

P17-01 Support for mental health content and awareness in the K-12 programs of study and schools
Co-Sponsored by: Hazeldean School Council, Galbraith School Council

Background

Overall, mental health is as important as physical health, yet it is often overlooked. Children who learn and practice healthy mental health habits are happier, have less stress and are better learners.

It is estimated that 10-20% of Canadian youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder – the single most disabling group of disorders worldwide. <Canadian Mental Health Association – Fast Facts about Mental Illness> In 2012, suicide accounted for 17% of deaths among youth aged 10 to 14, 28% among youth aged 15 to 19, and 25% among young adults aged 20-24. <Statistics Canada (2015). Leading causes of death, total population, by age group and sex, Canada, 2012. CANSIM 102-0561>

Suicide is among the leading causes of death in 15-24 year old Canadians, second only to accidents; 4,000 people die prematurely each year by suicide. <Canadian Mental Health Association – Fast Facts about Mental Illness>

34% of high-school students indicate a moderate-to-serious level of psychological distress (symptoms of anxiety and depression). 14% of high-school students indicate a serious level of psychological distress. <CAMH – Mental Illness and Addictions: Facts & Statistics>

Because early support and intervention are vital,

Because research shows that 70% of mental health problems begin in childhood or the teen years.

<Government of Canada (2006). The human face of mental health and mental illness in Canada. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada>,

Because Mental illness is increasingly threatening the lives of our children; with Canada’s youth suicide rate the third highest in the industrialized world. <Canadian Mental Health Association – Fast Facts about Mental Illness>

Because stigma or discrimination attached to mental illnesses presents a serious barrier, not only to diagnosis and treatment but also to acceptance in the community,

Because normalizing the discussions around mental health will help remove some of the stigma for children and teens, who feel ashamed of their struggles,

Because reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues improves self-esteem, focus and achievement,

Because knowledge and awareness of mental health issues can greatly reduce incidents of bullying and self-inflicted injuries;

WE REQUEST that Alberta Education include mandatory, comprehensive mental health content in the curriculum for all grades that educates about disorders, symptoms and strategies for coping.

WE REQUEST that Alberta Education work in close partnership with Alberta Health Services to simplify the sharing of information, to create a comprehensive care plan, which will facilitate student’s diagnosis, management strategies and access to resources, supports and programs.

WE REQUEST that the Alberta Association of Deans of Education provide more comprehensive training on mental health issues for children through pre-service teacher programs

WE REQUEST that Alberta School Councils’ Association provide links to authoritative reference materials/organizations to assist school councils in developing their knowledge about mental health issues and impacts on learning successes of kids.

WE REQUEST that all Alberta school councils encourage open communication with respect to impacts of mental health issues on children and learning and that school councils be recognized as a safe place for these discussions to take place.

P17-02 Accountability Pillar surveys delivery and accessibility

Sponsored by: Notre Dame School Council

Background

Accountability Pillar surveys are administered to students, teachers, administrators, parents at the Grade 4, 7 and 10 levels annually.

The results of the surveys inform policy and direction for the K-12 education system through the compiled Accountability Pillar results at both the provincial and individual school district levels.

Parents do not currently have opportunity to respond to the survey digitally as teachers and students do.

Students do not currently have the opportunity to respond digitally from their homes.

Because easier more efficient access to the survey for parents may result in more survey participants,

Because more parent respondents will result in more data from across the province,

Because students and educators are already able to access the survey instrument digitally at their school,

Because parent involvement and engagement in the learning successes of children is important to parents as individuals and important to parents collectively through the platform of school councils

Because a better understanding of the Accountability Pillar survey results for both school council and administration about the level and type of involvement parents are having in the education system will benefit school councils, school boards and provincial education stakeholders

WE REQUEST that Alberta School Councils' Association collaborate with Alberta Education on the accountability survey instrument questions for parents to more clearly define involvement in regards to the level of satisfaction around the parent involvement and school council sections.

WE REQUEST that the Alberta School Councils' Association advocate to Alberta Education that the parent portion of the Accountability Pillar surveys as they relate to parent and school council involvement be available online and distributed and collected digitally.

Background

At its 2016 annual meeting, the Alberta School Boards' Association passed a motion supporting the inclusion of computer coding and computational thinking skills into the Alberta curriculum. Some of the background that was submitted with that motion is quoted below. In summary, these skills are increasingly important to modern life. Although the Alberta curriculum provides opportunities for interested students to learn some of these skills, it is becoming more and more important for all children to have some basic understanding of these subjects. There is a growing trend around the world to include these skills in the curriculum, and we do not want our children to fall behind on this. Modern coding techniques take advantage of intuitive "drag-and-drop" block commands that children can learn and understand from very young ages.

The fact that coding and computational thinking skills are not included consistently in the Alberta curriculum from a young age makes it more challenging to introduce them later, as students enter higher-level courses with vastly different levels of preparation and background. It is important to distinguish here between the basic skills of using electronic devices, and the ability to create and develop code to command these devices. The latter is where our curriculum leaves many of our students behind.

"Learning to code has been likened to learning a foreign language, or perhaps, more specifically, a family of foreign languages. There are many different coding languages, each one designed for a specific purpose. Every website, smartphone app, computer program, calculator and even microwave oven relies on code in order to operate.

"Currently, the Alberta K–12 Information and Communication Technology curriculum provides a broad perspective on the nature of programming languages and is infused in parts within the core courses, but is not addressed through learner outcomes.... Career and Technology Studies (CTS) Computing Science courses are available at the high school level.... In grades 5 to 9, the draft Career and Technology Foundations (CTF) curriculum will provide flexible ways for students to pursue areas of interest, which could include computer programming.

"The skills that exposure to coding build are... 21st century skills like creativity, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking. It is becoming crucial to have at least a basic understanding of how the devices that play such a large role in modern life actually work.

"Over the next 10 years it is estimated that there will be 1.4 million jobs in computer sciences and only about 400,000 graduates qualified to do them. Jobs not directly linked to computer sciences – such as banking, medicine and journalism – will also be affected by the need for at least an understanding of programming and coding.

"Some schools have encouraged teachers to integrate coding into the current curriculum and many others have robotics clubs, makerspaces and access to 3-D printing and related lunch time or after school activities. However these activities do not attract enough students into the world of coding. In this age of information we need to build skills for the workplace of the immediate future. Therefore, we must interest and educate all students in this new language; especially girls who, if not introduced to coding by grade three, are not thereafter easily engaged in computer science. In the early 1970s when the field of computer science was new, 41% of those in this field were women, but today that figure has shrunk to 24%.

“BC [has recently followed] Nova Scotia, which introduced coding to curriculum last fall. Alberta, like many other provinces, is using a patchwork approach addressing students with special interest in the area.

“Germany, Denmark and Britain have introduced coding into their school curriculum. Estonia is teaching children as young as 5 to code:

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/digital/news/five-years-olds-learn-coding-in-schools-to-prepare-for-future-labour-market/>”

“Exposing students to coding from an early age helps to demystify an area that can be intimidating. It also breaks down stereotypes of computer scientists as boring geeks, supporters argue. Plus, they say, programming is highly creative: Studying it can help to develop problem-solving abilities, as well as equip students for a world transformed by technology. It is important not only to individual students’ future career prospects, but also for a country’s economic competitiveness and the technology industry’s ability to find qualified workers.

“Our children need to build their digital confidence and an understanding of the new world around us. This can be done through building digital literacy in our schools. We in Alberta, through our curriculum, need to ensure that all students experience and strive to meet specific learner outcomes dealing with coding.

“Following are some additional links to background material as to why our children should learn to code and why coding is especially important to our girls.

“General information re why kids should learn to code:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/teach-kindergarten-kids-computer-science-1.3485915>

<https://hourofcode.com/ca>

<http://gu.com/p/4em53/sbl>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/nov/29/five-ways-work-will-change-future-of-workplace-ai-cloud-retirement-remote>

“Girls and coding links:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sophie-rothdouquet/the-five-reasons-girls-sh_1_b_8131660.html”

Because coding and computational thinking are both creative outlets, and fundamental skills of modern life, that should be taught to all students whether or not they make an effort to seek them out in optional courses, and

Because early exposure to these skills can create opportunities for students to develop their understanding and further their ownership of their individual learning; therefore

WE REQUEST that the Alberta School Councils’ Association request that Alberta Education integrate computer coding and computational thinking skills into the Alberta K-12 programs of study curricular outcomes, beginning in elementary school at a grade level determined by experts’ recommendations to Alberta Education, and continuing through all subsequent grades.

P17-04 Support for Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action

Sponsored by Lethbridge District #51 Council of School Councils

Background

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was established on June 2, 2008, as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, and carried out a mandate based on “an emerging and compelling desire to put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future. The truth telling and reconciliation process as part of an overall holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy is a sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing. This is a profound commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect that will forge a brighter future. The truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation.” [Mandate Introduction, Schedule N, Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.] Led by Justice (now Senator) Murray Sinclair, the TRC conducted extensive hearings across the country, eventually concluding its work in December 2015 following the release of a lengthy report. The report included 94 “calls to action” for Canadians, to help us move forward together.

While many of the TRC’s calls to action relate to matters under the jurisdiction of the federal government, or otherwise outside the mandate of the Alberta School Councils’ Association (since our focus is on provincial education), there were calls under the headings “Education for Reconciliation” and “Education” that the Alberta Ministry of Education would have a direct role in implementing, and that relate to parental involvement in our children’s education. Calls to Action 10 and 62–64 are particularly relevant to ASCA’s work. The full list of Calls to Action can be found at

http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

There are many ways in which ASCA can support this work, and has been supporting it. It is important both symbolically and procedurally for this work to have the explicit support and approval of the membership.

Because 6.3% of the population of Alberta is of “Aboriginal identity,” representing 15.8% of the Aboriginal population of Canada [Statistics Canada National Household Survey, 2011];

Because we value the history, traditions, and cultures of the indigenous people of Alberta, which are part of our history and heritage as residents of Alberta whatever our racial or ethnic origins;

Because we acknowledge that great harm was done to the indigenous people of Alberta through the residential school system; and

Because we wish to support the efforts begun through Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission to find ways to work towards a stronger and healthier future, therefore

WE REQUEST that the Alberta School Councils’ Association (ASCA) recognises our shared responsibility to raise the next generation of Albertans in the spirit of reconciliation. To that end, ASCA supports the work that has been done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as an important step toward reconciliation, and will endeavour to support the work of implementing the Calls to Action from the TRC report as opportunities arise.

WE REQUEST that ASCA work together with Alberta Education to provide resources and information for parents and school councils who want to inform themselves about the history of residential schools, and the ongoing process of reconciliation.

WE REQUEST that ASCA provide regular updates and communication to the membership related to the work of reconciliation.

Background

Following the Alberta government's "Setting the Direction" framework for inclusive education (2009) and the subsequent release of the "Continuing the Conversation" document in 2013, the Alberta Teachers' Association struck a Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools to study and report back on the state of inclusion in Alberta. The Panel released its report in September 2014. It concluded that inclusion has still not been adequately addressed in the Alberta Education system, and its report included a variety of recommendations to address this. Parents are active and important partners with teachers in the effort to ensure that all of our children are fully included in our public education system.

In the context of the new curriculum development currently underway, it is particularly important to add the voice of parents in support of Recommendation 14 of that report, asking the government to address the needs of all learners when developing new curricula and related resources.

The background provided for that recommendation in the report states: "In Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response (Alberta Education 2010b, 3), the government committed to 'provide tools to help school authorities adapt and utilize the current Programs of Study and learning and teaching resources for students with specialized learning needs within the context of the student's school and community.' This was never completed, and within the current curriculum redesign process, having curricula to more easily plan for the range of student learning in classrooms is not a readily apparent goal. As this work progresses, it is critically important to keep this at the forefront of the design of both new curricula and the resources that will be based on these programs. In the survey conducted for the blue ribbon panel, only 8 per cent of teachers indicated that they had satisfactory access to specialized learning resources, compared with 49 per cent in 2007. If new curriculum is too general, it will still fall on the shoulders of teachers to recreate programs without assistance from core documents. In addition, the government must require that resources developed are multileveled and multifaceted to meet the wide range of learners in the classroom. There are models available, including Universal Design for Learning, that could be used as a lens for resource development (Rose and Meyer 2002)."

Because our Alberta curriculum is currently undergoing significant redevelopment; and
Because we as parents see the need to include and support all of our children through this new curriculum,
therefore

WE REQUEST that the Alberta School Councils' Association call on the Alberta Ministry of Education to ensure that all curriculum documents clearly address the full range of learners in the school system. This should include the development of related resources that address the full range of student learning needs.

Background

Following the Alberta government's "Setting the Direction" framework for inclusive education (2009) and the subsequent release of the "Continuing the Conversation" document in 2013, the Alberta Teachers' Association struck a Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools to study and report back on the state of inclusion in Alberta. The Panel released its report in September 2014. It concluded that inclusion has still not been adequately addressed in the Alberta Education system, and its report included a variety of recommendations to address this. Parents are active and important partners with teachers in the effort to ensure that all of our children are fully included in our public education system.

Recommendation 15 of the report recommends tracking and assessing the funding provided by the province for inclusive education and the amounts spent on inclusive education, to ensure that school districts are funded adequately to support all students. As parents, we need to be secure in the knowledge that our school districts are not placed in a position of needing to take money from other educational needs in order to ensure that all of our children are receiving adequate support in the classroom.

As background for this recommendation, the report states: "Inclusive education funding is now allocated in a block to school jurisdictions. Having some kind of monitoring or reporting mechanism for these funds would assist in determining the kind of support provided and the true costs of support.

"Many schools and school jurisdictions report that the funds provided for inclusion do not come close to the true costs of inclusion and that money must then be taken from programming for other students. One superintendent remarked, *It's taking the funding that we receive and trying to make that funding stretch in so many different ways. . . . With the increase of the type of students and the complexity of our students, certainly our greatest challenge would be to see more funding to provide those services and supports to our children.*

"Another superintendent said, *When we talk about diverse students, they're the highest cost to our system, and we spend way more supporting our diverse students than we ever receive from the government. So that resource allocation is very skewed. We don't feel that the money that we get to support our diverse learners is accurately reflected in the funding distribution model that we have from the government. We've voiced that to them, and we've gone through and listened closely to the research behind it and the criteria and how it was worked. We have a very, very clear understanding, but it still doesn't equate to front-line resourcing and how that looks. ...In a time where we're implementing inclusion...we need additional resources, and it's crucial to...get buy-in and support from teachers and students, but we were getting fewer resources. So that allocation of internal resources has had to offset that need, because the need doesn't go away and we can't not resource it appropriately.*

"A second issue is the tension between local decision making and ensuring that policies are being followed. This trend is also seen in other provinces: *Decentralization is a double-edged sword. On one hand, districts have been given more flexibility to make decisions about how best to offer required Special Education services to students within their individual contexts. On the other hand, the Ministry has distanced itself from monitoring the educational value of decisions being made—some with the best of intentions but limited financial means. (Fewster et al 2007, 9).*

"That tension was listed as a challenge in the Setting the Direction Framework, and it remains a challenge: "Local decision making . . . results in inconsistencies across the province in implementation of policies and procedures, and in the provision of services and supports" (Alberta Education 2009b, 7). This inconsistency will continue until policies, regulations and regular assessment of inclusion happens in the system. The Government of Alberta must pay whatever it takes to provide the education all students deserve."

Because the funding formulas and mechanisms used by the government to provide funding for inclusive education in Alberta schools have not been tracked or assessed to determine their adequacy to meet the needs they are designed to address;

Because it is impossible to assess whether or not existing funding for inclusive education is adequate without first monitoring what that funding is currently being used for, what student needs are and are not being met by that funding, and the costs of meeting any needs that are not being met; and

Because all parents want our children to receive the funding required to support their education effectively, and do not want school districts forced to make choices between the needs of various children if the available funding is not enough to support them all adequately, therefore

WE REQUEST that the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) call on the Alberta Ministry of Education to track the usage of existing inclusive education funding that is provided to school jurisdictions as well as actual local expenditures relating to inclusive education, in order to determine the actual costs of supporting all students effectively.

WE REQUEST that, should this process determine that the funding provided does not meet the actual costs of supporting all students effectively, ASCA calls on the Ministry and school boards to work together to ensure that any shortfalls are eliminated.

Background

When parents have questions about how their school district is allocating its budget, their school district is the only place to find answers. Although this is not required, some parents, School Councils, and Councils of School Councils (or comparable groups) participate in an annual preliminary budget consultation process undertaken by school boards. When parents are consulted, the information provided by the districts to aid in the consultation is complex, and can be incomplete and lacking in options. It would be helpful to have a “best practices” document that could serve as a guide for districts that want to engage in effective budget consultations.

If parents have accurate information, choice, and the time for careful consideration of the alternatives, they will be able to provide helpful feedback. This will lead to boards making better decisions about what parents want in their children’s schools and to a better education system. Best practices could include providing information that:

- is complete;
- is easy to understand;
- is in a standard and comparable format for all districts;
- includes a list of all budgetary items and amounts that are not mandated by the Ministry of Education;
- provides significant choice in measures that will increase or decrease the size of the district budget; and
- is provided to parents in time for a meaningful consultation to take place, including revisions when appropriate.

Because giving parents adequate information, time, and options to provide meaningful feedback on proposed district budgets is a vital part of active, informed dialogue; and

Because recommended processes and formats should be designed to empower parents who have well-considered ideas relating to their district budget, therefore

WE REQUEST that the Alberta School Councils’ Association work with the Alberta School Boards’ Association, the Alberta Association of School Business Officials, and the Ministry of Education to develop and implement recommendations for standards and processes to improve the transparency and clarity of district budget consultations where such consultations are undertaken. These should include recommendations of standard formats and content for information provided during budget consultations, and recommended timelines for the consultations.

Background

At the time of writing this motion, the Alberta government has announced a carbon levy to be included in the price of all fuels that emit greenhouse gases when combusted. The levy is planned to take effect on January 1, 2017, before this motion comes to the floor of the Alberta School Councils' Association.

Significant concerns have been raised by school boards on the effect this levy will have on their budgets, and the cutbacks that could need to be implemented in order to cover this new cost.

In the event that the implementation of the carbon tax levy changes or removes these concerns, this motion could be amended to focus on specific concerns with the implementation, or withdrawn prior to the ASCA Annual General Meeting, as appropriate. However, until we have a clearer idea of how this levy will be implemented for school districts, it remains important and timely to proactively plan to take a position on this issue.

Because the funding for public education in Alberta is provided by the government of Alberta in order to cover the full costs of educating our children (a public benefit and responsibility); and

Because the costs of educating our children are rising very directly as a consequence of the new carbon levy, therefore

WE REQUEST that the Alberta School Councils' Association call on the government of Alberta to either:

- exempt school districts from the newly-created carbon levy indefinitely, or
- provide new funding to cover the full costs that school districts will incur due to the carbon levy.

P17-09 Publicising behaviour guidelines for persons working on school property during school hours
Sponsored by Lethbridge District #51 Council of School Councils

Background

Activities (e.g. construction, contract work, etc.) taking place on school property during school hours can sometimes involve the presence of individuals working on school property who are not employees of the school district. On occasion, this can lead to uncomfortable situations where children are forced to deal with workers who may not be adapting their behaviour to the presence of children. Examples of inappropriate behaviours may include offensive language, suggestive comments and gestures, or smoking. A child may be unable to avoid encountering the workers at school, and school teachers or administrators may not always be present, and in any case have no direct control over the behaviours of the workers. Clear expectations of behaviour for these workers are included in the agreements that are signed as part of the bidding procedure for the work. Processes for dealing with complaints are also in place. However, to a parent or other member of the general public it is not always clear how to report or deal with concerns about their behaviour, since these workers are not directly answerable to the principal of the school at which they are working.

Because our children have a right to expect certain standards of behaviour from the adults they see at their schools, and

Because the processes for bringing forward any concerns about the behaviour of adults working at a school, even if those adults are not employees of the school, should be easy for members of the public to find and follow, therefore

WE REQUEST that the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) call on school boards to ensure that their behaviour guidelines for persons working on school property during school hours, and the procedures for dealing with complaints about such behaviour, are easy for members of the public (including parents) to find.

Legislation and Resources related to proposed draft issue resolutions

Ministerial Order on student learning

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626588/ministerial-order-on-student-learning.pdf>

School Act and School Act Regulations

<http://www.gp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/s03.pdf>

<https://education.alberta.ca/legislation-and-regulations/school-act/>

Education Act

http://www.gp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=e00p3.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779786855

Guide to Education

https://education.alberta.ca/media/3272731/guide_to_ed_2016.pdf

2016\17 Funding Manual and Funding Manual Handbook

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/3402009/funding-manual-november-2016.pdf>

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/3255924/education-funding-in-alberta-handbook-2016-2017.pdf>

About the Accountability Pillar

<https://education.alberta.ca/accountability-pillar/about-the-pillar/>

Accountability Survey Overview and examples

<https://education.alberta.ca/accountability-pillar/surveys/everyone/accountability-pillar-survey-overview/>

Policy and Requirements for School Board Planning and Results Reporting

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/3115398/policy-and-requirements-for-school-board-planning-and-results-reporting-may-2016.pdf>

School Authority Planning and Reporting Reference Guide

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/158779/school-authority-planning-reference-guide.pdf>

Policy and Requirements for Charter School Planning and Results Reporting

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/3115400/policy-and-requirements-for-charter-school-planning-and-results-reporting-may-2016.pdf>

Provincial Curriculum Development

<https://education.alberta.ca/curriculum-development/why-change-curriculum/>

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

<http://nctr.ca/map.php>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action

<http://nctr.ca/research-pages.php#cta>

First Nations Metis Inuit Education

<https://education.alberta.ca/first-nations-m%C3%A9tis-and-inuit-education/supporting-student-success/>

Inclusive Education

<https://education.alberta.ca/inclusive-education/what-is-inclusion/>

<https://education.alberta.ca/inclusive-education/inclusive-education/everyone/overview/>

Standards for provision of early childhood education

https://education.alberta.ca/media/3227597/2016-06-08_ecs_specialedstds2006.pdf

Diverse Learning Needs

<https://education.alberta.ca/diverse-learning-needs/?journeyId=1085&resetFilter=1&language=English>

Creating a compassionate classroom ATA and Global 2015

<https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Human-Rights-Issues/COOR-79e%202015%2012.pdf>

Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta

<http://alberta.cmha.ca/>

Alberta Health Services Mental Health Review

<http://www.health.alberta.ca/initiatives/Mental-Health-Review.html>

Alberta Education school capital manual

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/1477148/school-capital-manual-march-2015.pdf>

Schools and Authorities

<https://education.alberta.ca/school-infrastructure/schools-and-authorities/everyone/schools-and-authorities/>