

## Internal Alberta Education (C1) Review – September 2014

### Introduction:

Following the release of the original C1 review report in June 2013, Education has continued its review of Alberta Education-initiated tasks that are perceived to impact teacher workload. In accordance with the commitments made in the original report, the Ministry has sought feedback both internally and externally to determine the tasks that might be eliminated or modified to reduce teacher workload. To some extent, the presence of Alberta Education facilitators at the C2 tables has helped to inform Ministry understanding of a number of workload issues which are perceived to have had a genesis in major Education initiatives such as Inclusive Education, Setting the Direction and *Inspiring Education*.

A significant and recurring observation amongst Education stakeholders – especially teachers, principals, and superintendents – is that the department must be more vigilant in its efforts to communicate frequently and with increased clarity about any initiatives where there are expectations or requirements for jurisdictional policy, procedure or other responses. While feedback from the field does not identify many areas where Alberta Education is encouraged to eliminate tasks, several suggestions for modification to department processes have been put forward.

In the June 2013 C1 report, Alberta Education identified changes that can be made to existing tasks that will contribute to the goal of reducing teacher workload. For some of these changes, the department indicated further review and analysis would be required before specific changes could be identified. Relevant updates to the change areas identified in the June 2013 C1 Report are referenced in the report below.

Further, stakeholders have brought to the attention of the department a number of additional challenges wherein department expectations are seen to impact teacher workload. A number of these are addressed below as well.

## 1. Curriculum Redesign

**Challenge:** Alberta Education launched a Request for Proposals for Curriculum Development Prototyping in August 2013. At this date, over 30 publicly funded school authorities from across the province, including teachers, are collaborating with the ministry in developing draft aspects of curriculum through prototyping that will contribute to Alberta Education’s development of new Kindergarten to grade 12 (K–12) Programs of Study in Wellness, Arts Education, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science and Language Arts. There will be a strong focus on literacy and numeracy as the foundation to every subject, at every grade level. As such, teachers will have new tools to support student learning. New provincial curriculum will have a common construct making it easier for teachers to plan across subjects. It will also be designed so teachers and students can focus on the most important learning outcomes. This will help address the long-standing concern expressed by teachers that the curriculum has been too difficult to cover in the time provided. More explicit focus on cross-curricular competencies will make it easier for teacher to reinforce concepts across subjects and provide students opportunities for real-world application of their knowledge. , many teachers and school administrators at the school authority level remain anxious about the pace of change and about how and where they will be able to access the professional supports necessary to implement changing curricula.

**Response:** Ministry feedback from school authorities indicates that the call for ongoing information and understanding about Curriculum Redesign remains strong. Curriculum Redesign is an initiative that incorporates many elements, including new Student Learning Assessments, Dual Credit, Programs of Study, etc. Prototyping is only the first phase in the development of new Programs of Study. Through Curriculum Development Prototyping, consortia of school boards are engaging with parents, teachers, the business community and educators from across the province to help develop options or possibilities for consideration by Alberta Education on programs of study to ensure they are suited for today’s classroom and student needs in a highly competitive global economy and society. 2016 has been identified only as a “target date for development.” If more time is needed, more time will be dedicated to development. Implementation dates for new programs of study will be determined in consultation with education partners based on availability of supports and teacher readiness to implement.

Alberta Education is committed to ensuring that teachers have the supports they need to effectively implement curriculum on an ongoing basis. As one significant component of this commitment, Alberta Education provides the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (ARPDC) with \$3 million per year to support implementation of curriculum.

## **2. Diploma Examination Accommodations and Exemption Processes**

**Challenge:** Teachers facilitating the accommodations for students writing diploma exams clearly identified that the process was challenging and time consuming. Focus group discussions were held to provide input regarding desired changes. In response to this feedback, Alberta Education has streamlined and simplified the application process, reducing the number of required forms and by requiring only one request for accommodations for all diploma exams written by the same student. Still, many teachers and principals have expressed continuing concerns about what they perceive to be burdensome requirements associated with the process.

**Response:** During the summer of 2013, the Ministry’s Assessment Sector built an Authority Assessment Contact list. Regular Ministry contact with the individuals on the Assessment Contact list has improved communication and understanding on a range of assessment issues.

## **3. Website-based requests for Field Testing of PAT and Diploma Examinations**

**Challenge:** Many Alberta teachers annually express interest in opportunities for Field Testing. There have been concerns that the process for making such requests takes too much teacher time – approximately 30 minutes for each such request.

**Response:** The Ministry has modified this process. Teachers should now find that the time to complete such requests has been reduced to approximately 10 minutes per participating teacher.

## **4. Scheduling of Diploma Examinations**

**Challenge:** Principals and teachers have expressed concern that the length of the diploma examinations scheduled in January and June (currently 8-9 days in each semester) detracts from time that could otherwise be used for instructional purposes. It has been recommended that the department consider adjusting the schedule with at least some diploma examinations scheduled on the same day.

**Response:** The Ministry is open to modifying the diploma examination schedule in accordance with the preferences of school authorities and could prepare a compressed schedule for 2015-16. The current schedule follows the advice arising from a survey administered by CASS in 2009. CASS has been invited to re-survey its members and advise the Ministry accordingly.

## 5. Grade Level of Achievement (GLA) Reporting

**Challenge:** Some teachers, principals, and system administrators believe that the department continues to require GLA reporting to Alberta Education. They express concern that this activity is redundant with other student assessment and evaluation requirements.

**Response:** Alberta Education no longer requires Grade Level of Achievement reporting by jurisdictions or schools. Provincial policy does not require that such information be reported either to the school authority or to the Ministry. This requirement was eliminated in 2011. The removal of the requirement for school authorities to report GLA to Alberta Education responds to the request to reduce administrative burden and compliance activities on schools.

The Guide to Education continues to reference an *Assessment as the Basis for Communicating Individual Student Achievement* requirement. This provision is intended to help ensure that information is effectively communicated to parents about what their child knows and can do in the courses being studied, how well their child is doing in those courses and the grade level(s) the child has achieved in relation to the grade levels of the provincial programs of study for language arts and mathematics. In a manner consistent with any related school authority policy requirements, teachers and principals are responsible for determining how such information should be communicated to parents.

## 6. 21st Century Assessment Practice in Schools

**Challenge:** School administrators and teachers in school authorities have been actively engaged in working with stakeholders to re-conceptualize an education system truly centered on the learner, where instructional practices are changing as teachers focus to a greater extent on building competencies in all students. Notwithstanding general stakeholder support for such changes, many school authority leaders indicate they are challenged in their efforts to shift stakeholder understandings about best practice in student assessment in schools. School authorities are seeking the support of the department and its education partners to improve public and stakeholder understanding about the kind of classroom assessment practices most likely to support all students in the achievement of the student learning outcomes identified in the Ministerial Order on Student Learning #001/2013.

**Response:** While the Ministry recognizes the responsibility and autonomy currently provided to school authorities in the development of local policy and procedures for student assessment and reporting, it also acknowledges the value of collaborative discussion amongst stakeholders in discussing this issue and considering possible remedies. Department staff is prepared to join with education partners to further discuss this matter. As an additional support, the Alberta Assessment Consortia is receiving \$1 million from the Ministry in 2014/2015 to support school authorities in building capacity for effective classroom assessment.

## 7. Individualized Program Plans

**Challenge:** Current requirements for Individualized Program Plans (IPPs) are reported as cumbersome and often not effective. Teachers have expressed that although they appreciate the system is evolving to ensure the creation of inclusive learning environments, they need more communication, and greater clarity from the Ministry about which students require an IPP and what is/is not required in an IPP. There is lingering concern amongst many teachers and principals about the need for “coding” of students with special needs. There has been a concern in many school authorities that the Standards for Special Education require an over focus on a determination of goals and objectives for student learning and too little focus on the identification of strategies that might lead to increased student success.

**Response:** Teachers must still identify and respond to the educational needs of individual students who require additional supports to be successful learners. One of the guiding principles of *Inspiring Education* is inclusive, equitable access. The Ministry acknowledges that some learners will require additional specialized supports to fully access learning opportunities.” To ensure individual learners receive the instructional supports they need to be successful, there should be a plan in place that identifies the student’s specific learning needs and the school’s commitment to meet these needs.

During this time of change, educators need to develop new ways of responding to the learning needs of each and every student. Moving forward, the Ministry recognizes it will be important to provide teachers with information, templates, tools, and resources that support them in providing inclusive, equitable access to learning for each and every student in their classroom. The department is committed to providing ongoing communication about the availability of information, templates, tools, and resources to support inclusion through the Education website.

Recently, through its development of a selection of sample IPP templates now available on the Education website, the Ministry made a significant effort to simplify the IPP preparation process and to improve the effectiveness of IPPs. The IPP templates have fewer sections and schools have several options from which to choose. Schools will have the opportunity to use the templates over the course of the 2013/2014 school year and to provide feedback. In addition to ensuring better alignment with the spirit of *Inspiring Education*, the new draft templates create a framework for teachers to use in planning additional supports that:

- build on student strengths and interests;
- use the programs of study as a starting point of instruction;
- focus on literacy and numeracy development; and
- ensure students have meaningful classroom-based experiences in inclusive learning environments.

The use of these draft templates is optional. However, using the templates will fulfill the current requirements related to Individual Program Plans, as outlined in the Standards for Special Education (2004), as well as reflect the shifts articulated in *Inspiring Education*.

To support the new *Education Act* coming into force, ministry work is underway to align corresponding regulations, policy, and Ministerial Orders, including the Standards for Special Education. Such changes will occur in relation to the anticipated implementation of the *Education Act* in 2015. Therefore, boards will have time to review their policies, procedures, and practices to ensure alignment.

## **8. Program Unit Funding Applications**

**Challenge:** In the June 2013 C1 Report, the Program Unit Funding (PUF) application process was identified as a task area that could potentially be modified in order to reduce teacher workload. The department committed to a review of the processes for school level completion of PUF applications.

**Response:** For the 2013/2014 school year, Education extended the deadline for school authorities to submit their PUF budgets from November 30, 2013 to March 5, 2014. This change has effectively eliminated the previous process that required authorities to resubmit new budgets during the course of the year (up to March 1) whenever children entered or exited their PUF programs. Now only one budget is required that captures all programming changes for the year. School administrators have commented that this new process has significantly reduced their workload around budget preparation and submission.

The department is currently reviewing the impact of totally eliminating the requirement for authorities to submit PUF budgets in the future. The projected implementation of any such changes is fall 2015.

Beginning 2014/2015, the PUF application process has been streamlined so that teachers and administrators do not need to organize and submit individual assessment reports on each child. This should reduce the time involved in gathering reports at the school level to send to Alberta Education.

## **9. Inspiring Education - Strategic Implementation Plan**

**Challenge:** Stakeholders observe that the vision expressed in *Inspiring Education* has been accompanied by a high volume of new initiatives, including Curriculum Redesign, Inclusion, FNMI- closing the gap, Task Force on Teaching Excellence, Teacher Workload committee work, Career Pathways, Dual Credit and High School Credentialing, High School Re-Design, Digitalization of Exams, etc.

Teachers and school administrators alike indicate a desire for greater support and direction from Alberta Education so as to ensure sufficient structure and guidance, particularly at the beginning implementation stages of those initiatives that have a provincial scope.

**Response:** Through the *Inspiring Education* public consultations in 2009, Albertans created a collective vision to modernize education to ensure every student experiences relevant, personalized and engaging learning opportunities. The Ministry acknowledges the need for the education system partners to be able to articulate a shared "way forward" with respect to the implementation of *Inspiring Education*, in a manner that incorporates the constructive support of all stakeholders committed to the changes we are seeking. Internally, Alberta Education has developed a Plan, one component of which is focused on enhancing coherency across the initiatives led by the department and on strengthening implementation supports to school authorities.

## **10. Information Sharing Strategy**

**Challenge:** School authorities have asked if the Ministry might play a stronger role in coordinating a streamlined approach to address school and system level information gathering and reporting needs. School authority staff believe that positive steps have been made in providing cross-Ministry services and supports for vulnerable students in the school population, but they think Alberta Education should extend its leadership role to ensure partners like Alberta Health, Child and Family Services, Justice and others work collaboratively and proactively with school authority staff to determine when and if information sharing is appropriate and thereafter to engage in joint planning to support students.

**Response:** The Ministry is committed to demonstrating department leadership by contributing and collaborating in the cross-ministry Information Sharing Strategy to develop resources and process to support information sharing to meet the health, education, and safety needs of Alberta children and families. Education recognizes that at the school authority level, effective information sharing means getting the right information to the right people at the right time, ensuring less duplication and delay and having the resources and training to make information sharing decisions.

The Ministry will support schools and school authorities with the development and sharing of resources and best practices created through the work of the Information Sharing Strategy unit. Guides and training resources will be made available to school authorities to ensure that programming and services for students are not reduced or delayed due to barriers in the information sharing process. A number of key resources are being prepared and will be shared with school authorities for the start of the 2014-15 school years with additional resources and training tools being made available on an on-going basis.

## **11. Documentation Requirements**

**Challenge:** School authorities indicate they experience a high frequency of requests for services or documentation from multiple sources, including other ministries, social agencies, post-secondary research centers, service organizations, parents, etc. School authorities cite as examples requirements that demand a heavy draw on staff time and resources, such as the tasks associated with field trip planning and preparation (requirements of the Ministry of Transportation regarding bus inspections, seating plans and other multiple forms necessary for field trips) and the expectations on school principals and teachers related to Occupational Health and Safety regulations, to name a couple. Superintendents have asked if the Ministry might play a stronger role in coordinating a more streamlined government approach to communication with schools, especially when requests or requirements are initiated by ministries other than Education.

**Response:** The Ministry is prepared to partner with school authorities and stakeholder organizations to consider the development of provincial guidelines/exemplars for documentation/reporting in areas of concern (e.g. Field trips, OHS) and to assist school authorities in meeting local needs while still satisfying legal/educational requirements.

## **12. Accountability Pillar:**

**Challenge:** Some school superintendents and some principals have expressed the view that the current number of measures in the Accountability Pillar inhibits school authority and community ability to communicate effectively about local context, local priorities, and local achievements. Additionally, some school authorities have expressed concern about the length of and time required to administer the Grade 4/7/10 student and teacher surveys.

**Response:** Over the last few years, Education has been working with stakeholders on evolving the existing accountability framework into an Assurance Model for school authorities that will reflect the strategic direction coming out of *Inspiring Education* and the new *Education Act*. The model is centered on student success and includes three main elements: accountability requirements, system priorities, and strategic engagement.

Currently, there are five school jurisdictions involved in the pilot of the Assurance Model through their planning-reporting processes. The pilot includes a streamlined set of requirements and provides additional flexibility with respect to planning and reporting. Participants are expected to implement a strong engagement process for stakeholders to inform planning and to integrate local and provincial data to provide a more complete picture of progress at the local level. The intent is to enhance school authority ownership, make the planning-reporting process more meaningful at the local level, and, ultimately, support continuous improvement in the education system.

### **13. Implementation plan for *Education Act*:**

**Challenge:** Stakeholders at the school authority level (particularly administrators at district level) have expressed considerable anxiety about the preparatory work required to successfully implement the new *Education Act*. They have been asking for increased Ministry direction and clarity in this regard.

**Response:** The Education Act received Royal Assent in December of 2012 and is anticipated to come into force on September 1, 2015, along with its accompanying regulations and Ministerial Orders. Before that happens and to ensure a smooth transition from the current School Act to the new Education Act, the ministry must align corresponding policies and other direction-giving instruments that support and guide the education system. The education system must also align its policies and procedures to align with the Education Act, regulations, and other direction-giving instruments.

Significant work is required both within the ministry and for the education system in preparing for implementation of the Education Act and the corresponding regulations and policies. Initial discussions have taken place on this topic with the Alberta School Boards Association. Other stakeholders will also be invited to participate in future discussions over the next few months. The ministry is committed to ensuring a collaborative approach that supports the education system and stakeholders with their respective implementation responsibilities.

### **14. Specialized Services for Students with Visual Impairments:**

**Challenge:** To comply with Treasury Board and Legislative Services policy, school superintendents or designates must approve specialized equipment loan agreements. This requirement assigns the financial liability if specialized equipment is lost or damaged.

**Response:** This requirement was modified effective August 2014, to require only that superintendents sign a transmittal letter once every 3 years whereby they accept financial responsibility for the specialized equipment on loan to their jurisdiction. This change represents an improvement from the requirement for multiple signings annually to just one signing every three years.

## 15. High School Redesign

**Challenge:** Many teachers in Alberta schools have long been frustrated by teaching and learning constraints they believe have arisen from school and timetabling structures associated with the Carnegie Unit. Under the Carnegie model, Alberta high schools have traditionally been required to offer 25 hours of face-to-face instruction to earn a course credit. However, a shift in focus of contemporary education systems on competency-based pathways (or demonstrating learning), which see students earning credits for demonstrating understanding or mastery, has led to a reconceptualization of the relevance of the Carnegie Unit in 21st century learning environments.

**Response:** In September 2013, 96 Alberta schools began a journey to bring to life the vision and policy shifts articulated in *Inspiring Education* by building on the learnings of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project and other High School Completion projects. Effective September 2014, approximately 100 schools are participating in the pilot. The Moving Forward with High School Redesign initiative provides participating Alberta high school communities the opportunity to explore changes in program organization and delivery with the removal of the 25-hour per credit requirement (Alberta's adaptation of the Carnegie Unit) for funding purposes, a process which has represented a long-standing workload concern for teachers and school based administrators.

Administrators, teachers, students, and parents in participating schools are rethinking and redesigning their environments to create flexible, student-centered approaches to 21st century learning. Teachers in these schools are encouraged to be innovative, to challenge themselves and each other, and to be creative. They are empowered to make meaningful decisions about matters of instructional practice including how learning experiences are organized, when they should occur and for how long they should extend. This has allowed teachers to respond in a tangible way to the emerging learning needs and interests of students, and to their local context.

High school redesign is about leadership that empowers teachers as decision makers. Findings from this work include a noted increase in teacher collaboration to create relevant and authentic learning opportunities for students, increased use of data to inform their work, increased sharing of resources and an increase in teacher engagement and professional efficacy.