisfactory
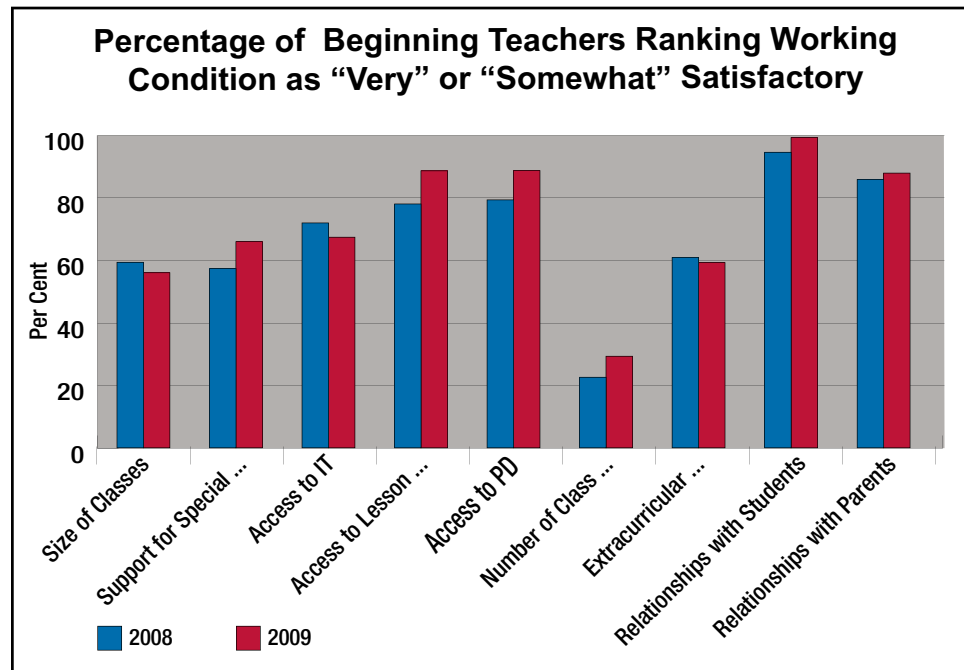
Early Career Mobility, Attrition and Commitment to the Teaching Profession

The second year of the beginning teachers study also included questions to track teachers' mobility across schools and districts. Of the year two sample, 87 per cent (n = 117) were teaching in the same district for the second year, and 66 per cent had stayed at the same school for a second year. Unsurprisingly, teachers attempted to get full-time employment and acquire probationary status (for example, moving from a temporary or part-time contract at one school to a probationary full-time contract at another school).

Projected Beginning Teacher Employment Status for Year Three (n= 117)

8%

20%

7%

65%

■ Continuous   ■ Probationary   ■ Temp/Irregular   ■ Not Working

Going into their third year in the fall of 2009, 7 per cent of the teachers surveyed had no prospects for a regular contract position. For four participants, this was by choice; however, others were anxious to obtain full-time probationary status and were deeply discouraged that this had not happened yet. Some seeking positions were frustrated by what they perceived to be a lack of transparency and fairness in hiring practices.

A common thread running through comments indicated confusion and uncertainty about what priorities were driving human resource decisions in the school district. As one teacher stated, "I don't know if this is just my district ... They don't post jobs here; it would be nice to know what is going on .... I feel helpless; I can't do anything to help myself." Teachers were also disheartened, discouraged and frustrated when they continued to be interviewed for jobs that they believed had already been filled. As one respondent observed, "At times you feel like you are going through some sort of ritual attending interviews—and not being certain if you are being asked the real questions that matter." Another teacher picked up this theme, reflecting on her failed attempt to secure a position: "I was .9 but the question no one asked me was whether or not I was willing to drop down to .5, which I wouldn't have been, making the interview like some sort of strange theatre." Clearly, more research is needed in assessing the impacts of human resource practices on teacher retention and the sense of commitment to the jurisdiction and profession. One strategy would be to study the human resources practices of jurisdictions that demonstrate exemplary practices in this regard and track teachers' sense of efficacy and growth over time.
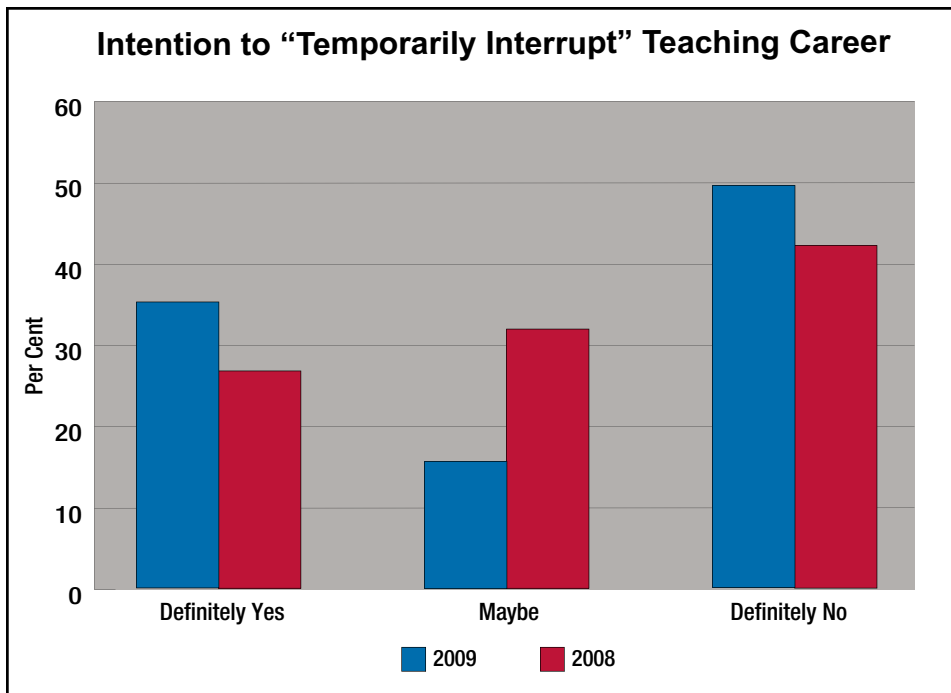
Projected Year Three Work Status (n = 117)

FT CONT	Full-time teachers with continuous contracts	72	62%
PT CONT	Part-time teachers with continuous contracts	5	4%
	Total Continuous Contract	**77**	**66%**
FT PROB	Full-time teachers with probationary contracts	7	6%
PT PROB	Part-time teachers with probationary contracts	1	1%
Total Probationary Contract		**8**	**7%**
FT TEMP	Full-time teachers with temporary contracts	8	7%
PT TEMP	Part-time teachers with temporary contracts	3	3%
SUB	Substitute teaching for the 2009/10 school year	12	10%
Total Temporary or Irregular Work		**23**	**20%**
OFF MAT	On maternity leave for all/part of the 2009/10 school year	5	4%
QUIT	Leaving the profession in the 2009/10 school year	2	2%
OFF OTHER	Travelling in the 2009/10 school year	1	1%
OTHER	Other	1	1%
Total Not Working		**9**	**8%**

Intention to Interrupt Teaching Career

Fewer teachers in year two were uncertain about their intentions to continue teaching. This likely reflects the loss of some year one participants, but also a settling out, as new teachers in year two were more likely to have established employment around which they could plan their futures.

Among the 117 participants in year two, taking time off to have a family was the most frequently provided reason for leaving teaching. Fifty-five participants in the year two study (47 per cent) who had not already left the profession and were not yet on any form of parental leave responded "maybe" or "definitely yes" when asked if they intended to interrupt their teaching careers, and 76 per cent of this group planned to take time off to have a family. Of this subgroup, three-quarters had obtained continuing contracts with their districts. The impact of parental leave on employment patterns and attrition for teachers without continuing contracts will be an important factor to follow for the balance of the five-year study. Certainly this is a similar question explored in a comprehensive study of new teachers in the Toronto School Board (Smaller, in press). It is also important to maintain distinctions between temporary interruptions to a teaching career and a departure from the profession altogether, and to identify whether failure to return to the profession after a leave is voluntary or involuntary.

Intention to "Temporarily Interrupt" Teaching Career

[Bar chart showing Per Cent on the y-axis (0 to 60) for three categories comparing 2009 (blue) and 2008 (red):]

- Definitely Yes: 2009 ≈ 36, 2008 ≈ 27
- Maybe: 2009 ≈ 16, 2008 ≈ 32
- Definitely No: 2009 ≈ 50, 2008 ≈ 43

Legend: 2009, 2008

Reasons for Interrupting Teaching Career by Contract Type (n = 55)

	Continuous Contract	Not Continuous	Total
Starting a Family	49%	27%	76%
Other	7%	16%	24%

Overall, the 117 second-year teachers interviewed for year two of this five-year study were considerably more settled in their second year of practice and had developed a greater sense of competence and professional identity.

Implications: Addressing Mobility, Attrition and Ambivalence

The main objective of the longitudinal study of this group of beginning teachers is to discern the complex contextual factors that may lie behind attrition within the first five years. Some of these factors are easy to identify (for example, choosing to teach overseas, return to school or start a family). Less obvious and more complex are the intersections of school and district cultures, teachers' individual dispositions and aspirations, and working conditions. Any efforts to implement provincial or system-level strategies must recognize the need to consider individual teacher and school-level contextual variables, not to mention the disparity of human resource practices that all too often appear as a black box to beginning teachers. As one respondent observed reflecting on a presentation by Minister Hancock at a teachers' convention, "After two years of teaching, I really respect the

minister's efforts to retain new teachers like me, but he isn't the one doing the hiring … ultimately I am not sure who is, or what drives their decisions."

By the end of year two, a little over half of the original 135 teachers surveyed had obtained full-time continuous contracts with their districts. The wide variety of outcomes for the balance of survey sample confirms the challenge of seeking any definitive explanation for new teacher attrition. Thus far, according to the data in this study, a number of small but important subgroups offer at least a starting point for analysis and comparison. While approximately 70 per cent of the respondents are happy and engaged members of the profession and their school community, most of the remainder plan on or are at risk of leaving the profession. This latter group can be grouped into these clusters that have emerged in the study to date:

Pull Outs: Some teachers leave because they want to change careers. A small number of teachers in this study have stated that they are not certain teaching is for them. They are open to other career options outside of the classroom, but do not attribute these to working conditions so much as their own dispositions and interests.

Conditionally Committed: Some teachers are committed to public education, and particularly to students, but wish, sooner or later, to be out of the classroom and the immediate school environment. These teachers were likely to cite stressful working conditions in the interviews to date.

Push Outs: A small number (only 2 teachers of the 117 sampled in year two) were leaving teaching because they were deeply dissatisfied with the profession as a whole. Dissatisfaction was attributed to an apparent lack of professionalism in the school and/or district culture.

Lost Souls: Some of the teachers in this study describe themselves as being in purgatory; they desire full-time permanent work, but continue to work with temporary contracts and/or as substitute teachers. A combination of insecure finances and disillusionment with the politics of hiring practices will most certainly push these teachers out of the profession if they are unable to secure probationary contracts within the next year or two.

Between the happy engaged teachers and the clusters of leavers and/or at-risk teachers, the study has also discerned a group best described as ambivalent *satisficers* (term coined by one of the respondents). These satisficers are new teachers who are disappointed with professional life and cultures in their schools and/or the stressfulness of their work, but they remain committed to the ideal of teaching overall. In follow-up interviews it will be interesting to examine the strategies these teachers use to manage their less-than-optimal teaching contexts and the impacts of these strategies on professional development and professional identity over time.

As the study moves into its third year in the summer of 2011, the Association looks forward to continued efforts to build on the successes in teacher retention to date such as the Workforce Planning Framework. Ultimately, however, much of the future for beginning teachers will rest on the broader actions undertaken within *Inspiring Action*.

A Preferred Future for Alberta Schools: Using Technologies That Put Real Learning First

> Students learn in different ways, and effective teachers must be able to design rich learning experiences for students that engage their minds and hearts in intellectually robust ways. Recent research has revealed that students need to have ongoing assessment woven into the very fabric of their day-to-day learning experiences in order to become self-directed in their learning, and teachers need to use this assessment information to guide their instructional decisions.
>
> —*Galileo Research Network*

This statement of principle from the Galileo Research Network articulates a vision shared by the teaching profession that sees emerging technologies as a catalyst for designing optimal learning experiences for students. Such experiences involve problem- and project-based learning that, as Bigum (2003) describes, reconceptualizes schools as *knowledge-producing* rather than *knowledge-consuming* entities. Secondary education in particular needs to move away from the industrial age, one-size-fits-all, production-line model of education to an approach that takes into account the learning needs of individuals.

So what has been getting in the way? The answers are complex, but some can be found in the Alberta Teachers' Association report, *Using Technology to Put Real Learning First in Alberta Schools* (Murgatroyd and Couture 2010). Spurred by the concern that Alberta Education has historically failed to consider that curriculum and instruction decisions made by the teaching profession should be the primary drivers of decisions about learning technologies, the Association drew on the expertise of Dr Stephen Murgatroyd, an internationally recognized scholar and expert on technology and innovation, to map out a vision and set of strategic directions for the road ahead.

The report questions some of the assumptions about emerging technologies. As the report outlined, dramatic innovations and shifts in technology bring about many unanticipated social, cultural and political changes. Drawing on the work of philosophers and cultural historians, the study begins with the premise that all material things, including technologies, *have* politics. The study cites the example of the tasering of Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski at Vancouver International Airport by RCMP on October 17, 2007 in a blatant abuse of power by authority figures that was captured on video. That is to say that technologies are neither inherently beneficial nor harmful in how they are designed and used in society. Consider data-projector technologies such as Smart Boards that can just as easily engage students as reinforce sage-on-the-stage teaching styles.

All technologies imply different social, economic and political interests that contest their appropriate uses and place in society. Therefore, as we move forward in the months ahead with *Inspiring Action*, education partners need to be mindful that social and political forces are always at work when it comes to technology in schools. As the study asks, why are school-district technology leaders almost always male in contrast to Alberta's teaching force, which is three-quarters female? What are the social and economic interests of proponents of certain kinds of technologies, such as digital reporting tools and student records databases, a booming software industry currently in Canada?[1]

Since the early 1980s, the government of Alberta, school districts and individual schools have invested more than $1.5 billion in information and communications technology (ICT). The majority of this funding has been used to acquire and maintain hardware and software and to undertake a number of incubator projects that have simply not been scalable. Outside of the welcome support for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, investments in professional development and collaborative inquiry at the school level to help educators take advantage of these technologies have been paltry by comparison. Even less effort has been spent on making the kind of deep cultural transformational changes at the jurisdiction and school levels that are necessary to implement technology in a way that truly enhances student learning. Most important among these is the restructuring of the school day that currently sees Alberta teachers required to teach almost twice

For too long in Alberta, decisions made regarding emerging technologies in education have been made by people outside the classroom. For example, those who simplistically describe students as "digital natives" and their teachers as "digital immigrants" ignore the research that debunks this myth, and their patronizing attitude does little to engage the profession and school communities that struggle with difficult day-to-day decisions about resource priorities. If the medical profession were marginalized in a similar way in our hospitals and health-care system, it would be run by the manufacturers of diagnostic equipment and drug companies. I see *Inspiring Action* as an opportunity to have the teaching profession responsible for decisions about what is good teaching and learning for enduring understanding.

—ATA President Carol Henderson

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1   A comprehensive provincial study of the use of digital tools to report student progress was undertaken in May and June 2010. The research team, which included the University of Alberta, the Alberta Assessment Consortium and the Alberta Teachers' Association, found significant issues with both the design and uses of these reporting tools. The final study will be released in fall 2010.

The Courage to Choose

as much as their counterparts in other high-performing jurisdictions such as Finland.

Aside from a few small-scale incubator projects that have been positioned as showcases there has been limited success in considering the need to rethink curriculum design and instructional practice. For example, with approximately 1,350 learner outcomes in Grade 7, how can we meaningfully expect the shifts in pedagogy necessary to capitalize on emerging technologies in schools?

The study raises some important questions as we look forward to changes anticipated in the release of *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans*. What is the legacy of previous ministry policy changes and how effective have they been in transforming the teaching and learning process? Do schools have the ICT required to equip today's students with the skills they will need to fulfill their career ambitions? What should happen next in terms of investing in ICT and developing a strategy for infusing ICT into Alberta schools in the years ahead?
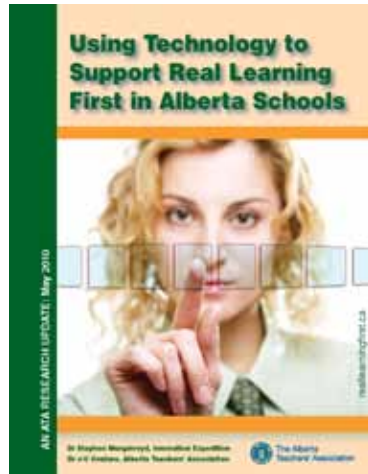
During the last three decades, Alberta Education has employed at least four rationales to justify its investment in ICT in Alberta schools:

- ICT makes education more efficient.
- ICT helps students build a sense of community and connect to the world.
- ICT is needed to engage the interest of the so-called digital generation.
- ICT is essential to equip students to function in the knowledge age of the 21st century.

All four of these policy positions imply that the education system must change. However, each argument is based on a different set of values and, as a result, the kind of change that would result by pursuing any one approach to its logical conclusion is quite distinct. Each position is highly politicized and not necessarily consistent with the others. Alberta Education has tended to embrace a combination of these ideologies at the same time and, as a result, its IT strategies lack coherence. For example, advancing the need for problem-based deep learning in schools while funding the development of online multiple choice test items and computer adaptive testing sends contradictory messages about the government's priorities.

The study goes on to argue that the situation is compounded by the fact that the Alberta government has yet to develop a long-term, sustained approach to education planning and funding and relies instead on the vagaries of oil and gas revenues and other primary resources. The uncertainty created this past spring with respect to staffing deployments as school boards attempted to address short-term funding challenges points to the fundamental irony of the K–12 system and the lack of long-term planning. As some might argue, how can we get transformational change right if we cannot get the basics related to human resources and infrastructure straight?

Technology has the promise to enhance teaching and learning in Alberta schools. However, as we move forward with *Inspiring Education*, Albertans

Using Technology to Support Real Learning First in Alberta Schools

AN ATA RESEARCH UPDATE: May 2010

Dr Stephen Murgatroyd, Innovative Expedition
Dr J C Couture, Alberta Teachers' Association

The Alberta Teachers' Association

need to consider the ethical, physiological and social costs associated with digital connectivity. These costs vary with the age, gender and socioeconomic status of the young people involved. Furthermore, technology can actually adversely affect the health of our students—an emerging body of research suggests that looking at a computer screen for long periods of time may not be healthy for children. Indeed, the Canadian Paediatrics Association has recently revised its screen-time guidelines to recommend that children under the age of two not be exposed to computer screens at all.[2]

Research conducted in Alberta schools currently assists teachers in sustaining pedagogies that draw on technologies in appropriate ways. We need to learn from this research and build on the strengths of what we know works in the Alberta context.

In an Alberta case study of schools mentored through Galileo Educational Network consultants, ten essential conditions were uncovered in order to sustain technology-infused, inquiry-based instructional strategies: (1) supportive leadership; (2) a learning, risk-taking culture; (3) a colleague, from within or without the school, to walk this road with the teacher; (4) ubiquitous access to reliable technology; (5) time for professional dialogue and connections; (6) school board and parent support; (7) securing sustainable sources of funding; (8) building onsite capacity and leadership; (9) diffusion of the mentorship relationships; and (10) designing learning communities: resisting the urge to turn back (Jacobsen 2006, p 231).

Although *Inspiring Action* generates great promise, ultimately the true test of sustainable reform will be determined by building the capacity of teachers, though not through myriad policy pronouncements, imposed structural changes or jurisdiction mandates. Consider Alberta Education's recent attempt to launch a distributed learning strategy. This initiative floundered largely because government did not open up the broader dialogue about the research on learning and curriculum design nor did it consider the growing diversity of Alberta's schools, where some urban schools are filled to

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[2]   A number of recent authoritative studies have been published on the complex social interactions and changes brought about by technology in the lives of students and parents. A March 2010 study reported that the average child between 10 and 16 typically spends 6 hours a day in front of some type of screen. Among Canadian youth in Grades 6 to 10, screen time on weekends averaged 7 hours and 25 minutes per day, while weekday time amounted to 5 hours and 56 minutes a day (Active Healthy Kids Canada). The annual Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey conducted by the Canadian Mental Health Association (2010) found that 9.7 per cent of students in Grades 7 to 12, or about 327,000 students, spend at least 7 hours a day in front of a TV or computer . In both studies care was taken not to attribute increased screen time as a direct causal factor in the decline of the well-being in children and youth. Yet it is clear that ongoing research is needed in this important area in relation to the policy directions articulated in *Inspiring Action*.

overcapacity and many rural schools are experiencing significant declines in population.

The engagement of communities with their schools and a thoughtful discussion about the purpose of school and the kind of students Albertans want to develop were key accomplishments of *Inspiring Education.* Rather than deploying hollow catchphrases such as *meeting the needs of twenty-first century learners* and *leadership in technology* the study calls for a reconsideration of the current industrial model of schooling and bureaucratic accountability that inhibit teacher creativity and innovation.

Alberta has an opportunity to be a global leader in learning. The study identifies seven key directions for the future that are infused in the concluding section of this publication ("A Framework for Informed Transformation"). Threaded throughout all of these is the requirement that before we invest time and money in technology, education partners must examine the ideologies that have driven initiatives to infuse digital technologies in learning and commit to creating schools where transferring knowledge and information is not the main goal. We need schools where students develop their talents and strengths as they pursue problem-based learning that is engaging and that inspires them to contribute to a vibrant democracy.

David King, former minister of education during the Lougheed era and former executive director of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, recently articulated the choices ahead for Albertans:

> If we lose sight of community, if we lose all understanding of what it means to be "the public," if we accept "statism" and seek only to make the state's tests the best they can be, [then] I am afraid that we will lose forever the chance to put real learning first.[3]

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3   *Time for Action–Real Learning First in the 21st Century*. Alberta Teachers' Association, 2009, p. 16. Address given to symposium held in Calgary, Alberta. Published proceedings are available from the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Informed Transformation: Cocreating a New Narrative for Learning in Alberta Schools

As someone who has studied Alberta closely for many years now, I see your choices ahead as an opportunity to focus on innovation and growth rather than simply achieving standardized proficiency. You have the incredible opportunity to create a new story for yourselves and an inspiring example for others in a province that more and more of the world will turn towards as an outstanding international achiever. This uplifting narrative can be one where your schools actually produce more growth for everyone and show the public how much students are advancing compared to prior norms, and where increased achievement growth for all is created by and evident in greater inclusion of all students, stronger cohesion among them, and innovative educational experiences and challenges that inspire all students and their teachers.

—Andy Hargreaves, Thomas More Brennan Chair of Education in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College

One thing many futurists realize is that just tweaking our education system will not produce the kind of workforce and community leaders we need for the future. What is needed is "informed transformation"—an inspired change in our system which refocuses the work of schools, teachers, parents and learners and re-engages communities, business and others in the work of learning.

—Stephen Murgatroyd, Chief Scout, Innovation Expedition

As an internationally recognized policy analyst and the lead researcher on the Association's recently completed Accountability Pillar Project, Murgatroyd sees the educational challenge for Albertans as one of urgency coupled with profoundly important long-term implications.

Following the release of *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans*, the Association called together forward-thinking international educational researchers and policy analysts to form a consensus panel to assist in the development of a coherent roadmap for the three years ahead.[4] The result was a document entitled *A Framework for Informed Transformation*, which sets

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4   This esteemed international consensus panel included a range of people who combined their impressive international experiences with their considerable understanding of the Alberta context. The consensus panel consisted of Stephen Murgatroyd, Chief Scout Innovation Expedition; Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley, coauthors of *The Fourth Way*; Pasi Sahlberg, Director of CIMO and author of *Finnish Lessons—What the World Can Learn from Educational Change in Finland* (Teachers College Press, forthcoming); Larry Beauchamp, former dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, and current vice-provost; Ken Chapman, of Cambridge Strategies; and two members of the Minister's Inspiring Education steering committee: Sharon Friesen, cofounder and president of the Galileo Educational Network and an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary, and Mark Anielski, an economist, professor of corporate social responsibility and author of *The Economics of Happiness: Building Genuine Wealth.*

out a number of key game-changing strategies that will ensure that that we succeed in accomplishing the bold ambitions set out in *Inspiring Education* and the subsequent ministerial response *Inspiring Action*.

Three assumptions informed the development of the framework document based on the public dialogues that took place previously as part of the *Learning Our Way*[5] lecture series and invitational symposium held in Calgary and Edmonton, May 31–June 2, 2010, and our consultations with members of the international consensus panel.

1. Despite the volatility and uncertainty ahead, Albertans share an unprecedented opportunity to ensure that we *educate every child everywhere* in this province.

Albertans are among some of the richest people on the planet (with the equivalent of 51,900 barrels of oil per person in proven reserves) and we live in a country that has successfully withstood the recent volatility created by the global financial meltdown. As a province we need to focus on developing the skills and capabilities that will help us maintain our economic advantage at a time of continued volatility in the energy market and increasing environmental sensitivities. The growing concerns and negative publicity related to Alberta's tar sands reminds us that we cannot take our future for granted. Whatever one's views on these issues, there is no doubt that Alberta is a world player, and Albertans are expected to show leadership and stewardship in a global context.

At home, complacency is our worst enemy: one out of every twelve Alberta children lives in poverty and there are structural obstacles related to the readiness to learn. Guaranteed universal access to early childhood education and a comprehensive community-based approach to enhancing the well-being of children and youth are essential to achieving the vision of *Inspiring Action*. Furthermore, 22 per cent of Alberta children are considered

> Emerging global economic powerhouses such as China and India cannot be ignored. They are going to eat your lunch.
>
> —*Gwynne Dyer*

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5   Attended by over 700 Albertans, the *Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta* forums provided an unprecedented opportunity to engage forward-thinking Albertans in a discussion about the kind of Alberta we desire for the year 2030 and the central role that learning in all age groups and sectors would play in making that future possible. For further background, see learningourway.ca

overweight and 8 per cent obese. Murgatroyd refers to such challenges as "wicked problems"[6] shared by all Albertans.

"They are going to eat your lunch." This was the opening salvo from the noted journalist and commentator Gwynne Dyer at the *Learning Our Way* public meetings held in Calgary and Edmonton, May 31–June 2.

In describing the global competiveness challenge facing Alberta and Albertans, Dyer observed that the most important trend affecting Alberta is climate change and, as a result, we may suffer a dramatic net loss of arable land. And the energy game will be very different. There will be a global refutation of carbon; this means we need to get out of fossil fuels and figure out how to be of use to a world that doesn't need manual labour, low-level intellectual work or factories.

Dyer said that there is good news. Unlike many other jurisdictions, Alberta has choices. His basic advice: don't try to stay the same. Relying on traditional skills and investing in sunset industries (that is, fossil fuels) are dead ends. Ideas for the future economy are to create global research centres in areas such as biotech and geoengineering, emphasize innovation and skills upgrading in the education system, address the cultural issues that underlie the educational deficits of First Nations people and take steps to be socially and culturally attractive.

2. Education partners need to avoid distractions and to make strategic and sustained commitments that will support teaching and learning for all students.

Recognizing that teaching and learning conditions are the keystone for school success, government and other education partners in high-performing countries recognize that collective bargaining can no longer be a political football. As Stephen Murgatroyd says, "Teachers do not need to be constantly negotiating contracts of employment. The government and the Alberta Teachers' Association achieved something significant when they reached a five-year contract settlement. The settlement created a space in which teachers could focus on learning, students and professional development. If we are to make major changes to the system, then I suggest that another five-year agreement needs to be in place to create an opportunity for change."[7] While this is only one view on this complex matter, certainly none of the education partners sees merit in returning to a time of combative labour negotiations that distracted us from the ultimate goal of creating a world-class education system that would guarantee a vibrant future for Albertans.

Another strategic opportunity is to get key forward-thinking Alberta business and community leaders to provide public leadership in shaping the broad goals and features of Alberta's public education system. As Sahlberg has noted in numerous presentations in Alberta in the past year,[8] much of the

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6 See Stephen Murgatroyd, "Wicked Problems and the Work of the School," *European Journal of Education*. 45:2, pp 259–79.

7 http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Publications/ATA%20Magazine/Volume%2090/Number4/Pages/Informed-Transformation.aspx

8 For summaries and further commentaries, see PasiSahlberg.com.

success of the Finnish education reforms in the 1990s can be attributed to the active participation of firms such as Nokia. Just as important, as Finnish business leaders promoted mathematics, sciences and technology, they also embraced the need for innovation, creative problem solving, innovative cross-curricular projects and teaching methods to schools. This synergy between various sectors provides sustainability and a shared focus, and a systemic societal approach to reform. In Alberta, challenges such as addressing readiness to learn, early literacy and high school completion require cross-sectoral collaboration and engagement. Such things cannot be achieved if distractions continue to draw leaders away from the long-term commitment and vision to ensure, in Sahlberg's words, "that every Alberta child will learn in a good school."

3. We must address the growing complexity and diversity of our province.

As a sage once admonished, "Not only don't we acknowledge the elephant in the room, we seem preoccupied with painting its toenails." The elephant in the room, as conceded by observers of Alberta politics, is the fact that the opportunity for the current minister of education to advance the vision for *Inspiring Education* will be framed by events over the next nine months to one year.[9] Without fundamental game-changing moves by the minister, we will see only incremental changes that will not address the opportunities and challenges ahead. For example, 25 per cent of Calgary's children under the age of 15 are of a visible minority, and by 2016 Alberta will be tied with Ontario with the largest First Nations population in Canada.

We must identify jurisdictions that have capitalized on the growing cultural diversity of their students, made inclusion a systemic part of school planning and moved beyond simplistic notions of standardization for short-term unsustainable gains in achievement (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009, xii).

Today, every student who leaves high school early adds to the province's human resource shortfall. We must take immediate steps to learn from success and draw on the experiences of other leading jurisdictions such as Finland. In that country there is a long-standing recognition that raising standards begins by lifting children from the bottom. Finland has extensive intervention early in special education whereby special education is not a legal system of identification and placement for a few, but a temporary, just-in-time intervention for students who might encounter a particular difficulty. It is estimated that between 50 and 65 per cent of Finnish students will be involved in some sort of intervention program by the time they

> *We are all complicit in our future.*
>
> —*Walt Anderson, futurist*

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9   For a detailed analysis of this economic and political environment impacting the current minister's mandate, see Ken Chapman's blog http://ken-chapman.blogspot.com/search?q=hancock

graduate. As Hargreaves has said of the Finnish experience, "Everyone gets support just in time and not over time."[10]

Further, as the minister prepares to operationalize the framework for inclusive school environments set out in *Setting the Direction*, we in Alberta might draw on one of Ontario's most recent successes, the *Essential for Some, Good for All* project. In this initiative, the focus is on making whole school changes that also benefit special education students in differentiated instruction through a variety of strategies, including assistive technologies.

Education partners and business leaders must work together to fundamentally restructure high school education. We can learn from Finland, where the government encouraged innovation by introducing nongraded programs of studies that offered flexible and dynamic learning opportunities. Through creative and innovative pedagogies and reconceptualizing high school as a place to capitalize on the talents of young people, we may see future high schools minimizing individual failure and maximizing school success through a rekindling of the performing arts, trades, sciences and humanities.

Navigating the Paradoxes of Informed Transformation

From a policy perspective, we face a design challenge in the short time we have to make the changes needed to achieve informed transformation. Whether it is curriculum reform, enhancing the leadership role and development of the school principal, the uses of emerging technologies and infrastructure, or how we achieve labour agreements, ultimately we come back to one overriding challenge: *what kind of future are we as Albertans planning for in our schools*? Will our education system of the future be built on a foundation of trust or on bureaucratic compliance and regulation? This is the fundamental choice presented in international comparisons of high-performing jurisdictions.

We must move past taken-for-granted assumptions about school improvement and the tendency to expect far too much from system-level or structural changes. Over a decade ago "the epidemic of policy reform" (Levin 1998) was recognized as one of the key barriers to sustained and authentic transformation in schools. More recently Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) cautioned against the three most common distractions plaguing reform efforts: the path of autocracy (governance through forced compliance); the path of technocracy (excessive surveillance through growing bureaucracies and standardization); and the path of effervescence (an obsession with achieving narrow, short-term and unsustainable targets).

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10   Personal communication, July 19, 2010.

Leading jurisdictions will be characterized by these two features:

> Gradual building of a culture of responsibility and trust within the education system that values teacher and principal professionalism in judging what is best for students and in reporting their learning progress. Targeting resources and support to schools and students who are at risk to fail or to be left behind (Sahlberg, forthcoming)

Based on his experiences and advocacy for school transformation, Sahlberg (forthcoming) reminds us about the persistent and nettlesome paradoxes that will challenge our thinking. Based on the Finnish experience and his extensive international comparative policy analysis, he has identified three such paradoxes.

Paradox 1: Teach Less, Learn More

According to PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), Finland consistently outperforms most of the world in literacy, math and science. Yet if one considers the number of teaching hours per year in lower secondary education, you will see that in 2007, Finland's teachers taught just under 600 hours while Alberta teachers typically taught over 1000 hours. At the same time, the total number of intended instruction hours in public institutions for children between the ages of 7 and 14 show that Finland's 7- to 14-year-old children receive anywhere between 500 to 2000 fewer hours of instruction compared to children in other countries.

Paradox 2: Test Less, Learn Better

There are no mandatory tests or exams in Finland, except for the nationwide National Matriculation Examination at the end of high school. Teachers are encouraged to make their own tests and to rely on formative assessment much more than on summative grading. This helps both teachers and students focus more on learning and less on fearing external test and punishing accountability.

Comparisons of international data consistently show that Finland leads the world in key indicators of learning. As Sahlberg stresses, the policy question is not to ask what Finland did to achieve this improvement; rather, it may be more important to ask what Finland did not do that lower-achieving countries did. Sahlberg explains that Finland does not subscribe to the test-based accountability policies used in so many other jurisdictions, including the United States and Alberta. In fact, the Finnish do not even have a word for *accountability*; they use the term *responsibility* instead.

Paradox 3: The better a high school graduate is, the more likely she will become a teacher

In Finland, the teaching profession is considered an admirable and trusted profession. Teachers are treated as autonomous professionals who have a shared responsibility in teaching Finland's youth. These attitudes resulted from a rethinking of educational policies and reform. The following chart shows how Finland and Germany have differed in their approach to reform.
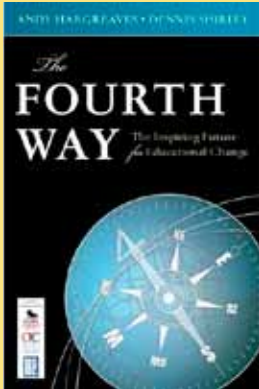
Education policies and reform principles	
Global education reform movement (Germany)	**Reform policies in Finland**
Focus on core subjects	Relaxed creative learning
Prescribed curriculum	School curriculum
More reform	Learning from others
Test-based accountability	Shared responsibility
Control	Trust

The profession can play an important role in setting teacher performance standards, including certification. We must de-emphasize autocracy and technocracy and emphasize professional responsibility and what Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) describe as the three principles of professionalism: excellent teachers, powerful professionalism and lively learning communities.

The path towards advancing authentic professional responsibility and away from the path of autocracy and technocracy is clearly laid out by the Association's executive secretary:

To advance the overall interests of the teaching profession, it's also time to make the teaching profession fully self-governing. Alberta's minister of health does not determine the professional practice standards to become a medical doctor—the medical profession does. The minister of justice does not set out the professional practice standards of lawyers—the legal profession does. However, the minister of education presently sets the requirements for a teaching certificate and also issues those certificates. This means that the professional practice standards for teachers are not established by the members of the profession. They should be. We would need to discharge these responsibilities carefully, and make sure that the public and the profession are well served. We already have the responsibility to monitor the professional conduct of our members and to deal with the few instances where there are issues about competence. It is not a huge step to assume responsibility for certification.

—Gordon Thomas
Executive Secretary

The Fourth Way *treats accountability as the conscience of the system that checks it, not the ego or the id that drives it.*

—Hargreaves and Shirley 2009

The Courage to Choose

In the past months, forward-thinking Albertans have developed a set of principles to give immediacy and substance to the policy moves needed in the coming months, of which the responsibility for teacher certification is one. This call to action, now endorsed by over 850 people, provides important context for the specific recommendations included in the *Framework for Informed Transformation*.

Reboot Alberta—An Education Charter

Source: http://themurgatroydblog.blogspot.com/2009/12/reboot-alberta-education-charter.html

Success for all is a cornerstone of our shared commitment to provide good schools for all students.

Ability comes in many forms, and learners need to be supported to enjoy success no matter where their talents lie—education is not just for and about "academics"—we need to be a province rich in all the talents.

The educational success of learners should not depend on the background or social status or economic characteristics of learners and their families. Schools, communities and families must work together to close gaps in attainment and give all learners the opportunity to find their talent, nurture that talent and be excellent. Success for all requires a significant investment in early childhood learning—without this, learners and the community spend their resources catching up rather than developing the talents of their learners.

Education should engage the learner with exciting, relevant content and opportunities for learning through experience and doing. The curriculum should balance abstract and practical knowledge so that every learner can access high-quality knowledge and skills as well as vocational opportunities. Teachers should be able to add adapt and develop curriculum—it should not be "overprescribed" by the province.

Education should help learners understand how to be healthy and happy and support them in their efforts to develop and maintain their emotional, physical and mental well-being. Schools should recognize that learning takes place both in and outside of schools. We need to facilitate, enable and recognize learning in a variety of settings.

Education must be a partnership.

The education of Albertans should be a partnership of schools, parents and the wider community in a local area. Learners have a valuable role to play in contributing to the design of their own learning and in shaping the way their learning environment operates.

Every place of learning should be different and innovative, and we must find meaningful, yet effective, ways of holding schools to account for their performance that reward rather than stifle innovation and creativity.

Trust in our schools and education professionals must be fostered.

Every teacher should be a creative professional involved in the design of curricula and learning environments, and should be supported in their acquisition of appropriate skills to fulfill that role.
Decisions in education should respect the rights of learners as citizens.

Decisions about and in schools should be driven by evidence and research. Alberta needs to be world class in educational research if its schools are to lead the world in performance and success.

Decisions about schools need to be based on the outcomes of participatory democracy. Communities should be engaged in the work of their schools.

Making Learning Accessible

Schools need a curriculum that is accessible, authentic and valued by learners. An academic curriculum is valuable to many, but so too is apprenticeship, the creative arts, sports and many other outlets for learners' talents. Learners need choices, and resources should be linked to the choices learners make.

Schools, colleges and universities should be accessible, affordable and effective. Access and affordability for our postsecondary system are prerequisites for building Alberta's competitive advantage and essential if the links between schools and Alberta's postsecondary system are to be meaningful.

OUR SCHOOLS HAVE MANY CHALLENGES

We know that our schools, teachers and students face challenges—lack of resources, uneven access to broadband and technology, testing and its impacts on real learning—the list goes on. We need to return to first principles, secure agreement that these principles should be driving our thinking about our schools and then use these principles to drive decisions. We can't deal with all the issues in a single document. What we can do is establish the basis for future decisions.

Flowing from the principles outlined in the *Re-boot Alberta Education Charter* and informed through discussions that emerged in the Learning Our Way public dialogue the framework that follows will advance the vision of *Inspiring Action.*

Developed in collaboration with the international consensus panel, this document does not necessarily represent sanctioned Association policy nor does it carry the formal endorsement of any group or individual. Rather, the framework is offered as a point of departure for education partners to address the key policy decisions that need to be made in the months ahead. The document is organized around four dimensions:

- **Sustain and improve:** actions and strategies to continue to build on current successes
- **Redesign:** key longer-term processes requiring a rethinking of current structures and processes
- **Start:** immediate steps requiring attention within the next six months
- **Stop:** immediate steps that can taken within the next year

Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta—Can We Do It?

—Ken Chapman, Cambridge Strategies

From May 31 to June 2 *Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta* engaged about 700 Albertans in conversations on the following topic: Can we create the necessary economic, environmental, social and political adaptive capacity to respond to changes the 21st century will impose? The events, in Edmonton and Calgary, partnered the Alberta Teachers' Association with their Calgary and Edmonton locals, Literacy Alberta, the University of Calgary and Cambridge Strategies Inc.

The evening dialogues and day-long symposium featured renowned author, documentary filmmaker and syndicated journalist Gwynne Dyer; the author of the *Economics of Well-Being: Creating Genuine Wealth*, Mark Anielski; and UN and OECD Senior Advisor and adult literacy expert, Scott Murray.

Alberta is known as one of the wealthiest societies on earth, with one of the best education systems. Yet we face falling competitiveness, low productivity and a weak business culture for innovation. We live in challenging, changing and uncertain times. As Gwynne Dyer noted, Alberta is one of the few places on the planet with the human and natural resource capital, coupled with a high-quality infrastructure, to effectively adapt to these volatile times. But we must learn new, creative ways of living that are flexible, deliberative and prudent if we hope to create a responsible and sustainable economy, environment and society.

The *Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta* events drew diverse groups of people and revealed some creative tensions, one of which concerned how to draw public attention to the need for dramatic societal change. The consensus was that there would be no real change until the Alberta public feels a crisis of confidence about the future based on growing uncertainty and doubt. Mark Anielski noted a tension between building an economy based on production and consumption versus a society grounded in well-being and happiness as another challenging change barrier.

Scott Murray warned about the risk of believing in naïve ideas about creating a viable prosperous society. We cannot take for granted that our students' high literacy scores will translate into high literacy skills in our workforce. The jobs of the past required less literacy skill than the jobs of our future will require. Our workforce has traditionally lost literacy and essential skills over time. We will simply lose the economic competitive sweepstakes if we do not immediately and dramatically upgrade all these skills in our workforce.

Seeking to answer these questions is just one reason to keep the public dialogue going. Plans are now being formed for the next series of *Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta* events. For more information and to contribute to the conversation on *Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta*, visit www.learningourway.ca

A Framework for Informed Transformation

Students	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
	• a vision that embraces different learning styles and approaches to teaching so that every *student can learn, everywhere* • students' ability to learn according to their needs and interests—strengthen the capacity of the system to enhance this opportunity[11]	• the basis on which instructional design and programming are provided so that meaningful choice is not confused with *more* choice • high schools to build on the diverse talents and abilities of students as they become members of a civil society and contributors to a vibrant economy	• making support for diagnostic assessments of students an immediate provincial priority, especially during the early years of learning • supporting and sustaining networks of high school pilot projects in community-based learning and student leadership based on sound assessment practices[12]	• focusing on student achievement as primarily defined by externally predetermined metrics and start focusing on enhancing the talents of each student • labelling students and framing learning with modifiers—*students are students* and *learning is learning*;[13] a shared vision of transformation is more likely through talking about education without modifiers

11 Sahlberg advances this principle in Finland as a vision of a "safe learning community for all to discover personal talent" (Sahlberg, Forthcoming, p 176).

12 Examples of this cutting-edge work currently exist. The Alberta Assessment Consortium, the Alberta Teachers' Association and a team from the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, have developed exemplars of assessment indicators for engaged citizenship and community learning and leadership. Many school jurisdictions have made this a strategic priority. Two leading examples are Northern Lights School Division, with its Alberta Initiative for School Improvement projects, and Grande Yellowhead School Division, with its stewardship program at the Jasper Palisades Centre. A key principle underlying these initiatives is that engaged citizenship must move beyond simply promoting student activity in the community. "Currently, the vast majority of school programs that take the time to teach citizenship are the kind that emphasize either good character (including the importance of volunteering and helping those in need), or technical knowledge of legislatures and how government works. Far less common are schools that teach students to think about root causes of injustice or challenge existing social, economic, and political norms as a means for strengthening democracy." [Joel Westheimer. "On the Relationship Between Political and Moral Engagement," in *Getting Involved*, Oser, F and Veuglers, (Eds.) Rotterdam: Sense p 21.]

13 For example, the past decade of policy deliberations in developed nations and in this province has not been well served by the overuse of phrases such as *digital natives, digital learning* and *digital citizenship*. Typical of this phenomenon is the description of "a high number of Alberta teachers" as "digital immigrants" (Draft Education Sector Workforce Planning Framework for Action, March 23, 2009, p 1). While helpful at times to clarify some of the technological and social forces influencing education, such condescending claims, unsupported by the research, do not contribute to meaningful policy development. Further, the core value we need to share is that "learning is learning" and discounting or framing some education programs and learning as distinct from others (eg, special education) can be a distraction from the truism that "All learning has value. All learners have value" (Gary Bunch, "Key to Successful Education: A Perspective from Experience in the Field." *Revista Educacion Inclusiva.* no 1:91, p 98.

Curriculum	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
	• the primacy of teachers in designing curriculum based on provincial frameworks • the recognition of different learning styles and approaches so that all students can learn effectively • multiple-track choices for high school students (high school curriculum combined with modules from universities, colleges, apprenticeships, and other approved learning opportunities for optional components of the student's study program)	• the K–12 curriculum around the UNESCO pillars for learning—learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together[14] • processes for curriculum development based on four principles: (a) less is more in terms of curriculum objectives, (b) problem-based work rather than content-dominant design, (c) scope for each school to have significant local components and locally designed curriculum, and (d) professional teacher-based assessment for all levels	• transformative high school pilot projects focused on flexibility and building on the strengths of each student[15] • ensuring that all who leave school have at least Level 3 literacy skills (as determined by the International Adult Literacy Survey)	• using age-related grades to describe schooling as opposed to modular- or outcomes-based curriculum goals • excessive curriculum specificity and design inhibiting exploration, problem-based learning and enduring understanding

14 www.unesco.org/delors/fourpil.htm; also found in UNESCO publication *Learning: The Treasure Within.*

15 One possibility includes modular curriculum, whereby each student has to complete X modules of 35 hours to complete junior high school, middle school and high school, with no more than 60 per cent of these modules being required. This would permit flexibility and build on the strengths and talents of students. The focus here is on personalization of learning that recognizes the highly relational nature of learning and the need for a common foundation of learning for full participation in a civil society.

	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
Governance	• a public assurance paradigm in assessing and determining overall system responsiveness[16] • the primary responsibility of school boards to their respective local communities • the role of trustees by focusing their work on advocacy for public education and generative governance in a democratic society	• the governance of each school by sustaining stakeholder engagement, including parents, teachers, students, and local business and community members • school-based planning as a tool for enabling community-based accountability within a provincially articulated framework for the goals of learning	• focused school planning using the innovative processes of school-based planning[17] • to see the development of school district planning as a bottom-up process established by school trustees, informed by the broad system goals established by Alberta Education • improving the coordination of children's services, including an enhanced role for school boards[18]	• treating all schools as if they had the same "inputs," processes and resources— focus instead on the school as the primary unit of measurement and set realistic school-based challenging goals • requiring superintendent appointments to be approved by the minister of education

16 A key principle put forward in the early days of the Inspiring Education consultations was this principle, authored by the lead consultant, Russell Carr: "Given the growing complexity of the challenges we now encounter in public policy, a shift in governance paradigms is called for. We need to move from a public management paradigm focussed primarily on cost/benefit, control and accountability to a public assurance paradigm based on sustainability, networks and quality of life."

17 For example, see the pilot project completed in Livingstone Range School Division and other innovative approaches developed in the Association's Accountability Pillar Projects.

18 Following on the heels of the release of the *Setting the Direction Framework*, it is imperative that decisive steps be taken to ensure that the elusive goal of providing wrap-around services to Alberta children and youth is achieved. Cross-ministry efforts at coordination of these services will not work until accountability and governance at the community level are clearly articulated, developed and sustained.

Assessment and Accountability	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
	• allowing school authorities to develop accountability models that are more growth or value-added related rather than focused on achieving targets on standardized proficiencies[19] • the ongoing assessment of student progress by teachers through a comprehensive approach to building assessment capacity[20] • the use of triangulation of data by teachers as a basis for assessment of progress • self-assessment by students in developmentally appropriate ways as a key attribute of learners	• move to a public assurance paradigm • move to "intelligent accountability"[21] by replacing current provincewide testing with sampling of the student population • building the capacity for assessing a broader spectrum of learning (eg, affective development assessment tools for community engagement projects, service learning, workplace learning)	• special analysis of key issues using project-based research and development • using longitudinal studies to study effectiveness and efficiency • a self-declared provincial Alberta's Legacy Challenge to make Alberta the leading place on the continent that provides Aboriginal education that works • an international Innovation Summit every two years in partnership with industry and key education partners to profile Alberta's successes	• seeing all schools as equal in terms of input, resources and processes • ignoring the opportunity to include broadened metrics assessing school performance, such as the General Well-Being Impact Assessment[22] • confusing the ongoing necessity to collect student assessment data in the classroom with system-level accountability assessments and/or performance measures

19 Such models were key features on the Accountability Pillar Projects undertaken by the Association in Livingstone Range and Grande Prairie Public school divisions. A final report on these research projects, developed by Stephen Murgatroyd, will be available in the fall of 2010.

20 A key step in this regard would be a greatly expanded role and set of supports for the Alberta Assessment Consortium.

21 A term coined by Pasi Sahlberg, a Finnish educational researcher. See pasisahlberg.com.

22 Developed by Mark Anielski, these indicators of overall well-being and happiness represent the future of assessing education and community development efforts. See, for example, www.genuinewealth.net.

Planning	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
	• the formation of a high-level, multi-stakeholder Curriculum Policies Advisory Board to provide strategic leadership and advice to the ministry on innovation and transformation[23] • strategic foresight and capacity planning at the provincial level through international partnerships with high-performing jurisdictions; such a partnership would include periodic summits and ongoing exchanges of expertise on shared areas of interest, such as school leadership.	• three- to five-year planning and budgeting cycles (where fixed costs are built into three- and four-year projections)[24] • the provincial planning process so that the focus is on school-based planning linked to strategic priorities set by school authorities, informed by Alberta Education • processes for engaging business and community leaders in a public dialogue about the place of public education in shaping the future of the province[25]	• seeing school infrastructure as a community asset • a public–private partnership called the Alberta Foundation for Research in Learning to position the province as a leader in research in learning and to shape evidence-based planning and decision-making processes in Alberta • focus on building lateral capacity as opposed to centrally administered implementation models[26]	• seeing the planning process as a command-and-control mechanism and start to see it as a process of engagement, professional responsibility and outcome mapping • using centrally determined formulas as the driver for shaping equitable access to learning

23 While Alberta's K–12 education system is one of the leading jurisdictions globally, informed transformation will be possible only if a concerted effort is made to focus on the core design issue in public education: the curriculum. Drawing together leading innovators and forward-thinking Albertans (informed by strategic international partnerships) into such a board would help to ensure that we keep the promise we make to ourselves—that every child will learn everywhere.

24 This funding approach would mirror the current one taken for postsecondary institutions.

25 Currently the key education partners work largely in isolation in their efforts to involve these stakeholders in the goals of basic education. A much more collaborative approach is desirable and possible.

26 An exemplar of this approach was the social studies mentorship program introduced in the early 1980s. The program was based on the assumption that expertise existed in the field and should therefore be drawn upon, supported and enhanced—more than 120 teachers were seconded to support the new program. While few studies were completed that assessed the long-term impact of this initiative, the leadership capacity built over a generation of teacher leaders was unsurpassed.

Innovation	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
	• commit to sustain and expand AISI over the coming decade and invest additional funds for collaboration with the current key education partners[27] • investments in professional growth and teacher leadership development[28] • enhanced connections with teacher education programs to foster partnerships in innovation (eg, internship programs on advancing strategic goals such as building assessment capacity)	• AISI to take into account the findings of the international assessment of this unique world-class school improvement initiative • the opportunity to link AISI projects with other activities at the local, regional or provincial level—integrate innovation resources	• transformational changes to the nature of the school day and instructional time requirements to provide time for collaborative teacher planning and professional learning[29] • providing expanded opportunities for schools to be designated incubator centres focused on sustained innovations (eg, performing and creative arts, trades)	• seeing innovation as limited to specific projects rather than as an element that infuses the culture of the system • being risk-averse by encouraging a culture that sees periodic failure as an indicator of system growth • thinking that successful programs can be self-sustaining (eg, current innovations achieved through AISI) • thinking that teachers have time to plan and develop major innovations within the structure of current school calendars

27 This was a key recommendation of the external evaluation team that evaluated AISI over its previous three cycles. See *The Learning Mosaic: A Multiple Perspectives Review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)*. Led by Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley, the group included Robert Crocker, Brent Davis, Lori McEwen, Pasi Sahlberg, Dennis Sumara and Maureen Hughes. The expansion of AISI would also provide the opportunity to address a number of the other recommendations identified in this chart, such as building research capacity across the K–12 system.

28 Key dimensions of this work would be the principles for sustained distributed leadership outlined by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), who argue for strategies that focus on coherence, where "distributed leadership creates pools among classroom teachers from which future higher level leaders come. It entails developing leadership early among many, and not just the chosen few who show early potential" (p 96).

29 The Finnish model is one of several examples where these reforms have led to system improvements. Others are Sweden and South Korea. See Sahlberg, Forthcoming.

Technology	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
	• investments in teacher professional development to support collaborative inquiry and innovation	• procurement processes so that the province leverages the buying power of the jurisdiction for key technologies—iPads, SmartBoards, 3D display systems, etc • the provincial learning objects repository	• all schools built after January 1, 2011, will be wireless and fully equipped for project/problem-based learning • commissioning iPad and smartphone applications in math, language arts, literacy and science/ technology to support independent learning • giving students a right to use appropriate technology at appropriate times under the supervision of a teacher when in the classroom	• seeing technology as separate from curriculum and teaching; instead, consolidate current ministry technology planning and development within its curriculum functions • allowing school boards to prohibit the use of technology in the classroom without considering the longer-term implications for learning

Teachers and the Teaching Profession	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
	• enhancing the professional responsibility of teachers as public leaders in learning • sustained assistance for the Association's efforts to provide professional development and supports for school administrators • the role of teachers in advancing the work of the school within the community	• professional practice and accountability to include the profession's ability to set and maintain professional standards • current conceptualizations of educational leadership defined strictly by formal roles rather than by the progressive development of leadership capacity for all members of the profession	• use the proposed Alberta Foundation for Research in Learning to support graduate research in Alberta schools • sustain and support networks of innovative communities of practice through the Association's specialist councils	• viewing the school day as set in stone and instructional time as commensurate with success in students' attaining learning outcomes; instead, ensure that the school day permits time for lesson planning, assessment of student progress and collaborative professional development

|	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
Finance	• ensure that investments in the K–12 education system are seen as a strategic priority of the Alberta government • career counselling and guidance services as a community commitment to the well-being of children and youth	• creative collective bargaining practices that establish long-term arrangements that ensure stability and the time for long-term and coherent planning • funding to support the inclusion of students with special needs • funding for creative and arts programs, especially those requiring itinerant teachers or additional capital	• sustainable and predictable funding • enabling e-books and online curriculum material as the norm and phase out the bulk buying of textbooks • open-source curriculum resource development	• making financial plans on an annual basis • seeing funding as subject to the ebbs and flows of the domestic economy; it is an investment in that economy

Alberta Education and the Government of Alberta	Sustain And Improve	Redesign	Start	Stop
	• long-term financing • sustainable leadership: enhance interaction among various public-sector policies by strengthening the coherence of economic and social reforms across ministries[30]	• the structure of the ministry using the concept of generative governance • curriculum planning and development on the basis of "teach less, learn more" • collective bargaining processes focussed on enhancing student learning and professional practice conditions	• coordinating research so that Alberta has a focused R&D agenda for education, linked to policy, innovation and learning outcomes	• hiring to replace departing staff; rather, hire strategically as part of the task of reshaping the department around generative governance • taking on responsibilities better undertaken by other agencies (eg, the Association is a better place to deal with teacher certification; the coordination of wrap-around services with other ministries would be more effective through reconsolidated mandates of school boards)

30 This concept has been thoroughly elaborated in very practical terms in a number of publications. See Hargreaves, A, and D Fink. 2006. *Sustainable Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Hargreaves, A, and I Goodson. 2006. "Educational Chance Over Time? The Sustainability and Nonsustainability of Three Decades of Secondary School Change and Continuity." *Educational Administration Quarterly 42, no 1: 3–41*; and Hargreaves, A, and D Shirley. 2009. *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*. New York: Sage.

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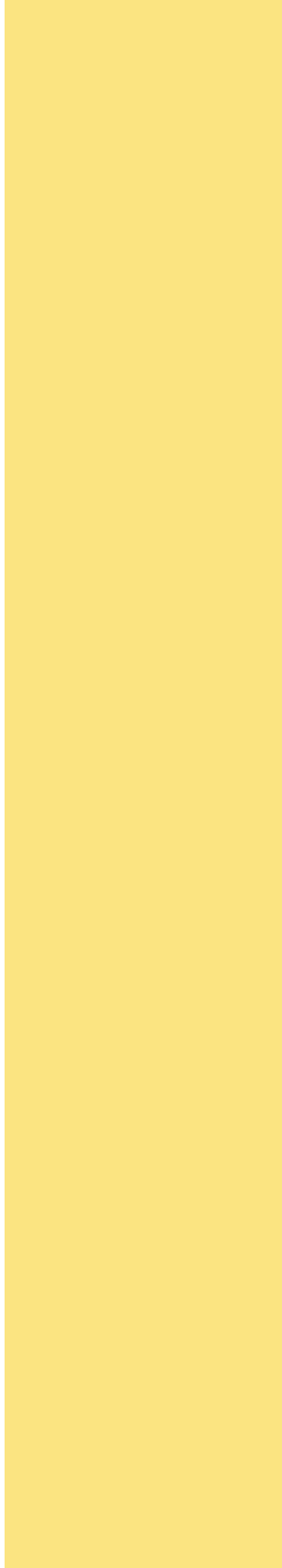
Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I may not reach them but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them, and try to follow them.

Louisa May Alcott

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