

An ATA Research Update: August 2012

a great
school for all
...transforming
education in Alberta



The Alberta
Teachers' Association

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Table of Contents

Foreword	ii
Preface	v
Alberta’s Redesign Challenge: Our Current “In-Between Time”	1
Introduction	1
A Call for Informed, Principled Action	1
Transforming One School at a Time: The Fourth Way in Action.....	3
Courageous Distributed Leadership to Build Professional Capital.....	4
Alberta’s Tipping Point: Informed Transformation or Paradigm Paralysis?	7
Beyond Paradigm Paralysis—Unleashing Local Innovation by Enhancing Professional Capital.....	8
Teachers at the Centre of Educational Reform.....	10
Twelve Dimensions for Transforming Education in Alberta	13
1. Assessing and Reporting Student Learning.....	14
2. Curriculum Development and Implementation	16
3. Digital Technologies and Learning	18
4. Inclusive Education	19
5. Optimal Conditions of Practice	21
6. Differentiation for Learning	23
7. Professional Development and Autonomy	24
8. Public Assurance	26
9. School Leadership	28
10. Teacher Leadership.....	30
11. Early Learning	31
12. Governance and Vibrant Communities	33
References	35

Foreword

For more than a decade, Alberta has been Canada's highest-performing province and the highest-performing English- and French-speaking jurisdiction in the world on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests of student achievement. Despite its superior educational performance in Canada and beyond, Alberta has so far been largely overlooked by influential international policy analysts and, therefore, also by the global media; the plaudits have gone largely to Ontario instead. To make this observation is not to imply that Ontario's hard-earned international prominence is undeserved but, rather, to wonder why Alberta's impressive educational record is largely unknown, even among Albertans themselves.

Strangely, one of Alberta's greatest challenges in the years to come will be to acknowledge its own success. In a world where education is easily hijacked by governments pursuing strategies that will produce short-term solutions for which they will then take credit in the next election, most other nations and their leaders are inclined to impute failure to the educational systems they have inherited and to the people who work in them, so that the incumbent government can claim victory in righting the wrongs of its predecessors. Alberta, however, has achieved increasing and sustained success over several decades with the same government. Alberta's challenge, therefore, is to acknowledge and celebrate its educational successes, and to find a way to articulate and explain them to its own citizens and then to the world. Alberta will then stand tall as a recognized world leader in education alongside other creators of educational excellence, in Finland, Ontario and Singapore.

Celebrating success brings risks as well as opportunities, however. This is a second educational challenge for Alberta. Celebration can court complacency. In the teaching profession, it can encourage a belief in the value of untrammelled autonomy among individual teachers who might want to claim that they can now be left alone to get on with the job. Among governments, it can induce business-as-usual approaches that fail to prepare them for the challenges of the future and that maintain long-standing policies that might be preventing even greater success.

Convincing policy-makers and system leaders to take new approaches when they have experienced educational and political success with existing ones can be difficult, but it is before the peak of performance that decline is often already occurring, even though the decline might not be evident in performance results. A paradox of improvement is that you have to quit your existing strategy even when you look as though you are still ahead.

Knowing that most innovations fail, leaders and voters are often reluctant to ditch tried-and-true methods in favour of a new approach. In *Great by Choice* (HarperCollins 2011), influential business writers Jim Collins and Morten Hansen argue that the answer to this dilemma is disciplined innovation that is delivered "with high reliability and great consistency." According to them, "the great task is to blend creative intensity with relentless collective discipline so as to amplify the creativity rather than destroy it." Discipline requires relentless perseverance and complete indefatigability to ensure that a good idea comes to fruition in practice and that innovation continues alongside improvement, not at the expense of it.

Innovation in the public sphere is important not for its own sake but because it helps citizens and governments deal with new challenges and opportunities. This is especially true in a province like Alberta, with its increasing population, prosperous but vulnerable energy-based economy, and growing awareness of the needs of indigenous communities and the importance of developing a balanced approach to new technologies that will embrace their creative advantages while offsetting the damage and distraction they can inflict on younger generations.

In 2004, innovation guru Charles Leadbeater argued that the answer to all of these issues was not for some central body to mastermind and implement innovations through pipelines of policy delivery, from the centre to the individual. Instead, he argued, at their most sophisticated, governments should establish platforms that enable users to organize their own lives and behaviours more effectively together. In public services, therefore, promoting innovation is not only a question of relaxing or releasing control and responsibility to others. It is about building platforms where people are increasingly able to design learning supports and solutions for themselves.

This analysis raises important questions for educators. For example, what platforms do governments need to create so that teachers can develop their own curriculum and assessments together, instead of delivering curriculum and testing designed by government? What systems can be created and how can resources be reallocated so that peer-to-peer networks of schools can raise achievement themselves instead of having expensive intervention teams impose policy from the top? What is the best way for teachers to pursue their own professional development to meet their own needs without this becoming fragmented and self-indulgent on the one hand and overly controlled by central priorities on the other?

We have some good ideas about how to mesh innovation and improvement, and about why we should. We need to innovate before our improvement efforts flatten out and before improved student achievement stops. We need to innovate to respond to the new challenges that any system faces. We need to innovate because even the best systems have elements in their policies that could impede success. Effective innovation is disciplined; it should complement improvement rather than challenge it. Finally, innovation in public services such as education is not about governments withdrawing from public life, but about shifting responsibility from driving and delivering services to creating ways for people to develop better supports themselves.

Alberta is extremely well placed to address these issues in its education strategies. It already has an astounding and sustained record of educational success that matches the best in the world. For more than a decade, in comparison to most of its Canadian peers, but in line with best practice across the world, it has supported educational innovation through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. Like other high performers, Alberta has begun to benchmark its strategies by starting to network with other high performers in Finland and elsewhere. Albertans are not impelled to change strategy from election to election, because the province has been characterized by a high level of political stability that is typical of most successful systems. Again, like other high-performing peers, Alberta enjoys strong support and participation in the public education system from almost all of the province's parents. And Premier Alison Redford has indicated a bold preparedness to review those parts of the government's existing strategy that may be detracting from even greater success, such as the provincial achievement tests, which can undermine commitments to deeper and more creative learning in schools.

One of Alberta's greatest advantages is common to high performers—a strong and committed teaching profession. Unlike its neighbour to the south, Alberta does not cheapen or demean the teaching profession; it understands that the human capital of its students depends on investing in the professional capital of its highly qualified teachers. Alberta does not involve only teachers in delivering change; it also engages principals and superintendents. And it creates and maintains platforms where educators can advocate for further innovations and improvements to benefit students and strengthen the profession that works with those learners on the front line, every day. Albertans understand that the teaching profession is not an obstacle to transforming the province, but an essential and inalienable part of the solution.

A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta is another example of the outstanding intellectual and strategic leadership of the province's teachers. It is a document that recognizes the successes of the province that the members of the Alberta Teachers' Association proudly serve;

challenges the province's leaders to be the best they can be in the circumstances they face in partnership with teachers; draws on research, inquiry and international benchmarking to identify the most promising practices; and sets out 12 clear directions to move the province and its children ahead.

Developed by the Association's research staff, this comprehensive document seeks not just an end to standardized testing but more-sophisticated and more-demanding processes of assessment for learning. It takes a balanced rather than a bullish or obstructive approach to the role of new technologies in schools, calls for a more inclusive approach to special educational needs, and identifies the best supports and partnerships to bring that about. It reasserts the importance of professional autonomy for teachers but understands that this autonomy is collective, not individual. And it argues for a profession that should be given and that must take greater leadership—teachers and principals need to take greater collective responsibility for the quality of professional work.

Alberta is already a world leader in educational achievement, but its high ranking is not yet matched by international recognition. What Alberta needs now is a clear statement identifying the reasons for its success, champions who can explain that success in inspiring ways to people in the province and across the world, and a platform from which it can launch the innovations that will lead to even greater success in the future. There is no better time for the government and the profession together to show the world what an outstanding system has achieved and can achieve, and to establish a platform that will make Alberta a world leader in educational innovation and transformation in the decade to come. Alberta has no need to rent improvement and reform models that have been built by other systems. On the contrary, it has the proven ability, creativity and professional quality to own the future that it creates for itself. This report can and should become a significant contribution to that quest.

Andy Hargreaves
Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education
Boston College

Preface

During the past couple of years, the prospect for educational transformation in Alberta has been promising and has sparked considerable public interest and discussion. Certainly, the recent election of Premier Alison Redford and her commitment to make education a “main priority” bode well for the hope of educational transformation in the province. Although Albertans may have different ideas about exactly how to move forward, they are increasingly realizing that their education system, although admired around the world, still has much work to do in terms of helping *all* students realize the full potential of their individual gifts and talents.

The vision of creating a great school for all Alberta’s students is a compelling one. It is a vision that teachers live every day—both individually in their work with students and collectively through the efforts of their professional Association in advocating for practices and policies that will help achieve the goal of educating all students well.

Based on the work of staff and input from leading international experts, *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta* represents the teaching profession’s best effort to outline the kind of educational transformation that it believes is necessary to ensure that Alberta continues to have one of the best education systems in the world. The publication develops in greater detail the perspectives that the Association presented two years ago in *The Courage to Choose—Emerging Trends and Strategic Possibilities for Informed Transformation in Alberta Schools: 2010–2011*.

The first half of *A Great School for All* describes the broad challenges and opportunities that exist in Alberta with respect to creating great schools for all students. The second half identifies 12 dimensions of transformation and outlines the specific practices and policies that are needed to bring about informed transformation. In analyzing these dimensions, the Association struck a working group, led by Associate Coordinator of Research J-C Couture, which undertook exhaustive research and consulted with a range of experts. Stephen Murgatroyd, chief scout with Innovation Expedition, helped to develop the analytical tool, or *logic model*, used in the second half. Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley (coauthors of *The Fourth Way* and *The Global Fourth Way—Architectures of Educational Excellence*) and Pasi Sahlberg (director of the Centre for International Mobility in Finland and author of *Finnish Lessons: What the World Can Learn from Educational Change in Finland*) provided advice and critiqued many of the ideas presented in this publication.

As some critics have wisely observed, education policy in many countries has been created, for far too long, in evidence-free zones. Fortunately, making public policy decisions without informed public deliberation has, for the most part, not characterized Alberta’s approach to educational development. The purpose of this publication is to help ensure that any decisions about educational transformation in Alberta are based on sound evidence and—just as important—on input from an engaged public that shares a commitment to creating great schools for *all* of Alberta’s students.

Gordon R Thomas
Executive Secretary

Alberta's Redesign Challenge: Our Current "In-Between Time"

The core task of organizational design is to disclose new worlds.

—Gilles Paquet

Introduction

For too long, Alberta's K–12 education sector has been over-managed and under-imagined. This critique is offered both as a hopeful provocation and as a call to action.

Given Alberta's internationally admired education system, its booming economy and its population that is materially one of the richest on the planet, some people have argued that incremental change and small tweaks are all that Alberta needs at this point to maintain its prosperity. By contrast, the central thesis of this publication is that such thinking is short-sighted and will seriously limit the province's ability to capitalize on the gifts and talents of its increasingly diverse citizenry. Before the end of this decade, Alberta's student population is expected to grow from 500,000 to 600,000. Furthermore, Alberta's major cities are expected to become home to more immigrants per capita than so-called cosmopolitan centres such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

Alberta, with its boom-and-bust economy, is all too familiar with the poverty of plenty. Its wealth of primary resources brings both great opportunities and huge risks. Over the years, a paradoxical mixture of wisdom and distraction has characterized Alberta's policymaking with respect to such matters as economic diversification, environmental stewardship, health care and, of course, education. After years

of rollercoaster education budgeting and decades of focusing on student achievement as measured by an outdated testing program, Alberta's government, under the leadership of new premier Alison Redford, seemed poised to make positive changes. In the fall of 2011, for example, the government initially restored the funding that it provides to school boards for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI).

Unfortunately, the February 2012 provincial budget brought less-than-encouraging news for the K to 12 education sector: school operating budgets would increase by only 5 per cent over three years (an increase that failed to match the rate of inflation), and AISI grants to schools would be reduced by 50 per cent.

A Call for Informed, Principled Action

Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley,¹ coauthors of *The Fourth Way* and *Global Forces—Architectures of Educational Excellence* and long-time observers of Alberta's education system, have presented their views about what Alberta needs to do to move forward. In a nutshell, Hargreaves and Shirley argue that Alberta needs to push beyond the stalled promises of what they call the "Third Way," an approach to public services, espoused by leaders such as Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, which attempted to combine the best features of state support and market competition. Hargreaves (2009) argues that the thin promises of standards and accountability that characterized the Third Way must be

¹ These internationally recognized experts regard Alberta, along with Finland, Ontario and Singapore, as among the leading educational jurisdictions in the world. But they also point out in a forthcoming book (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012b) that Alberta is at a crossroads. If it does not embrace distributed leadership, give teachers more autonomy and encourage them to create networks and participate in international partnerships, Alberta could lose its position as an education leader.

2 • A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta

replaced by a deeper understanding of the true value of education:

Creativity, innovation, intellectual agility, teamwork, problem solving, flexibility and adaptability to change are essential to the new economy. But if these skills are all there is to 21st-century schools, they will convert personalization into mere customization in a fast-forward world of temporary teamwork and swift solutions. Twenty-first century schools must also embrace deeper virtues and values such as loyalty, perseverance, courage, critical engagement, service, and sacrifice. Third Way learning is customized. Fourth Way learning is learning for life. (p 85)

Hargreaves and Shirley further argue that a society's vision of the future should be created by citizens and community members who are actively engaged and by leaders who can tap into and elevate public spiritedness. Looked at from this perspective, redesigning Alberta's education system will involve addressing such broad existential questions as these:²

- What is the Alberta that the world needs to see?
- What kind of Albertans do we need to become to get us there?
- How will leadership in learning help us become our best selves?

Rather than focusing on long-term questions such as these, some policymakers become distracted by what Hargreaves (2009) has termed "the perniciousness of the present." For example, the millions of viewers over the last few years who have tuned into the hit television series *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* share one virtue: hope in the face of the scarred prosperity of fast capitalism.³ Devoted to rebuilding the

homes of families challenged by personal hardship or devastated by health issues, the program continues to draw 10 million viewers per episode. However, as a culture we should be wary of claims that anything that needs fixing can be transformed instantly, especially without taking into account the material cost and the craftsmanship required to create something enduring and sustainable.⁴ Equal caution should be exercised in attempting to transform Alberta's K–12 education system.

Hargreaves (2010) has counselled Albertans that the time has come "to own a vision rather than rent one." The leadership shown by former education minister Dave Hancock in such documents as *Inspiring Education*, *Setting the Direction*, *Speak Out* and *Inspiring Action* is, without question, a positive first step in developing such a vision. The June 2010 release of *Inspiring Action* afforded education partners an unprecedented opportunity to embark on a journey of informed transformation that could make Alberta a world leader with respect to student learning and well-being. Taken together, the choices outlined in these documents present the education partners with exciting opportunities to rethink their structures and moral purposes in ways that will improve learning for students. At the same time, aggressive commercial interests are attempting to privatize curriculum development and student assessment and to find technology solutions for educational problems. Such commercial developments are distractions from sustainable educational reform. Indeed, a recent study of the digital student reporting tools and software packages currently used in Alberta schools concludes that, because teachers were not involved in developing them, they are of little benefit to students.⁵

² Over the past eight years, the Association has organized a series of public lectures, featuring internationally recognized experts, designed to engage Albertans in a future-oriented discussion on such topics as the economy, the environment and the sciences. More information about this lecture series is available at www.learningourway.ca.

³ For a thorough critique of this television series, see Nickel and Eikenberry (2009). On December 15, 2011, ABC announced that *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* would end its run on January 13, 2012.

⁴ Crawford (2009) has written evocatively about how the world of fast capitalism has led to a loss of knowledge about crafts.

⁵ In May and June 2010, a team of researchers from the University of Alberta, the Alberta Assessment Consortium and the Alberta Teachers' Association undertook a comprehensive longitudinal provincial study on the use of digital tools to report student progress (ATA and AAC 2011).

Transforming One School at a Time: The Fourth Way in Action

One of the hallmarks of the Third Way was system-level reform, an approach that was adopted by Ontario and most OECD jurisdictions (Schleicher 2012). By contrast, the teaching profession in Alberta believes that the *school* rather than the system should be the focal point for educational transformation. Once innovations have been validated at the school level, they can be scaled up through networks to the divisional level and beyond, an approach that has proved highly successful in the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI).⁶

Educational transformation in Alberta will hinge on the willingness of the provincial government to adopt a more distributed approach to governance, one that allows school boards, as

democratically elected entities, to support schools in becoming community hubs. David King, who was Alberta’s minister of education from 1979 to 1986 and later director of the Public School Boards’ Association of Alberta, concurs that a more distributed approach to governance in Alberta is long overdue: “The experience of Albertans in the last few years is that the government wants to make decisions behind closed doors, does not want public discussion and tries to intimidate people away from public discussion” (CBC 2012).

In analyzing a number of Association-sponsored transformation projects, Murgatroyd (2011) has observed that systems, as they mature, tend to follow an S-shaped curve, as shown in Figure 1. The curve, which is produced by plotting time on the horizontal axis and outcomes on the vertical axis, depicts the progress of a system over time. Applying this model to Alberta’s education system, most commentators would

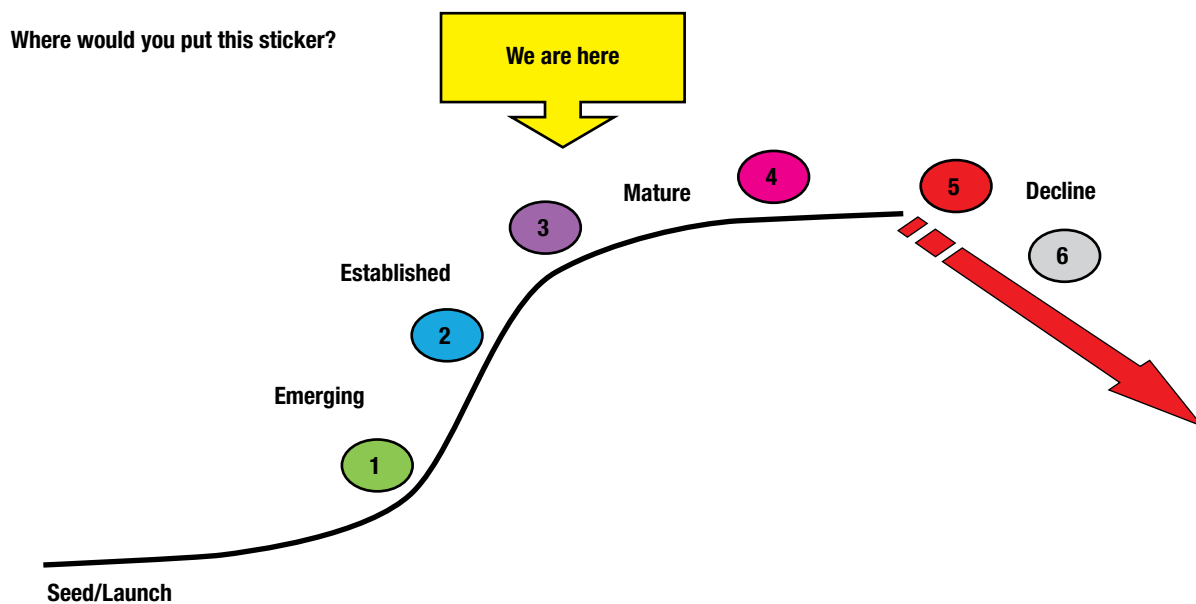


Figure 1: The S-curve framework for understanding the maturation of complex systems

⁶ According to a review of AISI conducted in 2009, AISI is unique in the world as an example of how to advance system-level reform: “Almost all of Alberta’s schools are actively involved in AISI, which was established to conduct teacher-driven research on an ongoing basis. Alberta would be a paradigmatic example of the kind of jurisdiction described by Marc Tucker where teachers are not the objects of research but its participants and drivers in a commitment to learning, innovation and self-developed improvement rather than delivery of other people’s policies” (Hargreaves et al 2009, 8).

4 • A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta

likely agree that the system is now at the mature stage.

Unfortunately, attempts to improve systems that have reached the mature stage more often than not tend to focus on seeking short-term performance and productivity gains by tweaking the existing system in an effort to sustain its integrity. Alberta's education sector has taken this approach on a number of occasions: by adding more instructional time in the hope of improving student performance; by hiring teacher assistants to work with special needs children; by enhancing technology to help teachers meet the demands of an overly prescriptive curriculum; and by introducing a system of performance-based pay to encourage teachers to improve student outcomes.⁷

Although well intentioned, most of these efforts were based on conflicting evidence, political expediency and crisis-response thinking. As a result, they generally failed to introduce sustainable game-changing transformations at the school level.

Sahlberg (2011) has coined the term *global educational reform movement* (GERM) to describe the ideology that prevents many governments from undertaking meaningful educational reforms. Driven by a small group of elite policymakers and corporate leaders, this neoliberal movement promotes an agenda with which Albertans are all too familiar: a narrow focus on basic knowledge and skills in so-called core subjects, the implementation of so-called universal standards for teaching practice and school leadership, and a fixation with emerging technologies as a way of improving schools. Fuelled by powerful organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, GERM compels schools and

nations to compete rather than to network and learn from one another. To facilitate managerial accountability, GERM also typically requires the maintenance of a large bureaucratic infrastructure.⁸ The prevalence of GERM ideology has tended to prevent governments from tackling curriculum redesign, addressing family poverty, taking measures to increase the readiness of children to learn and allowing teachers to take the lead in reform efforts. More important, GERM ideology discourages policymakers from taking into account what should surely be one of the pillars for creating a great school: a commitment to the principle of social justice, the recognition that all students have an equal opportunity to learn.⁹

Courageous Distributed Leadership to Build Professional Capital

The only safe ship in a storm is leadership.

—Faye Wattleton

The S-curve model suggests that, to overcome the inertia of their own successes, mature, complex systems (such as Alberta's K–12 sector) will ultimately need to reinvent themselves by making game-changing structural changes. Paquet (2009, xix), a professor emeritus with the Centre on Governance and the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa, observes that people attempting to reform entrenched bureaucracies are inclined to take the underlying structure and existing role descriptions for granted and to focus, instead, on making small tweaks to the system. He argues that to truly transform the system, reformers must take into account how

⁷ The government's performance-pay initiative, introduced in the spring of 1999, was entitled the School Performance Incentive Program. In response to opposition from the education partners and the community, the government suspended the program a few months later and entered into discussions with the partners to develop what subsequently came to be known as the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement.

⁸ Alberta Education, for example, employs 640 full-time staff, 100 of whom make decisions about curriculum and student assessment for the entire province. Alberta's ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education also employs a large staff. By contrast, Finland's National Board of Education employs 250 people and its Ministry of Education and Culture employs 300 people. Because most programming decisions about Finland's basic and postsecondary education curriculum take place at the community level, Finland needs fewer government bureaucrats.

⁹ For a thorough treatment of this orientation to school leadership, see Theoharis 2009.

information flows in the system. In a similar vein, management guru Peter Senge (2008) notes that a distinctive feature of highly effective organizations is that the leaders celebrate success while being careful not to insulate themselves from bad news. Clearly, to achieve meaningful transformation, complex organizations must ensure that their structures are responsive and that management is distributed.

Crozier (1970) observes that the process of developing public policy in a democratic society is often a contest between “cognitive despotism,” on the one hand, and authentic public deliberation, on the other. The endless constitutional wrangling in Canada during the last three decades over renewed federalism and the protracted debate, more recently, about the extent to which human activity contributes to global warming illustrate that public policies are, at best, tentative hypotheses to be tested and retested in the streets and communities of the country (Paquet 2009).

Attempts to reform Alberta’s education system in the last few years have often done more harm than good:

- In 2011, 42 per cent of Alberta teachers reported that the size of their classes had somewhat or significantly increased, whereas only 11 per cent indicated that the size of their classes had declined.
- Forty-five per cent of teachers reported that the readiness of their students to learn had deteriorated, whereas only 7 per cent indicated that their students were more ready to learn.
- Increasingly, teachers are expected to take on additional noninstructional activities. In 2011, 49 per cent of Alberta teachers reported an increase in the amount of supervision and the number of assigned tasks (including responsibility for extracurricular activities) that they were expected to do.
- The amount of support for students with special needs is declining dramatically. In 2005, 25 per cent of Alberta teachers indicated that support for students with special needs

was eroding. By 2011, the percentage of teachers reporting that support for special needs students was decreasing had doubled to 50 per cent (ATA 2010b, 2011d).

- Less than 50 per cent of a cohort of 135 first-year teachers hired in 2007 had continuing contracts in 2011. Interviewed in 2011, only 76 per cent of this cohort stated that they would recommend teaching as a career. Asked to identify their major sources of stress, they cited class size and lack of support for students with special needs (ATA 2012b).
- Since the early 1990s, the Government of Alberta has spent more than \$1.5 billion on information and communications technology (ICT). The preponderance of this funding has been used to acquire hardware and software and to keep it up to date as well as to support several incubator projects that have not proved feasible on a large scale (ATA 2010i). Although the government has provided welcome financial support to the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, it has invested little in professional development and collaborative inquiry at the school level to help educators take advantage of these technologies.
- The average teacher in Alberta works 56 hours a week, the equivalent of almost two days a week of unpaid time (ATA 2012c).
- Thirty-two per cent of Alberta teachers report that they have little control over their work lives and 72 per cent report high levels of conflict between their working life and their personal time. One reason that teachers are experiencing a decline in their professional autonomy is that they are seldom consulted about the acquisition of new technologies, especially those used to track and report on student progress (Duxbury 2012).

These trends are symptomatic of what Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) call the “business capital” approach to school reform, one that focuses on standardization, compliance, school choice, market-based competition and technology. To make matters worse, such reforms are usually directed by policy analysts

6 • A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta

and system leaders who are far removed from the school.

According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), an alternative approach to school reform is to focus on developing the professional capital of teachers in three domains: human, social and decisional. Human capital has to do with the individual talents and qualities of teachers. Human capital, however, must be sustained and supported by social capital—colleagues working together in communities of practice or in teams committed to common goals. The authors argue that developing a school culture that builds social capital also enhances the human capital of individual teachers. The third domain, decisional capital, has to do with the ability of teachers to carry on their craft on a daily basis, making the complex and nuanced decisions that will help students learn. Bringing these three forms of capital together to enhance teachers' professional capital, the authors contend, also promotes authentic collaborative professional autonomy. Professional autonomy, in turn, requires what the authors call the "five Cs": capability, commitment, career, culture and contexts (or conditions) of teaching (Hargreaves

and Fullan 2012, 46). In fostering professional capital, Alberta should focus on developing high-quality teachers and teaching practices.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) warn that, increasingly, corporations are eyeing education as an untapped market worth up to \$500 billion. Responding to the popular notion that education should be available at any time, at any place and at any pace, corporations are marketing technology as the solution to all that ails education.

The implications for Alberta are clear: the province must set aside its business-capital approach to reform and focus on building the professional capital of its already-strong teaching force. The research on school development clearly shows that a complicated architecture of system-level reforms will likely have little impact on an already-high-performing jurisdiction such as Alberta (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012b; Sahlberg 2011). More than a decade ago, Levin (1998) predicted that the "epidemic" of centrally managed policy reforms already evident would ultimately prove more of a barrier rather than an asset to the authentic transformation of schools.

Alberta's Tipping Point: Informed Transformation or Paradigm Paralysis?

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us: we already know more than we need to do that; and whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

—Ronald Edmonds

As Figure 2 illustrates, the key to transforming education in Alberta is to develop new processes that the system can switch to at some critical tipping point. However, reaching a tipping point does not guarantee that educational reform will proceed in a positive direction. Witness, for example, Sweden's decision to privatize its schools, the implementation in North America of vouchers and charter schools as a means of inspiring reform, and the introduction of academies in England. Each of these developments could be construed as an alternate system that, once proven, could replace the existing system. The difficulty is that many reform efforts are driven by fear rather than trust and by a desire for a quick fix rather than a long-range strategy based on evidence. Yong Zhao, the renowned Chinese-born education expert who is now at the University of Oregon, argues that both developed and developing countries need to make an important decision:

We thus face a choice of what we want: a diversity of talents, and individuals who are passionate, curious, self-confident, and risk taking; OR a nation of excellent test takers, outstanding performers on math and reading tests. (Zhao 2009, 59)

Zhao goes on to note that, historically, the United States has had a decentralized, highly individualized education system that contrasts starkly with China's extremely centralized, test-driven approach. He warns against adopting China's system, which, he says, has produced a generation of highly skilled test-takers who, unfortunately, lack creativity and exposure to a broad range of experiences. Zhao also argues that America's education system, despite a lot of unfounded criticism, is actually working very well in a number of states. He argues that what is needed is "more local autonomy, more flexibility, more choice, less testing, less content, and less standardization" (Zhao 2009, 60).

Alberta's current education system has evolved over a period of more than 100 years. Britain's core public education system, by contrast, did not come into being until the passage of the *Education Act* of 1944. The system was modified

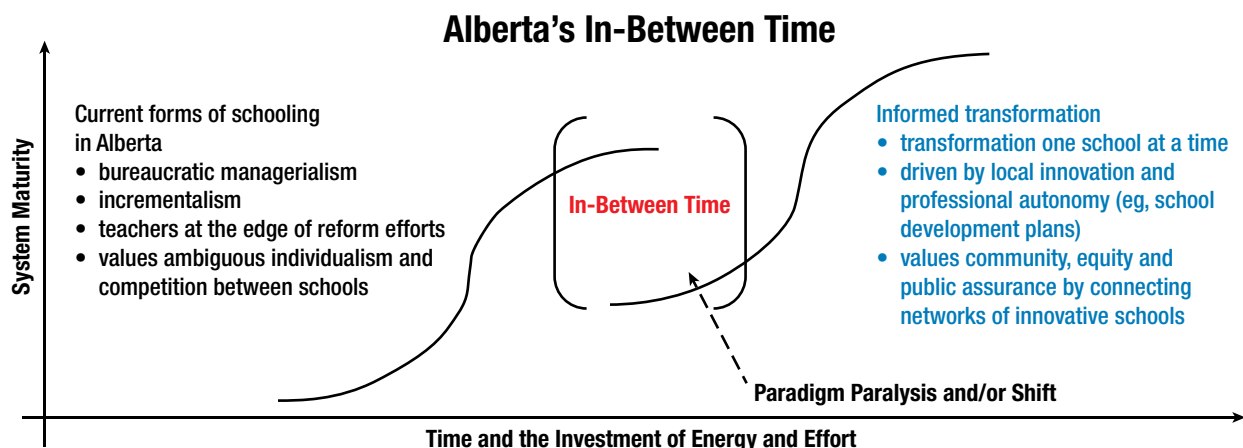


Figure 2: The tipping points between the Third Way and the Fourth Way

8 • A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta

by the comprehensive schools movement of the 1960s. Although the current model of schooling in Canada and the United States has provided innumerable benefits, it contains many structures and processes that need to be fundamentally rethought. The leadership challenge facing Albertans is to puzzle through this new undefined space of opportunity as the province makes the transition from the Third Way to the Fourth Way.

The gap between the decline of the established system and the emergence of an alternative structure is known in systems thinking as the *in-between time*—a messy, difficult period during which systems compete for resources and recognition, and performance in neither system is optimal. Following several years of public consultation about how to realize the vision articulated in *Inspiring Action*, Alberta is clearly at such an in-between time. Transitional times tend to be periods of risk, in large measure because the people tasked with administering the new system must unlearn the rules of the old system and develop new approaches that will maximize the outcomes of the new system. Although people may be committed to the new system in principle, they often discover that making that concept a reality is actually very hard to do so.

Beyond Paradigm Paralysis— Unleashing Local Innovation by Enhancing Professional Capital

We have been doing something right, and it would be good to know what it is.

—Steven Pinker, Professor of Psychology, Harvard University

The second half of this document identifies 12 dimensions of Alberta’s education system that need to be rethought. Although rethinking has the potential, in each case, to produce true transformation, it could just as easily end in paradigm paralysis: the inability to see beyond the existing state of affairs. With reference to the first dimension—assessing and reporting student learning—many countries currently assess students at certain key stages of their development, such as Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12.

Although testing all students at each of these stages may, in a transformed system, be regarded as inappropriate and inefficient, the public may continue to demand that such tests continue. “Standardized tests were good enough before, weren’t they?” critics may charge. Policymakers in a transformed system would have the courage to answer, “No, they weren’t.” The path that Alberta needs to follow in transforming accountability in education is illustrated in Figure 3. The public-management paradigm that characterizes Alberta’s current approach (shown on the left-hand side) involves testing all students in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12 on aspects of the curriculum that are easily measured. By contrast, the public-assurance paradigm (depicted on the right) is much more flexible, focusing on less-easily-measured aspects of achievement such as creativity and flexibility.

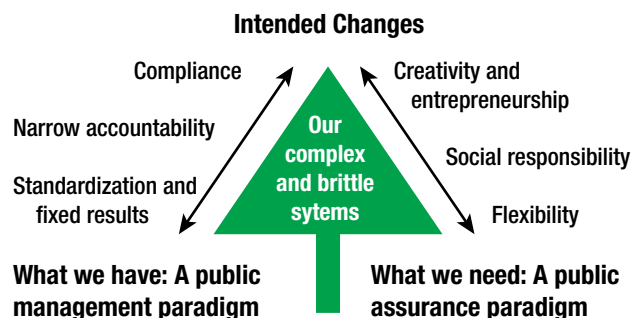


Figure 3: A new approach to accountability

Alberta’s challenge is to redesign its curriculum development, assessment and governance structures and processes simultaneously. One of the key findings of a pilot study that Murgatroyd and Sahlberg (2010) undertook is that changes to curriculum and to assessment must occur in tandem: expecting students to develop a broad range of competencies while continuing to measure their progress on a few core skills is a setup for failure. The pilot project also demonstrated that teachers are unlikely to take risks and try new approaches if the culture in which they work fails to actively acknowledge and support their professional judgment. Figure 4 illustrates the way in which the authors believe that instructional design,

school performance reporting, community relationships and governance fit together in a model of public assurance as opposed to a model of bureaucratic accountability.

For the public-assurance model to succeed, schools must become acutely responsive to the needs of the communities they serve rather than to dictates of the provincial government. Governance, in other words, need not reside within the confines of the government. The kind of transformation envisaged in *Inspiring Action* will be achieved not by making incremental policy changes but by moving quickly to adopt a public-assurance model. Making such a radical change will raise many practical issues, such as how much instructional time is optimal and when to begin implementing a new curriculum.

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) identify three “paths of distraction” that, they argue, can plague reform efforts: (1) the path of *autocracy* (governance through forced compliance), (2) the path of *technocracy* (whereby a technical analysis of numerical data about student progress targets and achievement gaps replaces any serious consideration of the moral issues of inequality and social justice) and (3) the path of *effervescence* (which tries to solve the motivational deficits created by top-down standardization and market-based reforms by talking up the importance of professional

engagement and interaction without really implementing it). More recently, Hargreaves and Shirley (2012a) have predicted that, in the future, successful jurisdictions will put teachers at the centre rather than the far side of educational reform.

Albertans must not allow their past successes to bind them to a culture of compliance and complacency. As the new system is introduced, outcomes may initially decline as education leaders and system managers, skilled at making the old system work, adapt to a new way of doing things. Alberta’s student population is changing in ways that few imagined possible a few years ago. As a result, proven teaching practices and school policies need to be re-examined in light of the overarching question: how can we create great schools for *all* students?

Another aspect of Alberta’s education system that may need rethinking is the way in which students make the transition from elementary school to junior high to high school to college or university to work-based training to employment. In a transformed system, such gateways may become passé. Rather than moving from one arbitrarily defined stage to the next, students may progress according to their ability and their achievements. For example, a student may embark on an apprenticeship while still in high school or begin working full time

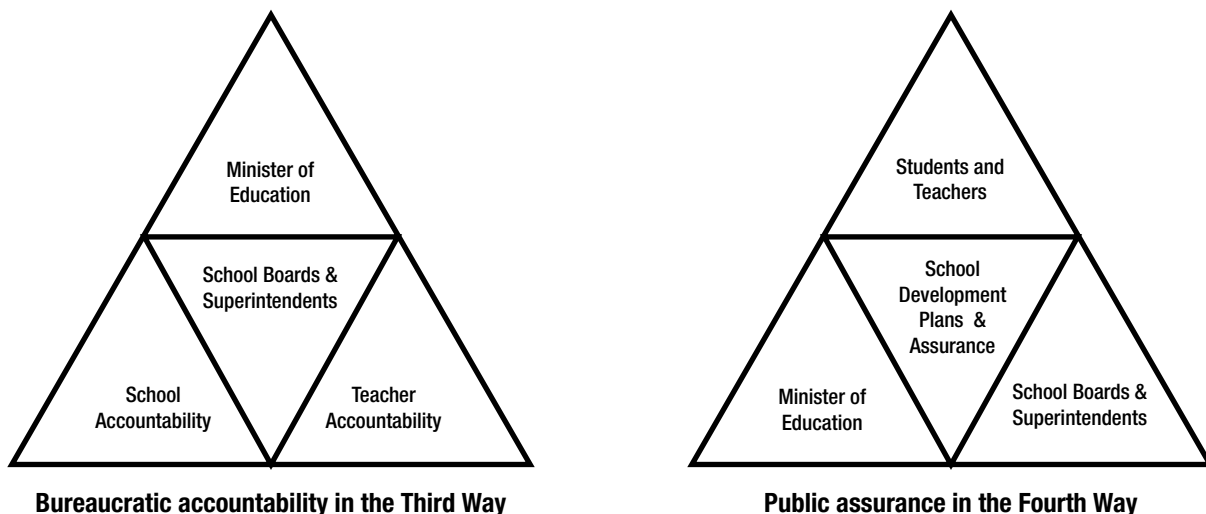


Figure 4: Moving from bureaucratic accountability to public assurance

while still taking college courses. As these traditional stages blur, the way in which education is funded and curriculum developed will need to change.

The government's failure to adequately fund the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) could jeopardize the transformation of education in Alberta. During her campaign to become leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, Alison Redford promised, in an open letter dated September 21, 2011, "to restore the education cuts made in the 2011/12 budget within 10 days of being sworn in as premier." Although Redford, upon becoming premier, did restore the full AISI grants to schools, she subsequently cut them by 50 per cent in the 2012/13 budget. Since its inception in 1999, AISI has provided schools in Alberta with more than \$500 million to develop, at the local level, innovative ways of improving student learning. Indeed, Hargreaves (2009) has described AISI as "a unique success story that exists nowhere else in the world." As AISI concludes its fourth cycle, its future is in doubt.

Teachers at the Centre of Educational Reform

Hargreaves and Shirley (2012a) observe that the government's failure to fully fund AISI as it embarks on its fifth cycle is but one example of a global trend whereby governments are attempting to reform education without meaningfully engaging the teaching profession. During the decade that the government supported AISI, more than 90 per cent of the province's schools embarked on innovations. AISI provided teachers with an opportunity to conduct research on an ongoing basis. Alberta became a rare example of a jurisdiction in which teachers were the active agents rather than the passive objects of research. Teachers were focused on learning and innovating rather than on delivering other people's policies (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012a, 8).

The Redford government's decision to reduce funding for AISI is ironic given that same government's promise to advance competitiveness and innovation. The cut to this world-recognized educational program seems inconsistent with Treasury Board President Doug Horner's comment on budget day that "Albertans want us to be talking about reaching out globally ... looking outward, not inward." The Government of Alberta spends nearly \$1 billion per year to support innovations in such fields as geomatics, genetics, bio-oils and health care. Restoring full funding for AISI—at a cost of only \$80 million—would help the province become a world leader in education innovation.

Although the cut in funding for AISI means that teachers will have less autonomy in advancing informed transformation, other initiatives, such as the Finland–Alberta partnership, demonstrate how innovations at the local level can create great schools for all students. The Finland–Alberta partnership was launched in Edmonton in March 2011, at an international symposium entitled Educational Futures—International Perspectives on Innovation from the Inside Out. The partnership is guided by the belief that school development emanates from the inside out—that the real work of reform and the locus of positive change is the school, not the system. The partnership has brought together 12 high schools—7 in Finland and 5 in Alberta—to help answer the question, How do we create great schools for *all* students?¹⁰

In forging a partnership with Finland, the Association was also searching for an answer to a broader question: "What kind of society do we want to create in Alberta and what kind of teaching and learning will get us there?" (ATA 2010h, 3). The power of the partnership is that teachers in both jurisdictions, along with participating students and principals, are charting new territory in the quest to create great schools for all students. Both jurisdictions are challenged by the growing diversity of their student communities. Some critics have argued

¹⁰ To ensure that the partnership focuses on real innovation and does not become what the Finns call "educational tourism," it is being evaluated by an international team of experts, including Andy Hargreaves, Dennis Shirley and Karen Lam of Boston College.

that Finland’s success in the field of education is the result of having a culturally homogeneous and relatively affluent population. However, nearly 10 per cent of the students in schools in Helsinki are now immigrants, and the number of languages spoken in these schools is 40. The partnership has demonstrated that the Finnish education system is the product of “systematic attention to social justice and early intervention to help those with special needs and close interplay between education and other sectors—particularly health and social sectors” (Sahlberg 2011, 58). Sahlberg also notes that Finland has remained relatively immune to the market-based educational reforms (including the focus on standardization and the use of technology to boost student learning) so prevalent in North America. Sahlberg emphasizes that the Finnish education system, by contrast, “has been built upon values grounded in equity, equitable distribution of resources rather than competition and choice” (Sahlberg 2011, 96).

Sahlberg observes that the Finnish model of education involves four paradoxes:

Paradox 1: Teach Less, Learn More

According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Finnish students consistently outperform those in other parts of the world in literacy, math and science. Yet, in 2007, lower-secondary teachers in Finland taught fewer than 600 hours. Alberta’s teachers, by contrast, taught more than 1,000 hours. A survey of intended instructional hours for children aged 7 to 14 in public institutions reveals that Finnish children of this age receive anywhere between 500 and 2,000 fewer hours of instruction than children in other countries.

Paradox 2: Test Less, Learn Better

Finland does not have mandatory tests except for the national matriculation examination that students take after completing high school. Teachers collaborate to develop their own tests, and they favour formative assessment over summative grading. Rather than asking what

Finland did to produce such successful learners, perhaps, as Sahlberg suggests, policymakers should ask what Finland *avoided doing* that lower-achieving countries did. The answer to that question appears to be that Finland avoided buying into the test-based accountability policies so prevalent in North American jurisdictions.

Paradox 3: Support Equity to Capitalize on Diversity as a Community Asset

Riceour (1992) observes that finding ways to become ourselves through others is the fundamental project of citizenship in contemporary democratic societies. If the purpose of education is to help students become productive citizens, the public in each country must define what it means by *equity*. In Alberta, ministers of education over the years have used the term *equity* to draw attention to certain areas of student need and have gone on to develop policies and programs to address those needs.¹¹ The public tends to equate *equity* with notions of fairness and social justice. As a result, the term has sufficient cultural capital to justify a wide range of policies, few of which focus on providing resources to those most in need.

With the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, school boards began to assert their legal right to be equitably funded, a development that led to the standardization of funding formulas. In the name of equity, governments have also expended a great deal of money on technology to ensure that students in remote, rural areas receive educational services comparable to those in more populated areas. Unfortunately, the ubiquity of technology has caused the pendulum to swing too far. Rather than being about what is best for *all*, the notion of equity has increasingly been used to justify what is best for the *individual*. The triumph of individual rights over the needs of the community is evident in current government policies that focus on personalization, flexibility and choice. The time has come to refocus considerations of equity on what is needed to support a diverse, responsive community.

¹¹ For a comprehensive analysis of this process, see Clintberg 2005.

Paradox 4: System Reform and Transformation Sustained from the Inside Out

Although Alberta and Finland both have strong public education systems supported by vibrant civil societies, the locus for transformation is the school, not the system. For transformation to occur, in other words, teachers in each school must have the professional conditions and the supports they need to help students realize their unique gifts and talents.

Sahlberg (2011), who has studied schools around the world, concludes that high-performing jurisdictions share three characteristics:

1. They have internal conditions of practice that respect the professional intuition of teachers, allowing them to build the knowledge and skills they need to craft the best learning environments for their students.
2. They exist in communities that have the social capital necessary to provide encouraging and supportive conditions for students.
3. They encourage teachers to engage in reflective practice and to undertake research to improve student learning.

To foster school cultures of creativity and ingenuity, Alberta must build on the professional capital of its already-strong teaching force. Teachers need support to undertake ongoing school-based research that pushes the limits of sound teaching practice, curriculum design and school development. Alberta also needs to develop a coherent policy framework, something that it can learn by studying Finland's *Development Plan for Education and Research 2007–12*. Although developed by the national government, this strategy for supporting innovation in all sectors is tied to initiatives at the community level. In some cases, for example, public and private partnerships are used to provide public health and education services.

Paradoxically, establishing international partnerships can help to foster innovation and creativity at the school level by emphasizing that school reform is part of the internationalization of education. Speaking at an educational summit in Helsinki in May 2012, Pasi Sahlberg pointed out that educational transformation involves three strategies:

1. *Thinking ahead*: being bold, visionary and forward-thinking in aspiring to create a great school for all students
2. *Delivering within*: materially supporting and committing to the goals one sets while avoiding the distractions of “doing business as usual”
3. *Leading across*: principals, teachers and students crossing school and jurisdictional boundaries to learn from each other

Figure 5 shows how these three strategies, working together, can help bring about transformation. Not only is the Finland–Alberta partnership modelled on this approach, but other education partners across the globe are embracing it. Building on the strengths of high-performing schools around the world involves trusting principals, teachers and students to lead the way to transformation.

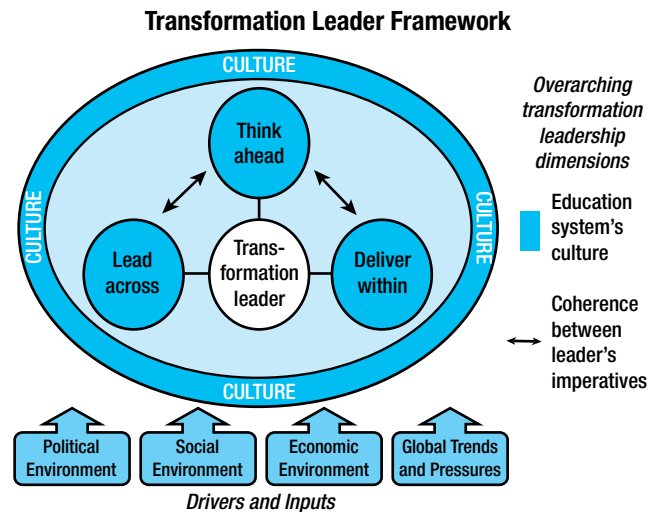


Figure 5: Transformation leader framework (Booz and Company 2012, 12)

While recognizing the political, social, economic and global trends and pressures that affect the work of school development, transformational leadership does not allow these influences to diminish the vision of creating a great school for all students. By thinking ahead, delivering within and reaching across, international partnerships can be a catalyst for transformation. Such partnerships also demonstrate that meaningful transformation must take into account the complex interplay of political, social, economic and global forces that affect schools every day.

Twelve Dimensions for Transforming Education in Alberta

Of all of the many-sided things in this world, education has the most sides.

—John Stuart Mill

The analysis of the 12 dimensions for informed transformation identified in the following pages is based on (1) comprehensive consultations with Association leaders and subgroups, (2) a review of the relevant literature on transformational change and (3) advice from leading international experts on educational policy development.¹²

In analyzing the 12 dimensions, the Association used a process known as *outcome mapping*. Essentially, outcome mapping involves asking the same set of questions to analyze the various aspects (or dimensions) of a complex situation. The questions are designed not only to reveal the underlying assumptions that produced the current situation but also to identify potential alternatives. Outcome mapping is intended to stimulate discussion, spur action and encourage long-term commitment to shared goals.¹³ Accordingly, the teaching profession offers the following analysis of the conditions necessary to transform Alberta's education system in the hope that it prompts education partners to discuss the issues and take action.

Here are the questions that were used to analyze each of the 12 dimensions:

Current Context

- What are the most relevant factors contributing to the situation?
- What is known and—equally important—not known about the situation?

Drivers for Change

- What forces are creating a sense of urgency?
- What serious problem or significant opportunity is on the immediate horizon?

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

- What shared societal and ethical commitments prompt the need to act?
- What principled long-term actions will address the situation?

Getting Started

- What are one or two readily achievable actions or goals?
- How can these actions lead to longer-term strategies?

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- What are the long-term indicators of a shared success?
- What is the evidence that a sustained commitment exists to address the situation?

The analysis of the 12 dimensions can be thought of as a series of *visionary essays*, a term widely used in outcome mapping. In the case of each dimension, the Association has attempted to describe the current situation, identify the core values and priorities, and suggest potential short- and long-term actions.

¹² The experts consulted were Stephen Murgatroyd, chief scout for Innovation Expedition; Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley, coauthors of *The Fourth Way*; Pasi Sahlberg, director of the CIMO and author of *Finnish Lessons: What the World Can Learn from Educational Change in Finland*; and Larry Beauchamp, former dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta.

¹³ For an overview of outcome mapping, see <http://www.outcomemapping.ca>.

1. Assessing and Reporting Student Learning

Current Context

- Outdated test-based compliance requirements continue to distract education partners from making real learning first a priority for Alberta students (ATA 2009d).
- School jurisdictions have adopted complex and often cumbersome digital reporting tools and other management systems to facilitate the reporting of student progress.
- Online reporting systems have done little to improve student learning and assessment or to better communicate student progress to parents.¹⁴

Drivers for Change

- The promising path of transformative curriculum redesign (which focuses on helping students become engaged thinkers, ethical citizens and creative entrepreneurs) is inconsistent with the increasing use of intricate data-management systems and the concomitant paucity of investment in professional development that would help teachers develop more effective assessment practices.¹⁵
- Technology vendors are increasingly using the slogans “21st-century learning” and “personalization” to market costly and often unsustainable learning management and assessment systems that have marginal benefits for students and significantly increase the workload of teachers.

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Access and Engagement

In addition to writing report cards, teachers communicate information about students to parents by organizing conferences, making telephone calls, creating agenda books and sending e-mails. These alternate forms of communication provide rich information and allow for dialogue. Rather than being seen as the final assessment, student progress reports constitute a written summary of information that was already shared in other ways. Students become active participants in a seamless process that blurs the distinction between learning and assessment.

Flexibility

Online reporting systems should accommodate decisions made by teachers. Teachers should not have to adapt their assessment practices to conform to the framework established by the software developers. In addressing the diverse learning needs of students, teachers may find that what constitutes evidence of learning for one student may not necessarily constitute evidence of learning for another. Student assessment is more than a mathematical calculation: marks must be mediated by the professional judgment of a teacher.

Partnerships

To be effective, report cards must be easily understood by parents and students. A report

¹⁴ In a comprehensive provincewide study, the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta Assessment Consortium (ATA and AAC 2011) found that more than 15 digital reporting platforms were in use in the province, most of them frustrating to work with and not particularly effective. More than half the study participants reported that their workload had increased by an average of 15 hours per term. Most participants (78.2 per cent) indicated that they had not been consulted with respect to choosing and implementing the reporting tool. A more recent worklife study of 3,000 Alberta teachers by nationally recognized researchers Linda Duxbury and Chris Higgins found that the inappropriate use of technology was one of the key contributors to teachers' increased workload. The results of this study, undertaken in the spring of 2012, will be published in the fall of 2012.

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of how transformation must include new approaches to assessment, see Murgatroyd 2011.

card should detail what has been learned, what remains to be learned and what actions need to be taken by the partners in learning (students, parents and teachers).

Innovation

Technology provides students with various ways of capturing evidence of their learning, including digital portfolios and video and audio recordings. Student-led conferences provide students with a chance to demonstrate their learning and to set goals for what they will learn in the future.

Getting Started

- Education partners re-engage and commit to implementing “Our Vision for Building Classroom Assessment Capacity to Enhance Student Success” (see Murgatroyd 2011), a comprehensive consultation process that took place in 2008. Here are two highlights of this activity:
 - Ongoing, job-embedded professional learning is the most effective way of enhancing teachers’ ability to assess and report on student learning.

- Teachers require support in learning how to make professional judgments about student progress based on evidence that they have gathered by observing students and talking to them about their learning.

- Education partners support alternatives to the current provincial testing programs as a way of assessing student progress in Grades 3, 6 and 9. The Alberta Assessment Consortium has developed pilot programs that could be used as a starting point for a public-assurance model (AAC 2012).

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Teachers’ professional judgment is considered the primary and most valid component of assessing and reporting student progress.
- Reporting student progress is seen as a way of enhancing the relationships among students, teachers and parents.
- Instead of measuring what is easy to assess, educators measure what society deeply values.
- What is reported publicly reflects the breadth and depth of the curriculum and is meaningful to stakeholders and to the public at large.

2. Curriculum Development and Implementation

Current Context

- Age-related grades are used to determine a student's level of access to schooling.
- The curriculum is excessively specific, thereby inhibiting exploration, problem-based learning and enduring understanding.
- Funding for implementing the curriculum is fragmented, program based and content focused. Funding also privileges certain groups.
- The Alberta curriculum is recognized nationally and internationally for its high quality.
- Alberta Education relies on and actively engages teachers in curriculum development.

Drivers for Change

- System leaders and teachers alike recognize that the system can do more to meet the needs of diverse learners by improving
 - high school completion rates,
 - high school to postsecondary transition rates,
 - the performance of First Nations and Métis students,
 - the support provided to students with special needs and
 - the extent to which students are engaged in, and are willing to take responsibility for, their own learning.
- Educators are frustrated by the rate at which programs change and by the lack of professional development provided.
- Alberta Education has historically placed too much emphasis on implementing discrete, disconnected new programs.

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Responsiveness

Sustain a balanced curriculum that promotes multiple ways of knowing and being. Focus on the four Cs—creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking—by offering a wide range of courses, including not only language arts, social studies, mathematics, sciences and technology but also drama, dance, music and art.

Professional Autonomy and Growth

Give teachers support for and the responsibility of designing, developing and delivering their own learning and that of their students (Shirley and Macdonald 2010).

Innovations

Use inquiry-based learning to engage students in learning activities that require disciplined knowledge, the ability to synthesize information, critical thinking and the ability to design. Such a rigorous approach will ensure that students develop knowledge and skills according to a formalized rubric.

Flexibility

Develop a provincial curriculum framework that clearly outlines student learning outcomes and that provides ample opportunity for local decision making. A promising model is the Finnish national core curriculum, which serves as the framework on which the local curriculum in that country is formulated (Finnish National Board of Education 2004).

Getting Started

- Base curriculum design on the following principles:
 - Keep the number of curriculum outcomes to a minimum.
 - Focus on problem-based work rather than on content-dominant design.
 - Ensure that the scope for each school has room for local components and for locally designed curriculum.
 - Ensure that assessments at all levels are developed by teachers.
- Establish a provincial advisory body (potentially cochaired by the government and the Association) to develop and coordinate a comprehensive five-year provincial curriculum-implementation plan and a funding framework that specifies provincial and regional delivery strategies (Alberta Education 2010b). Such an advisory body will help to ensure that the partners share an

understanding of how student competencies can form the basis of curriculum design.

- Initiate and support transformative school pilot projects that build on the gifts of each student and that take into account local priorities.

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Teachers have the primary responsibility for designing the curriculum within the context of a provincial framework.
- Teachers recognize the unique gifts and talents of all students and use different learning styles and approaches to ensure that all students learn effectively.
- Curriculum is implemented on an ongoing basis and is supported by learning networks that enable teachers to collaborate and share their experiences.
- The high school curriculum provides multiple pathways for students.¹⁶

¹⁶ Through the Finland–Alberta partnership, 12 high schools (7 in Finland and 5 in Alberta) are exploring an approach to high school programming that incorporates modules from universities, colleges, apprenticeships and other approved sources.

3. Digital Technologies and Learning

Current Context

- So far, attempts to use emerging technologies in the classroom have focused on the technology and infrastructure itself rather than on the interrelationship among pedagogy, curriculum and technology (ATA 2009a, 2010i, 2011c).
- A lack of appropriate technology, the failure of school boards and the province to consult with teachers, and restrictions in the form of filters and firewalls are limiting the ability of schools to make teaching and learning more flexible in terms of time and space (ATA 2009a, 2010i, 2011c).

Drivers for Change

- Technology will continue to double in power and capacity every 18 months and, as a result, will become ever more pervasive in teachers' personal and professional lives (Moore 1965).
- Corporations are framing the debate, promising that technology will transform education by offering inquiry-oriented, self-directed and more personalized learning experiences (ATA 2011c). What has been called the "Personalization of learning"¹⁷ is distracting jurisdictions from undertaking meaningful transformation.

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Responsiveness

In addition to being digitally literate, Albertans must have the ability to critically reflect on the appropriate time and place to use technology in their lives (Media Awareness Network 2010).

Professional Autonomy and Growth

The use of digital technologies to enhance learning raises a number of significant issues with respect to teachers' conditions of professional practice: the blurring of boundaries between professional and private time, the

increased need for technical support, the need for professional development related to technology, and structures to find innovative ways of incorporating digital technologies into their teaching practice.

Innovation

To succeed in a globally competitive workforce, students will need to be not only competent in the use of digital technologies but also capable of dealing with the enormous challenges posed by such issues as climate change, water shortages, overpopulation, economic destabilization, urbanization and pollution. The next generation will also need to function in a world in which economic activities are extended across national boundaries.

Getting Started

- The Association, in consultation with the government and education partners, establishes priorities with respect to future government investments in digital technology and related supports (ATA 2009a; Alberta Education 2010a).
- Universities, colleges and the Association collaborate with jurisdictions to fund field research into the kinds of technologies that optimize student learning (ATA 2010i).

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Alberta schools offer vibrant and creative learning environments in which the teaching profession decides how best to use digital technologies in meeting the learning needs of students and recognizing their individual talents and gifts.
- Decisions about investing in digital technologies are based on teachers' professional judgment and on what best serves the public interest.

¹⁷ Dennis Shirley's term, named after Pearson Publishing, for a focus on performance-driven systems that use technology to deliver educational services and analytics with the aim of lowering the costs of service. (See more at <http://albertafinlandpartnership.blogspot.ca/2012/06/educational-transformation.html#/2012/06/educational-transformation.html> or <http://tinyurl.com/842wp3n>.)

4. Inclusive Education

Current Context

- Alberta Education is in the process of implementing a new framework for inclusive education (Alberta Education 2009). Until the most recent budget, special education funding grants were frozen at 2008 levels. Because school districts have experienced significant cost increases in staffing and supports for special education programs over the last four years, many have had to cut services. Introduced in March 2012, the new funding framework is based on total student enrolment and on calculations of socioeconomic factors that affect the readiness of students to learn. While some districts will receive less funding than previously, others will receive more. Based on the public consultation process undertaken in conjunction with the Setting the Direction initiative, parents have high expectations that school-level services for students with special needs will be enhanced (Alberta Education 2009).
- The language of transformation is leading some stakeholders to expect that *all* students will have personal learning plans, personal supports and the opportunity to learn at any time, in any place at any pace (Alberta Education 2010c).

Drivers for Change

- The government's Action on Inclusion initiative articulates a new vision for inclusive education that highlights the need to provide all students with supports and services for learning (Alberta Education 2010e). Nevertheless, some students are falling through the cracks.
- Increasingly, teachers are experiencing difficulty meeting the needs of diverse learners because class sizes have increased and resources have decreased (Alberta Education 2010e).
- Because of budget cuts, school principals are having difficulty providing programs and services to students with diverse needs.

- New programs, under the umbrella of wraparound services, are being implemented. These programs will increase the workload of teachers and school administrators (Alberta Education 2010f).
- The current provincial accountability framework is inappropriate for students on individual program plans or on modified programs.

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Access and Engagement

All students have the right to learn. As a result, schools must be provided with the resources, supports and services they need to meet students' diverse learning needs. Teachers need time to plan, assess students' learning needs, design appropriate instructional programs and authentic assessment strategies, and meet as a learning team to develop resources for students who require specialized programs and supports (ATA 2009c).

Flexibility

- Programs of study need to be written in such a way as to provide all students with opportunities to learn.
- Teachers need tools to plan programs for students with diverse learning needs and the learning resources necessary to implement those plans (ATA 2009c).
- Student assessment and evaluation programs must be flexible enough to accommodate a wide-ranging curriculum (Murgatroyd and Sahlberg 2010).

Partnerships

Students have the right to be provided with the supports they need to succeed in school. Classroom teachers will work in partnership with parents and other professionals to support all students. The roles and responsibilities of each professional group will need to be defined relative to the group's scope of practice. Schools

should not be responsible for coordinating and funding wraparound services (ATA 2009c).

Innovation

Innovative instructional approaches and assistive technologies offer students new opportunities to learn. Teachers will receive the professional development they need to use these innovative approaches and assistive technologies effectively (ATA 2009c).

Getting Started

- The funding framework for inclusion needs to reflect the true costs of providing supports and services to diverse learners, and school districts must be transparent in reporting how these funds are used (ATA 2009c).
- Adequate funding for inclusion needs to be provided immediately to support all aspects of implementation, including staffing, time, technology, learning resources and professional development (ATA 2009c).
- Protocols for wraparound services need to be developed that reflect the professional scope of practice of each participating group.

Teachers and school administrators must be provided with time to participate in learning team meetings (ATA 2010f, 2010g).

- Inclusive learning coaches need professional development to help them carry out their role, and they must be available to help classroom teachers meet the diverse learning needs of students (ATA 2011b).

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Schools have the funding they need to honour the right of all students to learn.
- Wraparound supports and services are available to help schools meet the unique needs of students.
- Classroom teachers have the time and resources necessary to maximize student learning, and they are valued members of a learning team.
- School administrators have the resources and supports necessary to provide safe and inclusive learning opportunities for all students.

5. Optimal Conditions of Practice

Current Context

- Since 2005, class sizes have increased dramatically, while support for students with special needs (including English as an additional language learners) has declined.¹⁸
- Alberta’s population is increasing and becoming more diverse. Calgary, for example, now has the fourth-largest immigrant population in Canada, and immigrants account for more than 18 per cent of its population.

Drivers for Change

- Teaching and learning are becoming increasingly complex.
- Teachers’ conditions of practice are directly related to students’ learning environments. In 2011, 44 per cent of Alberta teachers reported that their classroom conditions had worsened. In 2010, 33 per cent of teachers indicated that their conditions had worsened.¹⁹
- On average, Alberta teachers work 56 hours per week. The number of hours worked varies widely from one school community to another.²⁰
- Increasingly, teachers are multitasking in an attempt to juggle their instructional and noninstructional activities. Teachers seldom have time for personal breaks (ATA 2011d, 2012c).
- Teachers are increasingly expected to undertake work not connected to instruction, such as trouble-shooting and working with

unreliable and constantly changing technology. Such noninstructional activities diminish their conditions of practice.

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Responsiveness

- Transform the system by making evidence-informed improvements in the structure and nature of teachers’ work.
- Learn from high-performing jurisdictions such as Finland, where teachers teach fewer than 600 hours per year, compared with the more than 1,000 hours that teachers in Alberta work.

Professional Autonomy and Growth

- Address the growing complexity of teachers’ work, including the expectation that they take on noninstructional duties.
- Create formal protocols for monitoring and responding to workplace conditions and organizational wellness.

Innovation

- Develop policy to ensure that teachers have opportunities to undertake research on creating innovative environments that not only maximize student learning but also provide teachers themselves with optimal conditions of practice.²¹

¹⁸ For a detailed analysis of how class size and composition has changed over time, see ATA 2010h.

¹⁹ The Association’s annual Member Opinion Survey has tracked classroom conditions in Alberta schools since the late 1990s. The past five years have seen a marked decline in classroom conditions with respect to support for students with special needs, requirements to take on noninstructional duties and access to professional development.

²⁰ In a study of teachers in Rocky View School Division (ATA 2011d), researchers found that, increasingly, teachers were required to perform duties in addition to classroom instruction. Seventy-six per cent of respondents in this study disagreed with the statement “I work less than 50 hours a week.” In a similar study conducted in Calgary School District (ATA 2012c), teachers reported an average work week of 55 hours, including about 22 hours spent on the core tasks of instruction and planning, 6 additional hours during the work day on assessment and reporting, and 2.3 hours on supervising during lunch and recess.

²¹ The OECD, in collaboration with Alberta Education, hosted an International Conference on Innovative Learning Environments, in Banff, Alberta, on October 10 to 12, 2011. The theme of the conference was the importance of creating innovative learning environments for students.

22 • A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta

- Start using indicators of organizational well-being that take into account the local context and the way in which the organization has changed over time.

Getting Started

- School authorities, in collaboration with government and the profession, undertake model projects that examine innovative teaching and learning environments that enhance organizational well-being and work-life balance.²²
- The government, school boards and the Association agree on a provincial framework

that expedites collective bargaining and enables the education partners to focus on professional practice and transformational change.

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Alberta schools are vibrant, creative working environments that enable teachers to grow professionally and personally.
- Teachers rate school authorities as progressive employers.

²² The education partners in Alberta recently agreed on an education research framework. One topic that the partners might consider studying is the extent to which creating optimal professional conditions for teachers benefits student learning. The study could draw on the international partnerships in which the Association and the ministry are currently involved.

6. Differentiation for Learning

Current Context

- Governments, teachers, parents and school communities are exploring how the education system can provide students with a more individualized approach to their learning, including flexibility with respect to when and where they learn (Alberta Education 2010c, 2010a; British Columbia Ministry of Education 2010).
- The current promise to personalize learning is vaguely defined and not supported by sound research. The fact that most promises come from the private sector also poses a risk to public education (McRae 2010).

Drivers for Change

- Policymakers are increasingly looking to replace the industrial model of education with one that provides students with more flexibility.
- Finding ways to differentiate learning is increasingly seen as important in helping students to develop the skills and knowledge that they will need to creatively navigate an uncertain future (Alberta Education 2010c; British Columbia Ministry of Education 2010).
- Corporations are promoting digital technologies as the magic bullet for achieving differentiation, which they refer to as “personalized learning” (Software Industry Association of America 2010).

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Responsiveness

- Differentiating learning in the public education system by building on the individual gifts and talents of all students is highly desirable.
- Many promising new ways of differentiating learning, instruction and assessment are becoming available.
- High school programs should be redesigned so that students can progress at their own rate rather than be tied to an age cohort or to the current class structure.
- The profession and the government should work together to develop the guiding principles for the differentiation of learning.

Equity

- Allowing technology rather than pedagogical considerations to drive personalization may create a situation in which some students have more access to learning than others.

Innovation

- The teaching profession must be allowed to define the conditions in which learning can be personalized using technology or other means. Involving teachers will ensure that personalization takes place in a highly relational, active and inquiry-oriented learning environment that encourages children to develop socially, emotionally, culturally and intrapersonally.

Getting Started

- School authorities, in collaboration with the government and the profession, will undertake model projects to demonstrate how innovative learning environments can help to differentiate pedagogy and assessment.
- Great schools are defined as those that (1) support experiential learning and (2) offer students multiple pathways to high school graduation.
- Alberta’s teaching profession, in collaboration with other education research partners, continues to explore the structures that, based on evidence and teachers’ experience, best facilitate the differentiation of student learning (McRae 2010).

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Alberta schools offer vibrant and creative learning environments in which all students find opportunities to succeed, feel connected to their teachers and are fully engaged in their learning experiences.
- Differentiated learning is driven by considerations of relationships and community engagement rather than by technology and business models of customization.

7. Professional Development and Autonomy

Current Context

- Teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their ability to help students learn are affected by their conditions of professional practice (Klassen and Chiu 2010).
- Most school-improvement initiatives provide teachers with little opportunity for input, are overly prescriptive and lack sustained, practice-embedded professional learning (Livingstone 2007).
- Teachers' access to professional development and the quality of that professional development vary widely from one school to the next.
- Funding for professional development is often unstable and haphazardly planned (ATA 2010d).
- Unlike other professions, the teaching profession in Alberta cannot determine the professional practice standards required to enter or remain in the teaching profession as currently outlined in the *Teaching Profession Act*.

Drivers for Change

- The consensus of researchers is that teachers should not be “at the far side of educational reform” (ATA 2010i; Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium 2009) but an integral part of it.
- As teaching and learning become more complex, improving teaching practice and teacher quality is becoming imperative.
- Teachers need access to professional development to keep up with the rapid evolution in technology (ATA 2010i; Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium 2009).
- Teachers are reporting that their access to individual professional development is declining.

- Teachers' access to professional development is restricted by excessive governmental bureaucracy.
- Although many professional learning opportunities are available, they often lack coherence, coordination and sustained funding.
- The government's decision to cut school grants for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement by 50 per cent will result in a reduction in professional development and in support for innovation.
- The transformational changes will require a major emphasis on professional judgment of teachers; the governance of the teaching profession should reflect this enhanced emphasis.

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Equity

- Teachers' growth goals must take into account their unique circumstances such as their area of specialization, their geographic location and the stage of their career.
- Resources and access must be distributed equitably to ensure that highly skilled teachers are available to address the needs of all learners.

Professional Autonomy

- Through collaborative professional autonomy teachers should determine their own professional learning needs based on a number of measures, including their sense of self-efficacy.
- Teachers need to remain vigilant that their professional growth plans are not co-opted by school boards or the government.
- The teaching profession should move toward self-governance, including teacher certification.

Innovation

- Professional learning must be based on research, implemented using a practice-based model and designed to encourage teachers to take pedagogical risks.
- Structures are needed to encourage individual practitioners to undertake research and to share promising practices with other teachers.

Engagement Through Collaboration

- To develop responsive learning partnerships, teachers must be provided with regular time to meet with their colleagues to develop curriculum and assessment tools, plan, dialogue, compare, coach their peers and undertake research.
- Professional development providers and planners must collaborate to ensure that teachers have access to formal learning opportunities and resources.

Getting Started

- Ensure that teachers have access to effective professional learning that meets needs they have identified themselves through collaborative professional autonomy (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012a).
- Ensure that professional learning opportunities are equitably funded throughout the province, implemented in a manner that allows for coherent professional

growth and designed to put teachers at the centre rather than at the edges of school-improvement efforts (ATA 2010i; Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium 2009).

- Significantly reduce teachers' instructional time and other duties so that they can participate on an ongoing basis in collaborative communities of practice (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012a).
- Devolve greater responsibility to the Alberta Teachers' Association for the governance of Alberta's teaching profession.

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Alberta teachers actively improve their teaching practice by collaborating and participating in communities of practice.
- Professional development is embedded in the daily work life of teachers.
- Professional development and learning for teachers are based on the principle that learning is cyclical rather than linear.
- Teachers undertake research to identify reflective practices that help them and other teachers to improve their teaching practice.²³
- The Alberta Teachers' Association is able to govern the teaching profession in ways that ensure the growth of the profession and public confidence in the profession.

²³ Practitioner research is a fundamental element of the education research framework that Alberta's education partners recently created.

8. Public Assurance

Current Context

- The government’s current practice of testing all students in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12 is not cost effective.
- The current accountability model, which relies on tests to determine how well students are performing, does little to support student progress and ensure that they are engaged in their learning (Gariepy, Spencer and Couture 2009).
- The current testing culture distorts teaching and learning processes.
- Performance measures are used to compare schools. These comparisons seldom take into account such factors as the socioeconomic status of the students, their cultural diversity or the goals of the school.

Drivers for Change

- The measures in the current accountability framework focus more on system performance than on the learning outcomes of students.
- Curriculum objectives are so numerous as to be meaningless.
- Students learn best through problem-based learning and mindful teaching.
- Engaging in international partnerships with other high-performing jurisdictions such as Finland will encourage students, teachers and principals to become leaders in finding innovative ways of improving teaching and learning.²⁴

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Access and Engagement

- Students need access to learning that is meaningful to them.

- Teachers, who are professionally responsible for supporting student learning, should assess each student’s learning in ways that are appropriate to the student’s level of development.
- The public good is best served when students are engaged in their learning, teachers are engaged in enabling learning, parents are engaged in supporting learning and communities are engaged in supporting their school.

Flexibility

- Student assessment should enable rather than constrain learning by identifying instructional practices that will enhance learning.
- Assessment should identify opportunities to “push the envelope,” thereby ensuring that students realize their individual gifts and talents.

Partnerships

- Student learning requirements should be determined locally within a broad provincial framework.
- Teacher assessment practices and school reporting processes should be supported through provincial networks of education partners, including the ATA’s specialist councils.

Innovation

- Use AISI and other local initiatives to find alternatives to provincial testing.
- Move to a school-based assurance model, which will increase student engagement, boost learning outcomes and help ensure that the school achieves its objectives.

²⁴ The Finland–Alberta partnership is exploring alternatives to system reporting that focus on relational trust as opposed to data trust. See Sahlberg (2011) for more information.

Getting Started

- The education partners develop a new provincial protocol for reporting school performance that takes into account such factors as creativity and proficiency in the various learning outcomes outlined in the impending revisions to Alberta Education's *Goals and Standards Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta* (Government of Alberta 1998).
- Teachers, students, parents and the community work together to create a school-development plan.
- Provincial assessments are conducted on a sample of students. These assessments are

performance based and developed in consultation with classroom teachers. The results of these assessments inform and complement school-development plans.

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Alberta schools have moved from a bureaucratic accountability model to a locally focused, student-driven assurance model based on school-development plans and teachers as leaders in innovation.²⁵
- Alberta schools take a less-is-more approach to learning based on a relevant, locally responsive curriculum.

²⁵ Such models were key features of the Accountability Pillar projects that the Association undertook in collaboration with Livingstone Range School Division and Grande Prairie Public School District. See Murgatroyd and Sahlberg (2010) for an initial report on these projects. Case studies based on this approach are also featured in Murgatroyd (2011) and Couture and Murgatroyd (2012).

9. School Leadership

Current Context

- A significant portion of school leaders in Alberta will retire within the next five years (Alberta Education 2010g).
- School systems are reporting a shortage of qualified candidates for school leadership positions (Alberta Education 2010g).
- A 2009 survey found that, although they enjoy working with staff and students, school leaders face a number of challenges: competing expectations, insufficient time and lack of appropriate professional development (ATA 2009b; ATA/Canadian Association of Principals 2012).
- Nationally, administrators are reporting an intensification in their work. Psychiatric disorders resulting from stress and anxiety now account for 50 per cent of long-term disability leaves.
- The Association provides leadership development and professional development programs for school administrators but is hampered by a lack of resources. Other stakeholders are offering competing programs.

Drivers for Change

- Among school-related influences on student learning, leadership is second in importance only to classroom instruction (Seashore et al 2010).
- Distributed leadership is becoming more common in schools. Though still at the centre of school leadership, the principal in this model is not the only leader (Seashore et al 2010).
- The system is expecting more and more of principals, whose role is becoming increasingly complex. A more distributed model of leadership is necessary to relieve this “authority dilemma” (ATA 2009b; ATA/Canadian Association of Principals 2012).

- Alberta Education has approved a Framework for School Leadership that includes Provincial Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders. This document should reshape the role of school leaders (Alberta Education 2010g).

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Access and Engagement

- The Association and its Council on School Administration provide high-quality leadership development, induction and ongoing professional development to school leaders that addresses their needs and that aligns with the Provincial Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders (Alberta Education 2010g).
- Teachers and school leaders have access to leadership development programs (ATA 2010a; ATA 2010e; Parsons and Beauchamp 2011).

Flexibility

- The Association, in collaboration with other partners, offers high-quality programs and services for school leaders that are tailored to the context in which they work (ATA 2010a; ATA 2010e; Parsons and Beauchamp 2011).

Partnerships

- The Association will chair a provincial board to coordinate the delivery of comprehensive programs of leadership development and facilitate the development of resources to support the Framework for School Leadership.

Innovation

- The school will become the locus of control for system improvement. New models of school leadership will be necessary to support this approach.
- Leadership will focus on enhancing the effectiveness of teachers and on ensuring

optimum learning for all students in the school (Parsons and Beauchamp 2011).

Getting Started

- The minister of education formally approves the Provincial Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders as a provincial requirement. The requirement will help to ensure high standards of practice and uniform procedures for the growth, supervision and evaluation of school leaders.
- The minister of education approves the Framework for School Leadership and provides the provincial board of leadership development with funding to develop programs and services to help implement the framework.

- The Association, in collaboration with other stakeholders, provides coaching and mentorship programs, professional development workshops, conferences and publications to support school administrators.

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- The Association, in collaboration with other stakeholders, provides flexible, responsive, high-quality programs and services that support the development of effective school leaders.
- School leaders across the province have the resources they need at the school and district levels to support maximal student learning and development.²⁶

²⁶ For detailed case studies on how leadership capacity can be supported, see Couture and Murgatroyd (2012). The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement has also demonstrated how schools can become leaders in innovation.

10. Teacher Leadership

Current Context

- A growing body of research demonstrates that distributed leadership has a positive impact on school development (Hargreaves, Halasz and Pont 2007; Schleicher 2012).
- Rather than being confined to the principal's or superintendent's office, leadership must be spread throughout the professional community so that it remains tied as closely as possible to classroom learning (Harris 2009).

Drivers for Change

- Teachers are increasingly finding inspired and innovative ways of improving schools (Murgatroyd 2011; Couture and Murgatroyd 2012; Hargreaves et al 2009).
- A more systematic approach to nurturing and sustaining teacher leaders is urgently needed. Currently, leadership is often misaligned with what is best for student learning (Mascall et al 2008).

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Responsiveness

- Supporting teacher leadership enhances the professional responsibility of teachers as public leaders in learning.

Professional Autonomy and Growth

- Teacher leadership development that is purposefully supported by policymakers and teacher organizations can significantly improve schools (Naylor et al 2008).

Innovation

- Support structures at the school and system levels are needed to help teachers incorporate ingenuity into their work (Couture and Murgatroyd 2012; Murgatroyd 2011).

Flexibility

- Educational leadership should focus less on defining formal roles and more on progressively expanding the leadership capacity of all members of the teaching profession.²⁷

Getting Started

- The education partners have agreed to an education research framework intended to facilitate the development of collaborative programs that foster local innovation and strengthen teacher leadership.
- Beginning with schools involved in the international partnerships, establish a provincial network of schools testing innovative practices.

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Teachers are at the centre rather than the periphery of educational reform (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012a).
- Alberta teachers are recognized globally as leaders in educational transformation (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012b; ATA 2011a, 2012a).
- Schools in Alberta support collaborative professional autonomy and risk taking.

²⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of specific strategies to advance this goal, see "Teacher Leadership." Special issue, *Journal of Staff Development* 32, no 3, June 2011.

11. Early Learning

Current Context

- Resource-rich Alberta ranked second last on the most recent national comparison of early education services across Canada. The independent report ranked provinces on 15 benchmarks associated with the delivery of high-quality early childhood programs. The benchmarks were organized into five categories: governance, funding, access, learning environment and accountability. Alberta scored 3 out of a possible 15 points. Quebec, which received 10 points, was the most highly rated province (McCain, Mustard and McCuaig 2011).
- Alberta’s provincial preschool program for low-income families currently turns away 900 needy families each year (Kleiss 2011).

Drivers for Change

- The social and economic benefits of providing early-learning programs are well documented in the research on economic and community development.
- Early-learning programs help children to realize their full potential and lead more productive and fulfilling lives. They also significantly reduce the amount that governments would otherwise spend on justice, health, welfare and correctional programs.²⁸
- Early learning is the most effective way of addressing health issues and socioeconomic factors that might inhibit a child’s readiness to learn.

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Equity

- Every child must have an equal opportunity to develop his or her gifts, talents and potential.

By the time many Alberta children currently reach Grade 1, they are already far behind and, as a result, have a reduced potential for learning.

Access and Engagement

- The province should focus on fostering learning in children at an even earlier age (0 to 4) by supporting families, especially young mothers.
- School and system-level support structures are needed to help teachers incorporate ingenuity into their work.

Flexibility

- Schools, as hubs of the community, should function as parenting centres that draw on community and social services to help families foster early learning.
- Schools in older neighbourhoods, because they tend to have extra space, are ideally suited to serve as parenting centres. Using the same building to deliver both learning and other services is an efficient use of public funds.

Getting Started

- Education partners and municipalities need to start thinking of schools as learning hubs for communities rather than as simply institutions for delivering K to 12 education.
- Undertake pilot studies on how schools can be used to facilitate learning for adults and seniors. A good model is Saskatchewan’s “Schools Plus” initiative. Scandinavian countries also use school buildings to deliver other services than just education.
- Working with education partners, Alberta Education should initiate pilot programs to implement the ground-breaking

²⁸ There is a growing consensus among economists and sociologists that high-quality early childhood development programs may in fact be good “investments” that have long-term economic returns ranging from \$7 to \$17 for every dollar invested in such programs (Schweinhart and Weikart 1993).

memorandum of agreement between the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta and the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs of Alberta. This agreement is the foundation for enhancing learning for First Nations students (Government of Canada 2010).

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Students enter Grade 1 ready to learn.
- Against the backdrop of dramatic population growth—Alberta’s population is expected to reach 4.6 million by 2030—Alberta is recognized as a world leader in early childhood development research and programming.
- Progressive initiatives such as the creation of an Early Learning Branch in Alberta Education and Premier Redford’s commitment to fund full-day kindergarten have enabled all Alberta students to achieve their full potential.

12. Governance and Vibrant Communities

Current Context

- Alberta’s economic boom has challenged the capacity of some municipal governments to sustain vibrant neighbourhoods and communities.
- Alberta’s approach to teaching and learning tends to be bureaucratic and influenced by market-driven factors such as competition and choice. A more democratic approach to the teaching profession, such as that espoused in the Fourth Way, is needed (Darling-Hammond et al 2009; Zhao 2009).
- Alberta’s population, which is becoming increasingly diverse, is expected to reach 4.6 million by 2035. Booming cities will struggle to avoid social fragmentation while rural communities will remain the same size or decline (ATA 2011a).
- Globalization is forcing the current jurisdictional governance and decision-making processes to change (Darling-Hammond et al 2009; Zhao 2009; Barber 1998).
- Education is a logical starting point for exploring how communities can better coordinate the delivery of education, health and other public services that enhance the well-being of citizens and contribute to healthy communities.

Drivers for Change

- *Personalization of learning* has become a mantra in the drive to transform education. Although individualizing instruction can benefit student learning, if taken too far it can also weaken the sense of community (Zhao 2009).
- The various levels of government need to work together to create strong schools and vibrant communities capable of participating in an increasingly globalized world (Zhao 2009).
- Little coordination and cooperation currently exists among the three levels of government responsible for education in Alberta: school boards, municipalities and the provincial government. For example, school boards throughout the province often find themselves in the position of closing potentially viable schools in older neighbourhoods in order to build schools in new subdivisions. What is needed is better coordination so that older schools can be preserved and new schools built where they are needed (Sands 2012; City of Edmonton 2012).

Core Values and Strategic Priorities

Responsiveness

- Governance must be grounded in a form of democracy in which citizens are not just voters but fully engaged participants in decisions about their communities. Benjamin Barber suggests that true democracy fosters “participation, deliberation and agency” (Barber 1998).

Access and Engagement

- School boards, municipalities and the provincial government must strive to coordinate the delivery of education in Alberta.

Engagement Through Collaboration

- The community must become more engaged in developing policy and making decisions about the delivery of public education in the province. As more and more immigrants arrive in Alberta, for example, local communities need to have input into programs that support English language learning.

Getting Started

- Adopt a distributed approach to leadership at the school and district level (Schleicher 2012).
- Encourage school boards to engage in partnerships that would turn schools into community hubs. One promising model is a consultation process that the City of Edmonton initiated involving local school boards and the municipal, provincial and federal governments in an effort to ensure the

vitality and sustainability of Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods (City of Edmonton 2012).

Getting It Right—What Will Success Look Like in Five Years?

- Schools are the hubs of vibrant communities and, as such, engage citizens in discussing such issues as what competencies students need to develop, how learning can be differentiated, what infrastructure is needed and how rural schools can remain sustainable.
- Albertans recognize that visionary leadership and engaged citizenship are the keys to effective community governance.

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