

# Setting the Direction: Towards a System Re-design

Phase 2 – 2009

Discussion  
Guide



we engage  
engager

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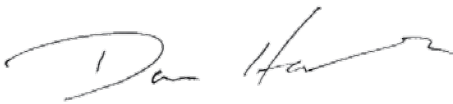
## Message from the Minister of Education

As Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta enters the second phase of consultation, I have the good fortune to be Minister of Education at such a dynamic time for education in Alberta.

During Phase 1 consultations, approximately 3,500 Albertans provided insight into vision and principles for a new special education framework in Alberta. Contributions were clear, consistent and direct. Teachers echoed the passion of parents who echoed the passion of school board trustees and so on. All spoke of systemic change where all students are provided with the supports, programs and services they need to be successful. Input set a positive tone to allow the Steering Committee, Stakeholder Working Group and Project Team to think constructively to develop the vision, mission and principles for this initiative and options for changes to the system.

Phase 2 will provide Albertans with an opportunity to consider a system that nurtures the vision and principles while supporting an increasingly diverse student population. During this phase, you will clearly identify what the preferred future looks like in relation to the vision, mission and principles. This is a time for you to roll up your sleeves and contribute further insight into system re-design. There are many ways to be involved in Phase 2 consultations as individuals or groups representing a particular interest or segment of the population.

I am looking forward to working with you as Setting the Direction and other Education initiatives inform and influence how we serve Alberta's children and students.



**Dave Hancock, QC**

Minister, Alberta Education

P.S. As Phase 2 of Setting the Direction gets underway, Phase 1 of Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans will begin. Setting the Direction and Inspiring Education are about listening to as many points of view as possible and learning from community input into the projects. I want to assure you that your contributions to Setting the Direction will not be lost. Outcomes from Setting the Direction will be integrated into Inspiring Education to allow for a more complete conversation about the education system as a whole and what this means for the 21st century learner.





## Purpose of this Discussion Guide

Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta is a major Alberta Education project designed to create a new framework that will help students with special needs receive the education necessary to be successful. Phase 1 of the project reviewed the effectiveness of our current approach and then focused on defining a vision and principles to guide the future direction of special education in Alberta. Input was received from 3,500 individuals and groups in public consultation sessions and through online responses to the Phase 1 discussion guide. Albertans told us that there are many challenges in understanding and supporting the abilities and needs of an increasingly diverse educational population.

Input from Phase 1 participants has been summarized in a *Phase 1 Community Consultation What We Heard Summary Report* document. This document is available online or in print through [www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca](http://www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca) or by calling 780-643-0834 or e-mailing [setting.direction@gov.ab.ca](mailto:setting.direction@gov.ab.ca).

This discussion guide is intended to shape our conversations with Albertans in Phase 2. We'd like you to answer the questions in each section, and return the Guide to us. Details about our consultation sessions, and the ways in which you can be involved, are on page 21.

## Glossary of Terms

**Assessment** means the ongoing process of collecting information about students using a number of formal and informal methods across a variety of domains relevant to performance (behavioural, communicational, intellectual, learning or physical characteristics) to develop and implement appropriate programming to support student learning.

**Accessible** means readily available to the individual or group of interest, with minimal constraints or barriers and may apply to information, knowledge, services and classroom resources.

**Assistive Technology for Learning (ATL)** is defined as the devices, media and services used in learning environments to overcome barriers for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, speech, learning or behavioural special needs to actively engage in learning and to achieve their individual learning goals.

**Authorized learning and teaching resources** means instructional and student resources that have been reviewed by Alberta Education and found to support the Programs of Study.

**Children and Youth Services** means the Alberta Department of Children and Youth Services.

**Collaboration** is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more individuals or organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to: a definition of mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards.

**Curriculum** is a broad term that includes the Programs of Study, authorized learning and teaching resources, and provincial assessments.

**Differentiated instruction** means creating multiple paths so that students of different abilities, interest or learning needs experience equally appropriate ways to learn, use and present concepts.

**Disability** is used from the standpoint of the Supreme Court of Canada having established that a disability may be the result of a physical limitation, an ailment, a perceived limitation or a combination of all these factors. The focus is on the effects of the preference, exclusion or other type of differential treatment experienced by the person and not on proof of physical limitations or the presence of an ailment.



**Diversity and diverse learners** describes the wide range of abilities, interests, backgrounds, languages, cultures and religions reflected in Alberta’s classrooms today. Diversity has become one of the defining features of Alberta’s schools.

**Early Childhood Services (ECS)** refers to a continuum of programming that is developmentally appropriate and meets the diverse needs of young children and their families. Kindergarten refers specifically to the education program for children in the year prior to Grade 1 and is a part of the ECS continuum. In Alberta, the term “child” rather than “student” is used for learners in ECS programs.

**Education** means the Alberta Department of Education.

**Education specialist** means a teacher with expertise and experience in a specific field of education, such as reading instruction or teaching children with visual impairments, who supports other teachers.

**Educational success** means students have acquired a range of skills and competencies needed to become the best they can be as adults, including interpersonal skills, academic skills, vocational competency, citizenship and health.

**Framework** in this document means an organized set of interrelated ideas including vision, mission and principles for policy, accountability and funding to support the future of special education in Alberta.

**Health and Wellness** means the Alberta Department of Health and Wellness.

**Home Education Program** means a program where a parent assumes the responsibility for the planning, the provision and the evaluation of an education program for their child in Grades 1 – 12. Home education is conducted in association with a public school board or an accredited private school.

**Inclusive education** refers to system-wide values that promote belonging and create the best learning opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities.

**Individualized Program Plan (IPP)** means a concise plan of action designed to address students’ special education needs, and is based on diagnostic information which provides the basis for intervention strategies.

**Learner** describes anyone who is learning; it includes students and children in ECS programs, and can include teachers, parents and others.

**Learning coach** means a mentor and facilitator who engages in personalized interaction with the teacher, and uses effective communication and feedback tools, works to create a sense of community, provides support and encouragement, and enhances learning in the school.

**Learning team or Support team** means all school authorities will adopt system-wide values that promote belonging and create the best learning opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities. This concept does not limit student and parental choice of school authority or school placement.

**One inclusive education system** means all school authorities will adopt system-wide values that promote belonging and create the best learning opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities. This concept does not limit student and parental choice of school authority or school placement.

**Paraprofessional** means a trained worker who works under the supervision of a professional but does not have professional credentials; in education paraprofessionals are usually referred to as teacher assistants or educational assistants.

**Personalized learning** focuses on the strengths of the student and addresses not just what the student needs to do but also what the system needs to do to promote better learning opportunities



for each particular student. A personalized learning profile identifies learning needs and the resources and supports needed to meet them.

**Programs of Study** identify what students are expected to learn and do in all subjects and grades and include both broad and specific outcomes.

**Program assessments** are measures to determine the degree to which students have achieved the outcomes of the Programs of Study.

**Province** means the Government of Alberta and in those instances where we mean Alberta Education, reference will be made specifically to Alberta Education.

**Resources** are things that can be used for support or help and can be drawn on when needed. Resources can include learning and teaching resources, human resources, and financial resources.

**School administration** means the school principal, assistant principal and other staff members in administrative roles.

**School authority** is a term that includes public and separate school jurisdictions, Francophone school authorities, charter and private schools.

**Student** in Alberta refers to learners in grades 1 to 12.

**SuperNet** is a government initiative designed to provide high-speed, broadband access to public facilities (and through service providers, to businesses and residences) in Alberta communities.

**Support team or Learning team** means a team that consults and shares information relevant to the individual student's education and plans, implements and evaluates special education programming and services as required. The team may consist of the classroom teacher, parents, students (where appropriate), other school and jurisdiction staff aware of the students' needs, and others as required.

**System re-design** means an evaluation of the existing design by breaking it down into its basic building blocks. These are analyzed to determine whether they continue to be relevant for learning in the future, or if they need alteration or replacement.

**Teaching Quality Standard** refers to Ministerial Order (#016/97) Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta, which includes descriptors of skills knowledge and attributes required by teachers. Link - <http://education.alberta.ca/media/311294/421pdf>.

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** is a set of principles that guide the design of flexible learning environments, resources and activities to accommodate individual learning differences. UDL is intended to increase access to learning by reducing physical, cognitive, intellectual and organizational barriers to learning, as well as other obstacles. A UDL approach calls for creating curriculum, learning environments and resources from the outset that provide multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge; multiple means of expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know; and multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

**Wraparound** is a philosophy of care that includes a definable planning process involving the child/ student and family that results in comprehensive, coordinated supports and services to achieve improved learning outcomes and improved quality of life. Coordinated services and supports, offered through multiple professionals and agencies that are school based and/or school linked, might include health and mental health related services, mentoring, before/after school programs, and other supports and services for parents and families. "Full service schools" is another term often linked to a wraparound approach.



## Introduction

Phase 1 of the Setting the Direction consultation process yielded very valuable input. It is important to note that Albertans told us that parts of our current system work well and should not be lost in a new framework. There was an appetite for considerable change and improvement in the system and we have identified the following elements as key ingredients of our new future:

- We still need to guarantee disability\* rights of those individuals with mental and physical disabilities as set out in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and in the *Alberta Humans Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*.
- We will continue to need assessment of students' abilities and needs, so we can understand their educational implications, and design the best learning opportunities for students in safe and caring schools.
- We will still need to collect meaningful data to enable us to track student learning, supports and services and to identify training and resource needs of the learning team, school authorities and province.
- We must continue to work collaboratively for the best learning opportunities for the individual student and for the best learning opportunities for all students.
- We will continue to need policy direction, standards, and accountability measures that reinforce our vision and principles.
- We must continue to support children in Early Childhood Services programs and ensure smooth transitions into the Grade 1 to 12 system.

The Phase 1 consultation message was clear: to address the concerns raised by Albertans, minor changes to the current system of special education will not be acceptable to our stakeholders. A new framework will need to recognize and respond to diversity across students, schools and school authorities in the province. While considering the possibilities for a new future as outlined in this document we must also take into account that change of this magnitude will have impact across all aspects of the education system – and that no one stakeholder, even the Government of Alberta, has the ability to create systemic change single-handedly.

It is a generally held perception in Alberta that special education focuses on individual student deficits, rather than their educational strengths and abilities, and identification is usually based on failure to succeed in the classroom. There is also the perception that when students do not learn in the same way as the majority of their peers, they are somehow considered to have faults. The approach has been to use a health model focusing on medical diagnosis (which may or may not have educational relevance), translate these disabilities into special education codes, and allocate funding and other resources based on the codes. Students are then labeled by their disabilities, a practice that has been described as both demeaning and limiting. Currently in special education, if a student is not labeled, the needed resources and accommodations may not be available. We heard that too much time and money is spent on diagnosing, assessing and coding students for funding purposes and this diverts resources away from meeting the educational needs of students.

Funding came up repeatedly in Phase 1 – issues of inadequate funding, inflexible funding or problematic access to funding. Creating a revised funding mechanism will be a key element of the new framework that comes forward in Phase 3, but before we propose funding allocations, we felt it was critical to get agreement on the elements of our proposed future. Albertans will be invited to respond to the Framework in Phase 3 by addressing how we might spend the money available to us more effectively for students.

\*The presence of the word “disability” in our materials has been raised as a potential issue. We appreciate the fact that this word may reinforce a perception of those with special needs that is inconsistent with the direction proposed in this document. We do, however, use the word consciously. Legal advice has recommended that we continue to use the term disability as a precaution to ensure protection under Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees equality to all, including those with disabilities (see page 7). The use of the word disability in our materials, is not designed in any way to diminish the intent of this discussion guide which imagines a single educational system responsive to the distinctive needs of **all** students.



Participants in the Phase 1 consultations described the current Alberta education system as ineffective or deficient in supporting education for ALL students. The perspectives gained from Phase 1 participants described the special education system as distinct from, and running parallel to, the larger Alberta education system. Albertans stated that it is not possible to create a new framework for special education in isolation. Therefore, our work in Phase 2 is to start thinking about those elements, or building blocks, that contribute to one education system and identify those things that need to change to support education for all students.

In addition, we must also be mindful that our education system supports Early Childhood Service (ECS) and transitioning beyond the Grade 1-12 system. We cannot think about change or possibilities for a new future without taking these important aspects of education into consideration. Phase 2 of this project is called *Setting the Direction: Towards a System Re-design* – and it starts with a vision.

## Setting the Direction: Vision, Mission, Principles

The Phase 1 process has made it clear that improvements to the current system will not be adequate. Therefore, the Vision and Mission and Principles, derived from the Phase 1 consultation, for the Setting the Direction initiative are:

### Setting the Direction Vision

One inclusive education system where each student is successful.

**One inclusive education** system means all school authorities will adopt system-wide values that promote belonging and create the best learning opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities.

### Setting the Direction Mission

Build one inclusive education system that makes it possible for all students to belong, and where the best learning opportunities are provided for each student. This system will be based on integrity, respect for difference and a focus on each student's assets.

### Setting the Direction Principles

Working with the principles of Alberta Education, which are: Student Centred, Leadership, Accessible, Responsive, Innovative, Collaborative, Equitable and Accountable, Setting the Direction's principles are:

#### **Alberta Education and its stakeholders believe:**

- That all students can learn and be successful.
- That when all stakeholders work together in a collaborative and purposeful way, we accomplish more for students.
- In inclusion as a value system that promotes belonging and creates the best learning opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities. Inclusion goes beyond the idea of classroom integration.

#### **Alberta Education and its stakeholders value:**

- An education system that is fair, appropriately-resourced and offers equitable opportunities to all students.
- Diversity as a positive and enriching aspect of Alberta's education system.
- The learning that happens for everyone when students with disabilities are effectively included in school life.





- Parents as vital members of the learning team who contribute important expertise and insights.

#### **Alberta Education and its stakeholders commit to:**

- Working together for the success of each student in an inclusive education system.
- Ensuring students and families are respected and supported so they can be successful.
- Ensuring teachers and school systems are supported so they are able to create successful learning opportunities.
- Being learner-centred in all of our decisions.

These statements of Vision, Mission and Principles for Setting the Direction will guide all of our work on this initiative, and will inform the development of the new framework in Phase 3. Another broad-based initiative is underway: *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans*, and it, like *Setting the Direction*, is about listening to as many points of view as possible and learning from community. While *Setting the Direction* has a vision, mission and principles for special education, *Inspiring Education* will invite a conversation about a vision, mission and principles for the 21st Century learner. To ensure that these projects dovetail, outcomes from *Setting the Direction* will be integrated into *Inspiring Education*.

### **Overarching principles to consider for one inclusive educational system**

There are some legal limits on the process of educational change but the proposed redesign of the system described in this discussion guide falls within those parameters. Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees equality to all, including those with disabilities. This constitutional mandate applies to all public and separate schools. These same rights of equality for people with disabilities are guaranteed in the *Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*, and that statute applies to all schools - be they public or private. Thus educational services must be provided to all students in a way that does not discriminate against persons with disabilities. Given the wide range of school authorities in Alberta and the high value placed on educational choice, we should have a system that supports choice for everyone. Thus the single inclusive system approach to education should be embraced in all Alberta schools. The proposed single inclusive education system is also consistent with the statutorily sanctioned value of diversity, currently stated in the *Alberta School Act*. This re-design of the educational system is the logical extension of both the letter and the spirit of the *Canadian Constitution and the laws of Alberta*.



## Five Building Blocks for Change

When we talked with Albertans (either in person or through the website) in Phase 1, they said that there are a number of things that needed to be considered in a new future for an inclusive education system. We have taken your good advice, along with the advice of academic experts in this field and an analysis of the research that exists in this discipline and developed what we believe are FIVE critical building blocks that could herald positive and important change in Alberta. These are:

1. Setting High Expectations for ALL Students
2. Using Strengths and Abilities to Drive Programming
3. Building Capacity for School-Based Staff and the Learning Team
4. Collaborating for Learner Success
5. Accessing Learning Resources and Technologies for the 21st Century

Within each of these “building blocks”, a desired outcome (or a description of a future state) is included. In addition, there is in each section, a collection of ideas that could be considered as ways to make the change possible and to deliver on the vision for one inclusive education system. In time, these could become *strategies* to arrive at the outcome, but at the moment, they are *possibilities* for you to consider.

A system redesign, like a house redesign, will require a bit of demolition and a lot of planning and building. We are in Phase 2 of our planning and building.

The results of the Phase 2 discussions will inform the new framework (Phase 3) - one that consists of Vision, Mission, Principles, Outcomes and Strategies – along with Policy, Accountability and Funding mechanisms that will need to be in place in order to get the strategies accomplished.

### 1. Setting High Expectations for ALL Students

#### **Desired outcome:**

All students in Alberta will be considered valuable enough to have provincial expectations set for them. The basis of programming for all students, whatever their particular ability, need or gift, will be the Alberta curriculum. The focus will be on working with partners to ensure that teachers are able to use the provincial curriculum to develop programming to meet the specific needs of their students.

#### **Possible ways to achieve this outcome:**

What follows are eight ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*



**i. Develop a more flexible definition of educational success for all students.**

We need to redefine educational success so that it includes more than academic achievement and will also support the opportunity for students to achieve to their full potential.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**ii. Set expectations for all students within the Alberta curriculum.**

Alberta Education tells schools what students must learn. The curriculum is made up of the Programs of Study (what has to be learned), authorized learning resources (tools to bring the programs to life) and program assessments (testing). Like everyone else, students with special education needs should be working on learning outcomes based on the Alberta curriculum, even if those need to be adapted for them.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**iii. Develop a system that emphasizes students' strengths and potential rather than limits and deficits.**

Each student across the province deserves to be considered as an individual, with particular strengths and abilities. Every student should have a program that meets his or her own learning needs.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**iv. Replace coding and labeling with the identification of educational supports, strategies and effective instruction for removing barriers to learning.**

Coding is all about identifying what's "wrong" with a student. A more personalized learning profile approach would identify what needs to be different in the classroom to ensure that the student is successful.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**v. Use assessment to inform programming.**

Comprehensive assessment will be used to inform programming and includes parent insight, teacher expertise and information from educational and health (including mental health) professionals. In a new future, a greater emphasis will be placed on these specialists collecting information necessary for educational programming, rather than on diagnosis for coding.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**vi. Involve parents in the development, implementation and assessment of programming for their child.**

Parents are an important source of information and insight about their child. They are a critical member of the learning team. They should be involved in the development of the personalized learning profile for their child and in its implementation and evaluation.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know



**vii. Clarify Ministry and school authority requirements for gathering data related to all students, including students with disabilities.**

School authorities and Alberta Education will still need to know what students with disabilities (and special talents) may need in order to be successful. In the absence of coding, data will still have to be captured; what kind of data and to what end, needs to be sorted out.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**viii. Include access to early learning programming in planning for students.**

If students are to be successful, learning opportunities must begin as early as possible. Early intervention for children with at-risk factors, including disabilities, dramatically enhances their chance of future success. Currently in Alberta, children with disabilities are supported in early education programming prior to entering Grade 1. To be effective, early education programming for young children, just like that for students in Grades 1-12, requires setting high expectations, programming based on abilities and strengths, staff that is skilled and knowledgeable about child development and early intervention strategies, and programming based on collaboration and appropriate learning resources.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**SECTION QUESTION**

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

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**2. Using Strengths and Abilities to Drive Programming**

**Desired outcome:**

The education system, made up of the Ministry and its partners, will focus on what students CAN do, rather than on what they are unable to achieve. We will adapt the system to ensure that no student is excluded from being as fully participatory in learning, assessment and classroom experiences as possible.

**Possible ways to achieve this outcome:**

What follows are four ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*



**i. Ensure that the Alberta curriculum is accessible for all students.**

In the spirit of building one inclusive education system, the Alberta curriculum including the Programs of Study, authorized learning resources and provincial assessments need to be re-examined to determine how to make them more accessible, engaging and meaningful for students with diverse learning needs.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**ii. Evaluate students with measurement tools that maximize the possibilities for accessibility.**

Teachers, along with provincial large-scale assessment tools, measure student success in school. In an inclusive system, where getting a measure of ALL students' progress against the Programs of Study is important, we must address how this might take place. Collectively, we must look for ways for all students to be assessed in a meaningful way, using assessment systems that support inclusive practices.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**iii. Create flexible and accessible learning opportunities for every student.**

We know that not every student learns in the same way. In the best of all possible worlds, each student in each classroom is given an opportunity to have their learning customized or personalized for them. New research and new instructional approaches make this kind of teaching possible. Concepts like Universal Design for Learning move classrooms away from the limitations of “one size fits all”, and have the potential to equip teachers with skills and techniques to offer differentiated instruction to a range of learners, with diverse needs.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**iv. Ensure that learning resources are available and accessible.**

Learning resources are those things that teachers use in internal and external to classrooms to bring the curriculum to life. Learning resources that are accessible and flexible give teachers powerful tools for meaningfully engaging students and creating rich learning opportunities. They support student success and promote instructional practice and design that supports inquiry and problem solving. Accessible and flexible learning resources also reduce the amount of time individual teachers spend on retro-fitting their resources so they can use their time working directly with students.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**SECTION QUESTION**

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

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### 3. Building Capacity for School Based-Staff and Learning Teams

#### Desired outcome:

A team approach to meeting the needs of students. The team would be made up of parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, school administrators and educational specialists who all have what they need to work successfully in support of the learner. For students with more complex needs, other specialists would be invited to be part of the team.

#### Possible ways to achieve this outcome:

What follows are eight ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*

#### i. Provide specialized personnel to support classroom teachers in the assessment and programming for diverse learners.

It's not possible for every teacher to have a complete understanding of every diverse learner and their particular requirements for success – but some educators make a career of understanding difference and being able to provide advice on differentiated instruction that will prove successful. These specialists are called “learning coaches” and they could work alongside teachers to assist them in accommodating a range of learners in their classrooms. Learning coaches can help teachers to differentiate instruction, develop or find appropriate learning resources, administer diagnostic or classroom assessments, create learner profiles etc. They could become an important part of the learning team.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

#### ii. Strengthen the ability of teachers to teach to diversity.

The magic of education takes place when skilled teachers meet students who are open to learning. Teaching practices vary because each teaching situation is different and in constant change. However, teaching practice is regulated in the *Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta* (TQS), which was introduced in Alberta in 1997. This, along with the *Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy*, describes the instructional standard that all teachers are expected to meet throughout their careers. It is a standard set by Alberta Education and implemented by school authorities. A critical component of one inclusive education system is teachers who are prepared to meet the TQS and are supported in their ability to teach to diversity.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

#### iii. Strengthen the ability of principals to provide leadership in an inclusive system

Education leaders who believe in and support inclusive schools are a key element of one inclusive education system. The draft *Principal Quality Practice document*, developed by an education stakeholder committee in 2006, aims to ensure that all students have ongoing access to quality teaching and learning opportunities to meet the provincial goals of education and that they also have access to appropriate programming based on their individual learning needs. In our education system, it is principals who are expected to ensure this.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know



**iv. Reflect the interests of a diverse population of students, including those with disabilities, in all aspects of Alberta Education’s work.**

Over time, a special education system has evolved in Alberta. It did so with the best of intentions in order to meet the needs of students with particular learning needs. Students and their families have said, however, that special education is “a place they cannot escape”. In the spirit of building one inclusive education system, Alberta Education needs to be more focused on meeting the needs of a range of learners across one system, rather than in meeting special education needs in an isolated way. We believe that the Ministry should set a province-wide example, so that a culture of respect and understanding of student diversity develops throughout Alberta – at all levels of the system.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**v. Develop standards for training of para-professionals.**

There is currently no standardized training for those who do the important work of supporting students and their teachers in classrooms (teacher assistants, for example). The education system should develop and adopt provincial training and performance standards for these staff, so that every student and family who work with an assistant, can be guaranteed a minimum level of expertise.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**vi. Develop provincial and/or regional centres that can provide highly specialized expertise and resources for students.**

There is a lot to learn about meeting the needs of students who have rare or exceptionally high needs, as there is about meeting the needs of the many thousands of students who have been diagnosed with learning and attention deficit disabilities. These students have definite requirements for learning and in some cases need specialized supports. It’s hard for one teacher to “know it all” in order to be able to successfully include that student in a school setting. But there is a wealth of expertise in the province that can be tapped into. Regional centres, designed to serve communities throughout the province, could act as resource “hubs” that schools can access for support and expertise. Such centres would be an efficient way to meet the needs of students. They would also act as research hubs so that the latest in research and development from across the world was easily available to Alberta teachers.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**vii. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers, parents and all members of the learning team.**

In one inclusive education system, the dominant philosophy would be: “we’re all in this together” and so learning opportunities for parents, teachers and others would be critical. Parents are advocates for their children and want to do the right things to support them in being successful in school. However, parents have felt that in the past they often had to “take on” the system. Further, the system has sometimes perpetuated this perspective as a result of parties being uncommunicative, unwelcoming or reluctant to listen to and understand the needs of students, because of a range of factors. Ongoing professional development to assist all members of the learning team would be one tool to demonstrate that, in the spirit of an inclusive education system, we have things to teach one another and learn together.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know



**viii. Ensure teachers entering the profession have the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to respond to students’ abilities and needs.**

Increasingly, there is a need in the education system for teachers who have been prepared to meet the diverse learning needs of all students, including students with disabilities. This will require the ability to adapt learning outcomes in the Alberta Programs of Study; to select and use flexible learning resources and to accommodate difference in ways that convey to the student and their family that the system will meet their needs, as opposed to any suggestion that a student “does not fit”. This cannot be accomplished without training. To prepare teachers in new ways will take system-wide collaboration with Alberta’s universities.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don’t know

**SECTION QUESTION**

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

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**4. Collaborating for Learner Success**

**Desired outcome:**

The provision of collaborative and seamless services and supports to students and families. This would aid in the educational success of students and set them up for success in post-secondary settings, the world of work, or assisted living situations – wherever life may take them.

**Possible ways to achieve this outcome:**

What follows are six ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*

**i. Create structures at both the provincial and local levels to enable effective cross-ministerial collaboration**

Lots of people contribute to a student’s success in school. When a student requires a more complex support team, made up of educational specialists, health professionals and others, it’s important that this support team be able to work in a collaborative way. Since not everyone who provides service to a child, works for the education system (made up of school authorities and the Ministry), it will be important to develop policies, procedures and practices that work across ministries. A professional from Alberta Health and Wellness or Children and Youth Services or a service agency should be able to work alongside a professional from Education or a school authority without complication.

This may require the re-alignment of mandates, policies and data systems – and considerable dialogue to get this underway, but in order to offer a logical suite of services to families in order to assure success for the individual student, this important systemic, structural work needs to be done.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don’t know





**ii. Establish full-service school models to enhance cross-agency and cross-ministry collaboration and wraparound approach to coordinated services and supports.**

We know that if the objective is for the child to experience educational success, the best PLACE for that work to be undertaken is in schools. At the moment, a student's educational needs may be addressed in a school setting, although their specialized needs (speech pathology, for example) in order to facilitate educational success, may be attended to elsewhere. In Phase 1 of the consultation, participants told us that if the school could be considered the service “hub”, where the collaborative team of specialists operates from, meeting students needs would be considerably easier, and children could concentrate on the business of being in school. Wraparound approach to services in this strategy does not just refer to the geography of where a service is offered, it also means a “philosophy” of offering services in a seamless way from year to year, beginning at the earliest possible time and concluding in an effective transition to further education or to the world of work. This strategy speaks to wrapping the services **around** the student, rather than requiring families to find the services that they need from a range of sources.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**iii. Reduce the disparity of access to cross-ministry services across the province.**

One inclusive education system should be available to any Alberta student regardless of where they live. This strategy will need to look at how regional centres could reduce disparity and how technology can be deployed to “teleport” specialists in to work with a student and their learning team. If the tele-health model can be used in Alberta to bring health and mental health care experts to rural, remote Alberta in a cost effective way, without compromising patient safety, perhaps there are lessons to be learned about how to make such access possible for students, teachers, families and other members of the learning team.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**iv. Increase awareness among parents, teachers, and administrators of the importance of parent involvement as laid out in the Learning Team document.**

The notion of a Learning Team and meaningful parent involvement has been in place in Alberta for some time. However, it may not have been “lived” across the province's education system as a concept to which all are committed. In one inclusive education system it will be an essential component of success, and so the philosophy and practices of successful learning teams will need to be taught, adopted and embedded across the education system. This begins with increasing awareness and effective communications, and could result in professional development and public information sessions.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**v. Include teaching of the collaborative process in pre-service teacher education and in in-service training for principals and school jurisdiction level administrators.**

Historically, teachers (who go on to be principals and sometimes school system administrators) have been prepared in their training for the rigours of the classroom, and the important work of working with families – they have not necessarily considered themselves to be part of a collaborative learning team, working with educational specialists, health and mental health professionals and others. The skill set for effective collaboration can be quite different than the traditional skill set for classroom effectiveness. If the education system of the future demands a more collaborative approach to meeting students' needs, then it is only fair to prepare teachers and other educational leaders for this reality through their pre-service training (their education



degree), their practice teaching and in their on-going professional development. Building the skill set for collaboration will be a key component of success in a truly inclusive education system.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**vi. Ensure student records transfer in a timely manner to develop a more efficient flow of student information**

It's not possible to prepare a student for success with appropriate programming without an adequate profile of the learner and his/ her history. In an increasingly mobile country, where families are moving schools, school districts and provinces, the efficient and timely transfer of student records is critical. Transience should not be considered unusual or problematic. Students get “lost in the cracks” when their records are slow to move, or do not make it to their destination. Processes of identifying abilities and needs begin over, with the consequent loss of valuable programming time. In a new future, protocols to ensure the timely transfer of student information would be enhanced and reinforced.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**SECTION QUESTION**

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

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**5. Accessing Learning Resources and Technologies for 21st Century Learners**

**Desired outcome:**

A system that is proactive about meeting the needs of students and is progressive about incorporating leading edge learning resources and technologies in the education of all students, including those with disabilities.

**Possible ways to achieve this outcome:**

What follows are four ways in which we think this outcome could be achieved. At the moment, they are possibilities for you to respond to.

The question we want you to think about as you consider and evaluate these possibilities is: *Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?*

**i. Use available technologies, including SuperNet and videoconferencing, to enhance access to specialized resources, including professionals with expertise.**

There are lots of ways for educators to learn and have access to people and information who can assist them in being instructional leaders for their students, in particular those students who may have complex needs. Not all of the learning can be anticipated and covered in universities, not all of the learning can take place in the physical presence of an expert; but if



the education system commits to working together to make use of technology to access new knowledge, resources and experts more readily, there is potential for the calibre of teaching and learning support in schools to be higher.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**ii. Increase access to assistive technologies and specialized services using technology.**

The world of technology is changing at a rapid rate, and there are new developments all the time that could be of value in order to accommodate learning for students. Regional centres could be the place that would know about new developments and would work with schools and their school authorities to increase access for students to tools that could make their learning more successful. In a system with hubs of expertise, all learning teams would have increased access to services, technology and research, thus leveling the learning playing field for all.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**iii. Develop accessible learning resources to meet the diverse learning needs of all Alberta students.**

In one inclusive education system, learning resources will need to be re-thought in order to ensure that they are accessible, engaging and meaningful for all students, including students with disabilities.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**iv. Implement guidelines for accessible resources for resource developers, publishers and school authorities**

Developers and publishers of learning resources will need to understand what it means to re-think their products for an inclusive system, and how developing them in this new way is in fact, a benefit to ALL students. Building one inclusive education system will require all partners to think about their work differently – and as the leader in developing learning resources, Education would be in the position to initiate and lead the development and communication of guidelines to ensure that learning resource developers and publishers understand what the requirements are in Alberta's inclusive system.

Strongly agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly disagree       Don't know

**SECTION QUESTION**

Are there any additional concepts, ideas or possibilities that should be considered here? Please be specific.

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## CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

1. The proposed changes described in these five “building blocks” are aligned with the vision, mission and principles of one inclusive education system.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

2. As Alberta Education builds a framework for one inclusive education system based on the concepts described in this discussion guide, do you have any advice for us to ensure success?

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### What Happens Next?

After the conclusion of Phase 2, when we have your reaction to these possibilities, the Steering Committee will produce the new framework for the Minister of Education. It will describe the way that change can happen, who will need to play a role in which parts and what policy, accountability and funding changes will need to be in place in order to create the infrastructure for success.

We also know that when massive change is contemplated – as is the case in this document that it cannot all happen at once. The other aspect that the new framework will cover is what must happen in the short-term, mid-term and long-term in order to build one inclusive education system. The changes that are proposed in this discussion guide will require a concerted and collaborative effort over time to make them possible. The new framework will come forward for your reaction at a Minister’s Forum on June 8 and 9, 2009.



## Bibliography

This list is current at the time of printing. The bibliography is a summary of information posted in the online library on the Setting the Direction website ([www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca](http://www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca)). Please visit this site for quick links to these documents.

A Summary of Key Information and Issues Regarding Policy, Accountability and Funding for Special Education in Alberta by A.L. Charette Consulting Ltd.

A Cross-Canada Review of Selected Issues in special Education: Prepared for Alberta Education by McBride Management Ltd.

### INCLUSION:

What is Inclusion anyway? Questions and Answers about the MacKay Report on Inclusion

The Fully Inclusive Classroom Is Only One of the Right Ways to Meet the Best Interests of the Special Needs Child by Yude M. Henteleff

The Lighthouse of Equality: A Guide to “Inclusive Schooling” by A. Wayne MacKay

Assessing without Labels: Inclusive Education in the Canadian Context by David Philpott

### TRENDS AND ISSUES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION:

Special Education Current Trends by Ackerman et al

Special Education – Current Trends by Jennifer J. Jakubecy et al

Special Education in an Era of Reform

An Overview by Margaret McLaughlin - Part II Restructuring Special Education (Pages 16 to 41)

- Accountability, Standards and Assessment by Ronal Erickson

- Special Education Finance by Thomas B. Parrish

Personalizing Education, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

Education & Skills by the OECD. (Overview; Executive Summary)

Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning by David Rose and Anne Meyer

### SAMPLE OF RECENT POLICY FRAMEWORKS FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS:

Special Education Transformation, Ontario

Saskatchewan Ministry of Education “Effective Practices toward School PLUS”

Special Education Policy, Nova Scotia

Focusing on Students: The ISSP and Pathways Commission Report, Newfoundland and Labrador

Special Needs Education in Europe – Thematic Publication by European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Every Child Matters: Change for Children, United Kingdom

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

### Phase 1 Consultations:

Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta: Phase 1 – 2008 Discussion Guide.

Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta: Phase 1 - Community Consultation - What We Heard Summary Report by Calder Bateman, January, 2009.



## We Want to Hear from You!

What do you think is important to include in the system re-design for special education in Alberta? Your input is important to us! Please answer the questions in this discussion guide and return your completed guide to us by March 31, 2009.

A third party will review all the responses and group them so we can see how some ideas fit together and others stand apart. All questionnaire data will be managed in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

There are three options for participating in the consultation process:

1. Go to [www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca](http://www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca) and complete the questionnaire online.
2. Print a copy of the questionnaire below, fill it in, and send it to:

Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta  
c/o Special Programs Branch, Alberta Education  
10044-108 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5J 5E6

Fax: 780-422-2039

3. Attend a community consultation (see list below).  
Please R.S.V.P. by visiting [www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca](http://www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca) or by calling 780-643-0834.

### Phase II Consultation Schedule February / March 2009

| Date        | Community/<br>Region | Venue                                    | Address                      | Time         |
|-------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| February 27 | Red Deer             | Red Deer Lodge                           | 4311 – 49 Avenue             | 10 am – 3 pm |
| February 28 | Red Deer             | Red Deer Lodge                           | 4311 – 49 Avenue             | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 2     | Lethbridge           | Lethbridge Lodge                         | 320 Scenic Drive             | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 3     | Medicine Hat         | Medicine Hat Lodge                       | 1051 Ross Glen Dr. S         | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 6     | Calgary              | Radisson Hotel<br>Calgary Airport        | 2120 – 16 Avenue NE          | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 7     | Calgary              | Radisson Hotel<br>Calgary Airport        | 2120 – 16 Avenue NE          | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 9     | Edson                | Edson and District<br>Recreation Complex | #1 Golf Avenue, Highway 16   | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 10    | High Level           | Executive House<br>Suites Hotel          | 9815 – 101 Street            | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 12    | Fort McMurray        | Sawridge Inn &<br>Conference Centre      | 530 MacKenzie Blvd           | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 16    | Grande Prairie       | Holiday Inn Hotel<br>and Suites          | 9816 – 107 Stret             | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 19    | Cold Lake            | Lakeland Inn                             | 5411 – 55 Street, Highway 28 | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 20    | Edmonton             | Delta Edmonton<br>South Hotel            | 4404 Gateway Blvd            | 10 am – 3 pm |
| March 21    | Edmonton             | Delta Edmonton<br>South Hotel            | 4404 Gateway Blvd            | 10 am – 3 pm |



## To help us understand and categorize your responses, please answer the following questions.

Where do you live? Please check one.

- City
- Town or village
- Municipal district or county
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide the first three characters of your postal code (example T5K).

Are you answering this questionnaire as a:

- Group

What is the nature of your group (see list below) and how many participated in your discussion:

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If you are answering as an individual, are you:

- Parent
- Parent of student with special education needs
- Student
- Teacher
- Teacher assistant
- School administrator (principal)
- Trustee
- Representative of a school authority (school board administrator)
- Representative of government
- Representative of a university
- Representative of a service provider
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Only contributions provided to us in one of the formats described here will be accepted. The nature of this consultation does not allow for the acceptance of papers or submissions that fall outside of this process.



## THANK YOU for your input!

Your ideas will be used to help design a new special education framework in Alberta.

Check the website at [www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca](http://www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca) for updates on the process.

## Steering Committee

### Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta

**Naresh Bhardwaj (Chair)** – MLA, Edmonton-Ellerslie

**Michael Bruised Head** – Principal, Tatsikiisaapo’p Middle School, Kainai Board of Education

**Margaret Clarke** – Pediatrician, Calgary Health Authority

**Joanne Cuthbertson** – Chancellor, University of Calgary

**Dena Davis** – Project Coordinator and Assistant Principal, The Way In

**Shauna Gervais** – Community Member

**Ron Gilbertson** – President and CEO, Edmonton Economic Development Corporation

**Carole Anne Hapchyn** – Child Psychiatrist, Capital Health Authority

**Bill McKeown** – Vice-President, Canadian National Institute for the Blind

**Brian Malloy** – Regional Director of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and Suburban & Area Clinics,  
Capital Health’s Regional Mental Health Program

**Anne Price** – CEO, Calgary Learning Centre

**Iris Saunders** – Executive Director, Employabilities

**Nancy Spencer-Poitras** – Former Superintendent, School Administrator, Principal and Teacher

**Marilyn Welsch** – Community Member

**Marie Whelan** – Co-Principal, St. Mary School, Edmonton Catholic Schools





