

SCHOOL ACT REVIEW

CANADIAN ROCKIES PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CRPS) SUBMISSION

**Disclaimer: The CRPS Board has no expertise in, nor intends to dictate any legal terminology. Where rewording is suggested, it is only to convey the sense of what should be in the legislation.*

There are three key elements taken into account while crafting the CRPS board submission:

- A. The Foundational themes developed by Alberta Education. These were cited by the Minister, and provide the frame for the Dept. of Ed.'s School Act Review.
- B. The *Inspiring Education* values, which the Minister wishes to be closely aligned with the Foundational themes.
- C. The key directions of CRPS' Futures Planning process: *Inspiring Hearts & Minds* (IHM).

The chair and vice-chair of the CRPS Board attended the fall forum of IE. It was clear that the Alberta education system has to be as flexible as possible in order to foster the innovative environment and practice needed to serve students properly.

The School Act currently states in its Preamble that there is one publicly funded system of education which provides education to students through its two dimensions, public and separate schools. There are in fact currently six distinct dimensions: public, separate, francophone, charter, private and home schooling. Consideration might be given to changing "two dimensions" to "two distinct entities" and follow that with "through multiple dimensions". This would acknowledge future incarnations of publicly funded schooling of which we cannot now conceive*. It must be stated here that the commitment of public education to inclusiveness should not place it at a disadvantage compared to those groups that choose an "exclusive" education within the publicly funded options. While "choice is beneficial to student engagement" (*School Act Review: Discussion Paper for Legislative Review*), the fact that private schools receive 70% of the instructional grant is difficult to reconcile with second half of that statement: "and must be balanced with the need for a strong, fiscally responsible public education system."

Locally elected school boards provide the best mechanism to provide parents with a direct, democratic and effective way to exercise their "right and responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children" (*Preamble, School Act*). Local communities are also most suited to make decisions which "consider the diverse nature and heritage" (*Preamble, School Act*) of those Alberta communities. Ideally, school boards should have a financial connection to the local community so as to address locally agreed mandates and community needs. Since the Alberta School Foundation Fund is the distribution instrument for education funding, this connection is blurred. As stated by the ministry in its *School Act Review: Discussion Paper for Legislative Review* "To support the accountability for the expenditure of public funds, it is important that roles in the management of capital be clarified and reflect a shared responsibility between the Minister and the boards."

The value of local autonomy should be identified in the Act. Any definition of public school education should refer to such education as governed locally by elected representatives of the local population. The capacity to develop local curriculum initiatives should be supported in the Act; it is vital to the flexibility and creativity that will fully enable student success. The conferral of "natural person powers" upon school boards would allow school boards to engage in a broad range of opportunities that are not specifically mentioned in the Act. The new Act should specify

that the role of boards is that of governance, not administration i.e. school boards formulate local policies for their administration to then enact. To further strengthen the principle of local autonomy, consideration should be given to allowing boards to hire their superintendents without ministerial approval. The principle of the relationship between the boards and the minister should be one of a respectful partnership.

The new Act must somehow allow for the creation of seamless services for all children within the Education system. It seems a mission statement is called for in the Preamble; it would contain the clearly defined overarching principles that describe (neither prescribe nor proscribe) the direction of Public Education in Alberta in the 21st century. The key tenets of the Act must acknowledge the importance of opportunity for all provincial students so that they may achieve their highest potential through universal access to a whole child education. It must be affirmed that the public schools are inherently inclusive, as opposed to other choices, which by their nature are exclusive. The Preamble should reflect the values of IE – particularly in regard to broad programming and schools as hubs of learning within a community.

The Minister encourages all of us to “Be bold,” as we move through the *Inspiring Education* process. The CRPS Board anticipates the Minister will be bold and balanced in his revisions of the School Act. There is a marvelous opportunity to reaffirm and strengthen all that is valuable in the Act while removing or modifying those things that are obstacles to Alberta Education providing the optimum conditions for every student’s success.

The Canadian Rockies Public Schools Board thanks the Minister of Education for considering our submission; we wish you wisdom and strength as you complete the School Act Review.

A. Ministry of Education's Five Foundational Themes

1. All Alberta children have a superseding right of access, which is not dependent on where they reside, to the ECS -12 public education system.

Some of the provisions of the legislation which might be affected by this foundational theme, or changed to support the foundational theme, include the starting and ending ages for access to the funded public school system, the dates of entry points to the system, and the definition of residence and resident student.

2. Students should be able to access instruction at any time, any place, and at their own pace.

Any time, any place, any pace access to learning requires a balance between fiscal responsibility and the interests of individual students. Any time, any place, any pace access may have an impact on how we define achieving school completion and the school leaving age, and what the school leaving age should be.

3. Student success is the primary goal of the education system and government has a responsibility to provide the structure and supports to maximize it.

Parent, community and student involvement are beneficial to student success. Additionally, choice is beneficial to student engagement and must be balanced with the need for a strong, fiscally responsible public education system. Collaboration amongst the Ministry, other ministries, school boards, and external agencies will allow for more effective provision of services. Areas that might be affected by this foundational theme include: the dates of entry points for ECS and grade.1, and how we support student involvement.

4. The connection of locally elected school authorities to their communities is an important element of our public education system. Government has a responsibility to support maximizing trustee and board competence, and to set provincial standards for the roles and responsibilities of boards.

It is acknowledged that government has a responsibility to support rights enshrined in the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**, and that constitutional rights must be balanced with the needs of all stakeholders.

School authorities should focus on educational outcomes and are accountable to parents, their communities, and the Minister for student achievement. Ministerial intervention is appropriate and necessary when a board is not meeting its obligations.

Parents and students are entitled to an avenue of appeal when not satisfied with a board's decision with respect to the education of a student.

Provisions in the legislation that might be affected to support this foundational theme include the election, appointment and removal of school board trustees, the ward and electoral sub-division structure within boards, the establishment process, and the capacity of the Minister to investigate or inquire into the operations of a school board.

5. There must be balance between local autonomy and fiscal responsibility.

The Ministry and boards are accountable for the expenditure of public funds. To support the accountability for the expenditure of public funds, it is important that roles in the management of capital should be clarified and reflect a shared responsibility between the Minister and the boards.

Some of the legislative provisions that may be affected include defining responsibilities for the management of capital (including instructional space, non-instructional space, school lands and buildings, and leased space), addressing the ability of boards to borrow to meet capital and operational expenditures, and clarifying definitions, responsibilities, and procedures for school closure.

B. Inspiring Education Values

- Opportunity – the availability of opportunity for all students to achieve their highest potential
- Fairness – equity of opportunity recognizing that advantages and disadvantages vary widely amongst Alberta’s students
- Citizenship – preparing students for full active participation in the economy, society and democracy at the level of their local communities, the province, the country, and the world
- Diversity – recognizes the diversity in learning styles and needs within the student population, the breadth of cultural diversity in the province, and the strengths that diversity provides to our society
- Choice – recognizes that citizens expect more than a “one-size fits all” approach to the delivery of public services.

D. IHM Key Directions

How do we educate the WHOLE CHILD? By focusing on 4 integrated elements:

WHOLE LEARNING APPROACH:

- **Create learning environments that foster academic excellence and develop 21st century skills – critical thinking and problem solving; communication and collaboration; creativity and innovation; digital-age literacy and emotional intelligence.**
- **Personalize learning to respond to each child’s gifts, needs, interests, and aspirations.**

WHOLE TEACHER APPROACH:

- **Support and develop teachers in their role as facilitators of learning.**
- **Knowing that teachers make a significant difference in a child’s life, create conditions that strengthen student-teacher relationships.**

WHOLE COMMUNITY APPROACH:

- **Engage with parents as partners in whole child education.**
- **Engage the resources and expertise of our local communities to enrich student learning and deepen community connections.**
- **Expand partnerships with agencies and services and connect people of all ages in order to make our schools the hub of learning in the community.**

WHOLE WORLD PERSPECTIVE:

- **Use technology and human connections to bring the world to the classroom and the classroom to the world.**