

The Principal Quality Practice Guideline: Promoting Successful School Leadership in Alberta



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Alberta has earned an international reputation for excellence in education. The contributions of principals in fostering commitment, collaboration and cooperation among community members are key factors in this achievement. In recent years, the duties and expectations of the principal have expanded and become increasingly complex. As a consequence, all school leaders need to acquire sophisticated knowledge and develop the skills that research and experience have concluded are necessary for effective practice. The Principal Quality Practice Guideline (PQPG) takes into account the leadership responsibilities and expectations that principals face today and will face for the foreseeable future.

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FOREWARD

Alberta's Commission on Learning (ACOL) made 95 recommendations to government in its report, *Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds*, released in October 2003. Recommendation 76 identified the need to develop a principal quality practice standard and to identify the knowledge, skills and attributes required of principals.

The Commission noted that a principal quality practice standard with clearly stated knowledge, skills and attributes should form the basis for:

- recruiting principals,
- preparing school principals and
- assessing each principal's performance.

Education reviewed the Commission's recommendation, current provincial legislation and policies related to the role of the school principal, Canadian and international school leadership research literature regarding the competencies required of principals, as well as the standards of practice or performance expected of school principals in their complex and multi-faceted roles as school-based instructional and education leaders.

Based on this review, Education believes that the opportunities for all students to learn and achieve expected learning outcomes would be further enhanced if a document were created that outlines the competencies for the quality practice of Alberta principals.

Presently, provincial legislation does not specify the competencies required of a school principal in Alberta; it only requires that a principal be a certificated teacher. Section 19 of the *School Act (Act)* states that a school board shall designate a number of teachers as principals and assign a principal to each school. Section 20 of the *Act* outlines current legislated duties and obligations of the principal of a school. Section 95 of the *Act* allows a board to designate a teacher to be an acting principal for a period of not more than one year.

DOCUMENT DEVELOPMENT

In June 2005, a stakeholder advisory committee was formed and, through a process of roundtable discussion and consensus building, developed a draft Principal Quality Practice document outlining the dimensions and relevant descriptors of a principal's role.

The Alberta Commission on Learning Recommendation 76 Stakeholder Advisory Committee (Committee) referred to the work of the ASBA, ATA, CASS, AHSCA and the United States Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and concluded that the research literature and Education stakeholders appear to agree that individuals designated as principals require a broad repertoire of competencies to successfully fulfill their complex and critical roles within the education system.

In May 2006, a draft of the Principal Quality Practice document was sent to all school principals, superintendents of schools, school boards, school council chairpersons and stakeholder groups for their review and comments. A field review response draft of the document was made available on Education's website for public comment.

Regional focus groups were held throughout the province in fall 2006. Principals employed in public and private schools, teachers, school council members, school superintendents, and school trustees and key stakeholder groups were invited to attend. The Committee reviewed and revised the draft Principal Quality Practice document on the basis of the feedback collected. In December 2008, the Committee supported Education's issue of the document as the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline*; Education will issue the document in Spring 2009.

Education, in cooperation with its stakeholders, is developing a School Leadership Framework to establish supports for the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* that will serve to promote its future use as a provincial requirement.

INTRODUCTION

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

The role of school principal has evolved over the past half-century. As schools became larger, the traditional role of the school principal as head- or principal-teacher responsible for teaching and learning within a school was expanded with the addition of greater administrative responsibilities. The principal's role has become more focused on the management of teaching and learning within the school, consistent with local school board and provincial policies and directions.

Policymakers assumed that significant, positive teaching experience generally provided individuals with sufficient preparation to assume the office of school principal. Therefore, Alberta, like most other Canadian provinces, required only that an individual designated as a school principal be a certificated teacher. However, some Alberta school authorities increasingly recognized that teaching qualifications and successful teaching experience alone were insufficient to prepare individuals to serve as school principals. Over time, school boards have increasingly required that individuals interested in being considered for the principalship hold post-graduate diplomas or degrees in education administration or leadership.

To ensure that all students across Alberta have the best possible opportunities to learn, Education maintains responsibility for key provincial standards and policies, such as approved programs of study, provincial achievement and diploma testing programs and the development of the *Teaching Quality Standard Ministerial Order*. In the interest of ensuring the best possible quality of basic education for all Alberta students, Education also strengthened the accountability of school authorities, schools and teachers.

In this context, the responsibilities of principals and key competencies they require have significantly increased. School mission and goal development, issue identification, priority-setting, school improvement planning, financial and human resource management and development, information gathering and data-based decision-making, public and community relations and educational accountability and reporting system requirements are now key expectations of the Alberta school principal.

Moreover, as part of an accountable and open education system, the school principal is required to focus more than ever on the core purpose of the school – providing all students with the best possible opportunities to learn. Consequently, school principals must have a deep and thorough knowledge of teaching and learning so that they are able to serve as instructional, educational and organizational leaders focused on the school's core purpose.

This PQPG represents a first step in a process to develop a framework for quality school leadership in Alberta. It includes a statement on Principal Quality Practice and seven leadership dimensions, with supporting descriptors, reflecting the Alberta context. The PQPG is to be used as a basis for many activities including: principal preparation and recruitment, principals' self-reflection and daily practice, principals' initial and ongoing professional growth and principal supervision, evaluation and practice review. It also provides a reference for faculties of education in developing and delivering principal preparation programs, for teachers and vice-principals who are preparing for school leadership roles, for beginning principals in their efforts to meet stakeholder expectations and for superintendents in their supervision and evaluation of principals.

PRINCIPAL QUALITY PRACTICE AND LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS

Principal Quality Practice

The principal is an accomplished teacher who practices quality leadership in the provision of opportunities for optimum learning and development of all students in the school.

Principal Quality Practice applies to all formal school leaders, including assistant and vice principals. In accepting the legislated and school authority mandated leadership responsibilities, all school leaders are expected to commit to fulfilling the leadership dimensions contained in the PQPG throughout their careers. The leadership dimensions and their descriptors are interrelated and link to school leaders' daily practice; however, they are not presented in rank order. Reasoned, evidence-based, professional judgment must be used to determine whether these leadership dimensions are demonstrated by a school leader in a given context.

1. Leadership Dimension - Fostering Effective Relationships

The principal builds trust and fosters positive working relationships, on the basis of appropriate values and ethical foundations, within the school community -- students, teachers and other staff, parents, school council and others who have an interest in the school.

Descriptors

The principal:

- a) acts with fairness, dignity and integrity
- b) demonstrates a sensitivity to and genuine caring for others and cultivates a climate of mutual respect
- c) promotes an inclusive school culture respecting and honouring diversity
- d) demonstrates responsibility for all students and acts in their best interests
- e) models and promotes open, inclusive dialogue
- f) uses effective communication, facilitation, and problem-solving skills
- g) supports processes for improving relationships and dealing with conflict within the school community
- h) adheres to professional standards of conduct.

2. Leadership Dimension - Embodying Visionary Leadership

The principal collaboratively involves the school community in creating and sustaining shared school values, vision, mission and goals.

Descriptors

The principal:

- a) communicates and is guided by an educational philosophy based upon sound research, personal experience and reflection
- b) provides leadership in keeping with the school authority's vision and mission
- c) meaningfully engages the school community in identifying and addressing areas for school improvement
- d) ensures that planning, decision-making, and implementation strategies are based on a shared vision and an understanding of the school culture
- e) facilitates change and promotes innovation consistent with current and future school community needs
- f) analyzes a wide range of data to determine progress towards achieving school goals

- g) communicates and celebrates school accomplishments to inspire continuous growth.

3. Leadership Dimension - Leading a Learning Community

The principal nurtures and sustains a school culture that values and supports learning.

Descriptors

The principal:

- a) promotes and models life-long learning for students, teachers and other staff
- b) fosters a culture of high expectations for students, teachers and other staff
- c) promotes and facilitates meaningful professional development for teachers and other staff
- d) facilitates meaningful parental involvement and ensures they are informed about their child's learning and development.

4. Leadership Dimension - Providing Instructional Leadership

The principal ensures that all students have ongoing access to quality teaching and learning opportunities to meet the provincial goals of education.

Descriptors

The principal:

- a) demonstrates a sound understanding of current pedagogy and curriculum
- b) implements strategies for addressing standards of student achievement
- c) ensures that student assessment and evaluation practices throughout the school are fair, appropriate and balanced
- d) implements effective supervision and evaluation to ensure that all teachers consistently meet the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard
- e) ensures that appropriate pedagogy is utilized in response to various dimensions of student diversity
- f) ensures that students have access to appropriate programming based on their individual learning needs
- g) recognizes the potential of new and emerging technologies, and enables their meaningful integration in support of teaching and learning
- h) ensures that teachers and other staff communicate and collaborate with parents and community agencies, where appropriate, to support student learning
- i) supports the use of community resources to enhance student learning.

5. Leadership Dimension - Developing and Facilitating Leadership

The principal promotes the development of leadership capacity within the school community -- students, teachers and other staff, parents, school council for the overall benefit of the school community and education system.

Descriptors

The principal:

- a) demonstrates informed decision making through open dialogue and consideration of multiple perspectives
- b) promotes team building and shared leadership among members of the school community

- c) facilitates meaningful involvement of the school community, where appropriate, in the school's operation using collaborative and consultative decision-making strategies
- d) identifies and mentors teachers for future educational leadership roles.

6. Leadership Dimension - Managing School Operations and Resources

The principal manages school operations and resources to ensure a safe and caring, and effective learning environment.

Descriptors

The principal:

- a) effectively plans, organizes and manages the human, physical and financial resources of the school and identifies the areas of need
- b) ensures that school operations align with legal frameworks such as: provincial legislation, regulation and policy; as well as school authority policy, directives and initiatives
- c) utilizes principles of teaching, learning and student development to guide management decisions and the organization of learning.

7. Leadership Dimension - Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context

The principal understands and responds appropriately to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting the school.

Descriptors

The principal:

- a) advocates for the needs and interests of children and youth
- b) demonstrates a knowledge of local, national, and global issues and trends related to education
- c) assesses and responds to the unique and diverse community needs in the context of the school's vision and mission
- d) advocates for the community's support of the school and the larger education system.