

March 14, 2014

Education Minister's letter to parents

I'm writing to you today at an important moment in the ongoing improvement of Alberta's education system. **I ask that you please forward this email to parents.**

The world around us has changed and continues to change quickly. Our children are growing up in an environment of constant innovation, and to best prepare them we must begin down our own path of renewal and adaptation. And we have already started.

After years of collaboration with our education partners we recently launched new and innovative initiatives such as the Dual Crediting Program and High School Flexibility Program. We've also started the transition away from outdated Provincial Achievement Tests and towards modern Student Learning Assessments. These are merely a few of the many ways in which we are working to realize the goals of Inspiring Education – our province's vision for education in Alberta.

As part of this work we are also looking at ongoing curriculum redesign. As parents I am sure you have questions and concerns about the curriculum redesign. I have also attached my opinion editorial which appeared recently in the Calgary Herald to the end of this email. While it is still early in the process of improving an already strong curriculum, I can tell you about the three main goals that we have established by listening to all Albertans, including parents like yourselves, who have been working with us to build the future blueprint for our children's education:

- More firmly embed the fundamentals – numeracy and literacy – throughout every subject and course offering to ensure better mastery of basic skills.
- Better instill soft skills demanded by employers and the global economy (21st century competencies – 3E's) such as problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration and communication, and entrepreneurialism.
- Better focus the curriculum on relevant and important learner outcomes. Critics say the current curriculum is too packed and has ballooned to over 1400 outcomes that prevent us from maximizing the creativity of excellent teachers. Furthermore, some argue the number of outcomes prevents teachers from having the time to be able to delve thoroughly into subject matter or individualize learning.

Just as important, I wish to clarify what this process is not. Keeping children's economic future in mind does not mean we are going to ignore the arts. On the contrary, arts education is a great vehicle for children's continued development – development that will help them academically, socially, and economically.

And despite claims to the contrary, Alberta Education is not embracing or moving towards simply imposing so-called "discovery learning". Some have suggested that teachers will only be a partner in learning and learners will be completely self-directed. I can tell you that nothing is further from the truth.

Alberta has already embraced inquiry-based learning, which is an approach that is well documented and the basis of significant scientific study. We know that methods used to reach each student are best determined by the professionals in the classroom. Teachers will remain the leaders that guide our students to success – we are just continuing our work to give them the best tools available for them to reach each and every student.

In addition, the redesign process is neither drastic nor radical. It is being done in a thoughtful, methodical and collaborative manner. No longer can educators take ten years to redesign a single subject at a time. We want teachers, parents, industry and students from the field to develop our prototypes. We hope our new process will enable us to interweave and reinforce the application of the fundamentals in with 21st century competencies across all subjects. If you want to learn more about the curriculum redesign process, please follow this link: <http://education.alberta.ca/curriculumredesign>.

At the highest level the goal of our curriculum redesign is to prepare our students, your children, for a future economy, society, and world that will be more connected and more unpredictable than anything we have ever seen before. But there are already many parts of the Alberta education system that we know are working well and will remain a focus for the system. In the future your children will have even more choice, more chances to learn in real-life situations, and more opportunities to learn at any time, in any place. With the renewed focus on literacy and numeracy skills, your children will not only learn math, reading, and writing, but they will have the chance to use those skills to solve problems, think creatively, and embrace opportunities. These changes are needed to make sure students are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. By giving your children the chance to pursue their passions, and tailoring their learning opportunities to those passions, we are aiming to not only create ethical citizens and engaged thinkers, but entrepreneurs and innovators for the future ahead.

A successful redesign of the curriculum is integral to realizing the vision of *Inspiring Education*. If you are unsure of what inspiring education means, I encourage you to follow this link, <http://goo.gl/DwXW52>, to watch the introductory speech I delivered to the Inspiring Education Symposium on February 19th. I trust that you will find it informative and helpful. If you still have questions, I invite you to provide your comments to my ministry by filling out the feedback form on this page: <http://alberta.ca/contact.cfm>.

In conclusion, I just want to reaffirm for you all that we are very much aware of the importance of what we are undertaking, and that is why we will take the time to get it right. Deciding the path our children will take through the education system requires planning, consultation, and time. Luckily we are blessed with many skilled and passionate education professionals, all of whom continually strive for excellence. Our world leading results are a testament to their hard work. The education system of the future – the system which we are building - will be cutting-edge, dynamic and student-centred. The students of Inspiring Education, your children, will help shepherd Alberta into the 21st century and will undoubtedly be regarded as our collective legacy. I look forward to working with you to build that legacy.

Jeff Johnson
Minister
Alberta Education
MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater