



# **High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project 2008/2009 School Year Year-End Report**

**Submitted by**

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# High school Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project 2008/09 School Year Year-end Report

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# High school Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project

## 2008/2009 School Year

### Year-end Report

#### Overview

##### **Purpose**

The purpose of the four-year High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is to determine if the requirement of students to have access to 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per course credit should be maintained. Given this purpose, participating high schools have the opportunity to organize their schools with the removal of the current 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per course credit requirement leading to the potential for significant redesign and innovation at participating schools throughout the project.

##### **Goals**

The goals of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project are:

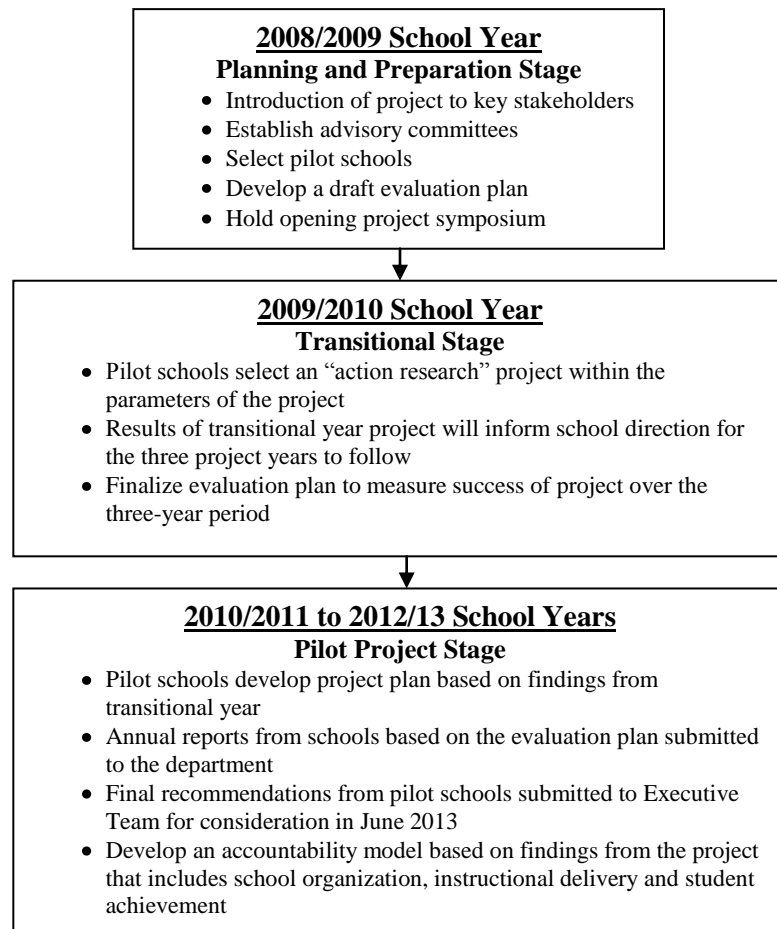
1. To explore the implications of high school organization and programming free of the 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per credit requirement.
2. To recommend the elimination or maintenance of the requirement for 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per credit.
3. To develop an accountability model that will include school organization, instructional delivery of the Programs of Study, and achievement of learner outcomes (if applicable).

Given the potential for transformational change in participating high schools throughout this project, two critical elements must be noted:

- Changes made to program organization and delivery must be done to enhance student engagement and achievement;
- Schools must plan a comprehensive approach to engage students, teachers, parents and the community at large.

## Project Phases

The chart below provides an overview of the stages for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project:



The 2008/2009 school year served as a planning year for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project (HSFEP). This planning year established the critical building blocks to support the work of the pilot schools throughout the four year pilot including the development of a draft evaluation plan to track accomplishments and report progress. Appendix 1 provides a summary of key milestones accomplished throughout the planning year.

## **Pilot Schools**

The composition of the pilot group evolved over the 2008/09 school year. The project charter called for a design which included nine participating schools representing the diversity of high schools in the province and an additional nine “control” schools to which the pilot schools would be compared.

On November 14, 2008, the Deputy Minister invited nine school jurisdictions to participate in the project. Of these nine schools from these jurisdictions originally invited, four schools withdrew from the project based on a number of factors specific to each

school. Replacement schools were identified and the appropriate superintendents agreed to have these schools become part of the project.

In January and February 2009 the project manager visited each of the principals of the nine pilot schools to discuss the project and each school's participation in it. On February 23, 2009, the Internal Advisory Committee discussed the following findings from the project manager's initial school visits.

- The current group of pilot high schools is representative of the wide variety of high school communities throughout the province, but not necessarily representative of high school communities committed to making foundational change in school organization.
- Initial visits indicated the majority of the nine current pilot schools had not engaged in collaborative dialogue with key stakeholders about changing their fundamental organization to support student learning.
- Following the invitation to the nine current pilot schools by Education, there was an interest expressed from other school jurisdictions to be involved in the project as they have been questioning the efficacy of their current structures.

The Internal Advisory Committee developed the following recommendations that were subsequently approved by Alberta Education's Executive Team:

- That control schools be eliminated from the project design and the number of participating schools be expanded to include a group of schools who join the project voluntarily.
- That each school submit a "Statement of Readiness and Commitment" that focused on processes to engage the school community;
- That the deadline date for the transitional year proposals be extended to late spring;

On March 17, 2009 the Deputy Minister sent an e-mail invitation to all non-participating jurisdictions to submit a proposal to become involved in the project. This e-mail resulted in twelve proposals from jurisdictions from around the province. Proposals were evaluated by the External Advisory Committee based on a rubric established by the committee.

On April 14, 2009, the Internal Advisory Committee met to review proposals that were submitted along with the evaluation of these proposals by the External Advisory Committee. From these proposals, schools were selected that demonstrated a desire to innovate. This resulted in a final group of sixteen schools which make up the pilot schools for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project (see Appendix 2).

Each of the sixteen participating schools submitted a proposal to the project manager to demonstrate their commitment to the project and to outline, in broad terms, their plans for the project within their school. Below is a summary of the input received in these submissions.

### **What do pilot schools hope to achieve?**

#### **1. Enhance relationships**

- a. Provide more one-to-one instructional time between teachers and students
- b. Enhance parental involvement

- c. Provide meaningful opportunities for peer tutoring
  - d. Incorporate a teacher-advisory and match students to particular teacher advisors
- 2. Enhance student engagement**
- a. Focus on learning not simply attendance
  - b. Explore and implement self-directed and project-based learning experiences
  - c. Provide school experiences which better reflect expectations of the workplace
  - d. Make class a place where students can share ideas
  - e. Encourage students to strive for excellence (not take a minimalistic approach to graduation planning)
  - f. Provide opportunities for students to develop portfolios
  - g. Provide students with more choices and give them control of making the choices (make an invitation to learn versus expecting compliance)
- 3. Provide more opportunity for students**
- a. Free-up time for Registered Apprenticeship Program/Career and Technology Studies/"option" courses
  - b. Increase programming options available at the school
  - c. Enable failing students to complete partial courses
  - d. Provide early entrance to post-secondary
  - e. Support multiple entry and exit points for coursework
  - f. Provide seamless transition points to shift course streams
  - g. Encourage cross-curricular approaches
  - h. Develop a stronger "voice" for students
- 4. Address teacher isolation and promote professional collaboration**
- a. Provide opportunities for collaborative planning and team teaching
  - b. Focus the staff on school-wide initiatives such as Assessment for Learning
- 5. Mitigate the negative effect of uncontrollable outside influences**
- a. Address the impact of busing on programs
  - b. Address the impact of hours of instruction dictated through the collective agreement
  - c. Address the impact of students needing to work to support their families
- 6. Provide learning opportunities (linked with outcomes) that transcend the timetable**
- a. Implement year-long course to support citizenship
  - b. Explore and implement a Teacher Advisory program
- 7. Better address the diverse needs of students**
- a. Honour various paces of learning
  - b. Honour various learning styles
  - c. Provide various modalities of learning
  - d. Incorporate outreach students and distance learning students within the existing school program
  - e. Better address the needs of students with special education needs
  - f. Recognize the differences in junior high and senior high students existing in the same building

- g. Mitigate the effects that senior high schedule has on junior high students in the same building

#### **8. Make better use of existing resources**

- a. Provide more flexible access to existing technology
- b. Provide more flexible access to existing instructional spaces

Given the diversity among the sixteen participating schools, it is expected that the degree of change at the schools will vary. As some communities have been engaged in conversations about school redesign for several years and others have just begun such conversations, innovation with respect to program delivery and school organization will follow different paths over the life of the project in each school. However, engagement of community members as well as the focus on student achievement will be expected of all pilot participating schools. In the end, it is the process that each school engages in that will provide rich data for consideration of any changes to the current requirements of high school organization.

#### **Literature Review**

To provide participating pilot schools with background information on high school redesign along with fundamental principles of effective redesign and models and strategies of effective high school practice, the *High School Flexibility Enhancement: A Literature Review* was developed. The document was distributed to participating pilot schools and superintendents and posted on the department website

(<http://education.alberta.ca/media/945864/hs%20flexibility%20enhancement%20-%20a%20literature%20review%20-%20full%20report%20-%20march16-09.pdf> )

on March 17, 2009 (see Appendix 5 for a copy of the Executive Summary). The document is also a potential resource for any high school principal to use when looking at potential change in programming in their schools.

The literature review has become a foundational resource for the project manager to use in supporting schools.

#### **External Advisory Committee**

The purpose of the External Advisory Committee is to:

- Support the department and the pilot schools throughout the pilot project by providing their advice, suggestions and feedback;
- Review the annual progress reports and provide recommendations and advice to the project manager and the department.

Two meetings were held of the External Advisory Committee in the second half of the 2008/09 school year. The first, on January 21, 2009 was the inaugural meeting in which the committee was introduced to the project. In addition, the roles and responsibilities of the committee members were reviewed. At the second meeting, on March 3, 2009, the following key outcomes were achieved:

- Developed a rubric to be used by the committee to evaluate proposals coming from school authorities interested in participating in the project;
- Input was received from the committee on the draft evaluation plan for the project;

- Feedback was provided on the first draft of the literature review.

Members of the External Advisory played a key role in the selection of the additional school authorities wishing to participate in the project by independently evaluating school authority proposals using the selection rubric and submitting their assessments to the project manager who compiled results for review with the Internal Advisory Committee for final selections to be made.

### **Internal Advisory Committee**

The purpose of the Internal Advisory Committee is to:

- Serve as a vehicle to facilitate communications within the department regarding the pilot project;
- Provide on-going guidance, support and advice to the project manager and the department regarding the pilot project;
- Provide advice to the project manager about the feedback from the External Advisory Committee
- Review and provide advice on the annual progress reports and recommendations stemming from the pilot project.

The Internal Advisory Committee has played an active role in providing advice and direction to the project. Below is a summary of changes made to the project based on the advice and direction of the committee.

- Supported the extension of the project from a three-year to a four-year project. (December 16, 2008 meeting)
- Supported the elimination of “control” schools from the original project design. (December 16, 2008 meeting)
- Gave input to drafts of the evaluation plan. (December 16, 2008; February 23, 2009 and April 14, 2009 meetings)
- Supported the proposal to expand the number of pilot schools in the project. (February 23, 2009 meeting)
- Supported the request for funds for the April 2009 Symposium and bi-annual collaborative meetings of participating schools. (February 23, 2009 meeting)
- Gave input to the literature review. (February 23, 2009 meeting)
- Supported the concept of an alternative funding arrangement for pilot schools and gave input to its content. (December 16, 2008 and February 23, 2009 meetings)
- Gave input to the selection of participating schools. (April 14, 2009 meeting)
- Gave input to the 2008/09 annual report. (September 30, 2009)

### **Communication**

Over the 2008/09 school year, communications surrounding the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project have been centered on introducing the project to school jurisdictions and internally to members of the Department. Also, there was a significant amount of communication related to the expansion of the project to include additional pilot schools in the spring (see Appendix 3 for a summary of key communications).

In addition, the project manager has corresponded regularly by e-mail, phone and face-to-face visits to keep principals, teachers and jurisdiction representatives informed of the progress of the project. A newsletter has been designed with Communications Branch

for participants of the project with the first edition being sent out to participating schools and jurisdictions on May 27, 2009 (see Appendix 4).

## **Support for Participating Schools**

### **School Visits**

School visits by the Project Manager are important to establish a relationship of collaboration and trust between Alberta Education and the participating schools. Through the face-to-face conversations, schools and the department are able to develop a common vision of the project while developing an understanding of the unique needs and features of each school community.

Common messages that have been delivered to principals, administrative teams and full staffs during school visits have been:

- The important role of the principal in guiding the community's redesign efforts over the life of the project;
- The need to focus on student engagement and achievement;
- The reason why an exploration and redesign of traditional structures may be necessary to better meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's students;
- The critical need to engage all key stakeholders of the school community throughout the project;
- The need to build redesign efforts based on the specific needs of the community and not to simply replicate an existing model;
- The need to focus on the fundamental principles that are at the foundation of redesign efforts throughout North America over the last several decades;
- The need to explore and understand research and literature dealing with change and to prepare for the potential tensions that change may create;
- The exciting opportunity that this project brings to a school community to potentially influence the direction that high school organization and delivery may take in the province.

### **April Symposium**

The April Symposium of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project took place on April 23 and 24, 2009 at the Olds College Campus in Olds, Alberta. A total of 37 delegates from the 16 participating pilot high schools attended. Participants had the opportunity to hear from a principal and two teachers who have experience in the Canadian Coalition of Self-Directed Learning. As well there were presentations from the Alberta Education Distributed Learning Strategy, members of the School Technology Branch and a presentation from the lead of the Speak Out student engagement initiative.

The bulk of the Symposium was dedicated to a series of five "conversations" that took place among the delegates from the schools. These conversations focused on critical elements of the project as schools plan for ways that they will organize their schools outside of the Carnegie Unit. Conversation topics included: Foundational Principles of High School Redesign; Readiness for Change; Planning for the Transitional Year; Engaging Your Community; and Future Support.

Participants were asked to evaluate their experience. These evaluations reported strong agreement to statements that the symposium provided a good opportunity to meet with colleagues from pilot schools, that the symposium helped participants gain a better understanding of the project and that the conversations provided a good opportunity to explore significant issues with colleagues. Participants also ranked highly the presentations that were given (see Appendix 6).

### **Informal collaboration**

Following from the April Symposium, there has been a great interest among participating schools to engage in informal collaboration. Over the last two months of the 2008/09 school year there have been several meetings held between school administrators and planning team members from participating schools.

### **Bi-annual meetings**

The project budget includes funding to accommodate bringing administrators together twice a year starting in the 2009/2010 school year. The purpose of these meetings is to share progress towards change and innovation at each school and support the on-going formal collaboration that began at the April 2009 Symposium.

### **Minimum funding arrangement**

The advisory committees and pilot school principals recognized that due to the explorative nature of the project some assurances with funding would be advisable to encourage risk-taking and innovative practice. This led to the preparation by Strategic Financial Services of a document entitled *High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project – Minimum Funding Allocation* (see Appendix 7). This document was shared with all superintendents and principals of pilot jurisdictions and schools on May 11, 2009.

This document outlines that over the three years of the project (2010/11 to 2012/13) pilot schools will be guaranteed a minimum amount of funding based on their previous three year's average Credit Enrolled Unit (CEU) production. If at any time during the project CEU production at their school falls below this minimum amount, the school authority will not be penalized. If, however, a pilot school's CEU production is above the minimum funding allocation, the school authority will receive the additional funding.

This arrangement encourages schools to take risks in their project planning which will encourage innovation and change in the pilot schools.

### **Evaluation Design**

A Draft Evaluation Plan was developed by the Education's System Improvement Group and presented through the project manager to both External and Internal Advisory Committees. Input from both committees made it clear that the evaluation plan must include:

- Both common and local quantitative and qualitative measures;
- Empirical evidence that would help guide decisions made by Executive Team at the conclusion of the project;
- A mechanism to capture the change process at each of the participating schools.

The 2009/10 school year will be dedicated to gaining input into the draft evaluation plan from all participating schools. Once all input has been received, a final evaluation plan will be sent out to all schools and advisory committees.

### **Transitional Year Plans**

The intent of the transitional year plan is to have the school community engage in action research that will inform each school community of the direction they will take for the following three years of the pilot project. Participating pilot schools were asked to provide the project manager a Transitional Year Proposal prior to the end of the 2008/09 school year. This proposal outlines each pilot school's plan for changes that they will make in the transitional 2009/10 school year. Schools were encouraged to focus on a segment of their population or a particular program in their school and institute changes that would challenge the traditional organizational structure and better support student engagement and achievement. (A summary of transitional year plans is found in Appendix 8).

### **Budget Expenditures**

Expenditures for the High School Flexibility Project over the 2008/09 fiscal year (excluding project manager secondment expenses) are summarized in the chart below:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Expenses</b>
<b>External Advisory Committee Expenses</b> (hosting and participant travel)	\$ 4,360
<b>April Symposium Expenses</b> (delegate travel, hosting, presenters)	\$ 11,635
<b>Project Manager Personal Expenses</b> (travel, food and accommodation for school visits and meetings)	\$ 9,001
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 24,996</b>

### **Summary and Next Steps**

The 2008/09 school year was dedicated to providing information and planning for the High School Flexibility Project. The process for the selection of participating pilot schools extended over a period of six months and occurred in two distinct phases. As the school year progressed, participating schools gained a deeper understanding of the nature of the project and the opportunity it presents to become engaged in deep innovation and redesign. This reality was received in each of the participating pilot schools along a continuum that ranged from reluctance to excitement.

An important element in the design and communication of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project is that participating schools are expected to develop a plan that responds to the needs of their community and based on their own research into effective practice. Although the Department has supported principals in providing a literature review that sets the project in the context of school redesign, principals have not been told that they must redesign their schools. As a result, it is the motivation of the school principal that becomes a key factor in the potential for this project to lead to significant innovation.

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is focused solely on the visions and plans of each individual school community. As well, the project has the potential to engage school communities in the deep and complex issues that surround high school programming and redesign that meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner. Given these two realities, the project manager must recognize the adaptive nature of the problems that these schools will be encountering throughout the life of the project and engage school communities in activities that “provoke debate, encourage new thinking, and advance social learning.” It is critical that schools are given the opportunity to work toward solutions to problems they encounter rather than have solutions imposed on them.

It is critical that participants build ownership in the evaluation plan within the context of their vision for the three-year project. As a result, the evaluation plan will not be finalized until the latter part of the 2009/10 school year to ensure that it reflects the context of the individual participating school’s plans as well as fully reflecting the needs of the department in providing empirical evidence and rich data to the Executive Team.

As schools developed their plans, the project manager had the opportunity to engage with principals, jurisdiction administrators and staff. These contacts led to the following observations:

- Principal leadership is a critical element for this project.
- Broad and deep collaboration with all stakeholders in school communities is of vital importance to the development of school proposals and implementation of any change.
- School communities that have engaged a larger committee of school members (teachers, students, parents) beyond the administrative team have produced stronger proposals.
- Schools that are part of a smaller jurisdiction appear to be more “nimble” in their approach to the project and have demonstrated deeper engagement with the project.
- Members of school communities are almost unanimous in their desire to collaborate with members of other participating school communities as they engage in the planning and implementation activities.
- Principals expressed the need for their superintendents to be informed and supportive of the project.

Highlights of this report include:

- The establishment of the structures, processes, and participants for the pilot project.
- The development of a literature review that was used to stimulate innovative practices for high school redesign that includes:
  - Increasing learning opportunities for students;
  - Enhancing engagement of students in their learning;
  - Addressing diverse learning needs of students;
  - Enhancing relationships in the school community;
  - Enhancing teacher collaboration
- Stimulating deep conversation about high school redesign through the April 2009 Symposium and through meetings with high school principals and central office staff.

- Established a collaborative learning community of participating pilot schools.

The following next steps for the 2009/1010 school year follow from the observations made throughout the planning year of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project:

- Input on the draft evaluation plan will be gathered and final draft will be completed by February 2010.
- Face-to-face and technological tools will be used to facilitate collaboration among participating pilot schools.
- Meetings will be held with the superintendents of each participating school authority to ensure that there is a complete awareness of the possibilities inherent in the High School Flexibility Project as well an awareness of the progress in their pilot school.
- Principals of pilot participating schools will be supported in taking innovative approaches to the delivery of curricular outcomes with the proviso that outcomes achieved are from the programs of studies and are assessed by certificated teachers in the pilot schools.
- Principals will be supported in the telling of the “story of change” through each school’s completion of annual reports.
- Meetings will be conducted with parents, students, staff and other community members of participating high schools as requested by principals.
- Internal and External Advisory Committees will meet at least three times per year to give guidance and advice on the project.
- There will be continued efforts to communicate progress of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project both internally in the Department and externally with key stakeholders.
- Preliminary discussions will take place with participating school administration and school authority administration to begin deliberations on a potential alternative accountability model if the 25 hour per course credit requirement is removed for schools.