

Education Legislation Discussion

In reviewing Alberta's education legislation to ensure it is meeting the needs of students, the Education department is holding consultations for potential amendments to the *School Act*, in the province during September.

- September 6 and 7 in Red Deer;
- September 11 and 12 in Grande Prairie;
- September 19 and 20 in Lethbridge;
- September 21 and 22 in Calgary; and
- September 25 and 26 and 27 and 28 in Edmonton.

The Minister has asked **each School Board to invite a parent representative from an ASCA member school council to participate** in the consultations.

The Ministry has identified policy issues that require further discussion and engagement, and are seeking input on several topics, including:

- age of access;
- age of common entry; and
- education services agreements between school boards and First Nations.

Additionally, **school and transportation fees will be discussed**. The Ministry will be seeking preliminary feedback on the work done to date on reducing school fees and setting the stage for further work on the *School Fees and Costs Regulation* and *School Transportation Regulation*.

These discussions are meant to inform potential amendments to the current School Act.

The ASCA organization will have representation at each of these meetings as well and looks forward to meeting the parents representing their school districts.

The document attached contains association information and member policy statements relevant to the discussion topics for reference.

School Councils are an important legislated voice in Alberta's K- 12 education system, and we encourage participation in this valuable engagement opportunity with the Ministry.

AGE OF ACCESS

Age of access is the age range whereby a student can access education services in Alberta.

Currently the School Act Right of access to education states: *Section 8(1)(a) Every individual who at September 1 in a year is 6 years of age or older and younger than 19 years of age... is entitled to have access in that school year to an education program in accordance with this Act.*

Alberta School Councils Association (ASCA), along with other stakeholders were consulted on the *Age of Access* topic in October, 2015 to discuss the merits of increasing the upper limit age of access to 21.

There were questions about who would qualify and for what reasons. E.g. How would these extra years be funded, what criteria would be used (if any) to determine the extra years of education. Will all funding responsibility fall to the school board?

ASCA has no specific policy on this topic, but does have the following with respect to **Accountability and Funding** which are implicated in an increase to the age of access and number of credentials available for completion.

- an appropriate funding model recognizes and supports the different stages of the ECS-Grade 12 system
- an appropriate funding model includes sustained dollars for any essential instructional materials required for the successful completion of any of the mandated programs of studies
- an appropriate funding model recognizes and supports geographic and regional considerations across the province
- an appropriate funding model recognizes the need for ongoing cross-sectoral financial agreements from ministries other than education in order to deliver necessary support for student success
- any changes to the funding model are to be done in consultation with all provincial education stakeholders and are based on educational goals rather than economic considerations
- a significantly higher ratio of education funding should always be provided to public education and public education supported programs than to other schooling options
- parents have the right to register their children to participate in whichever type of legislated schooling best suits the child's learning needs
- there needs to be reasonable and sustained financial support for the review, revision, implementation and evaluation of programs of studies
- the Ministry of Education has the responsibility to ensure that school authorities are using their allocations in the best interests of the learning successes of students

Additional Considerations:

Should access be limited after the successful completion of a high school credential, and if so, how should the criteria for establishing these limits be determined?

If this question is being asked based on the current practices in place, ASCA offers that first and foremost an inventory of those practices province wide needs to be recorded and best practices that benefit both students and boards should be further examined in light of this question.

Also, ASCA believes that there is an opportunity here for the ECS-12 system to work more collaboratively with post-secondary institutions to determine how many institutions are offering students between the ages of 16 and 21 the opportunity to complete courses that lead to the successful completion of a high school credential, and what those high school credentials are, and if that completion is recognized by the school board that the student came from, and by Alberta Education.

The current mature student designation at a majority of Alberta post-secondary institutions is 21. Will allowing a student to credential through a board run high school up to the age of 21 have an impact on the availability of post-secondary spots for first year students?

The original discussion question does raise some points around high school flexibility. Although the high school flexibility work is proceeding, the high school re-credentialing work appears to be on hiatus or at least ASCA has not been advised that meetings are taking place.

Questions going forward that could influence the criteria to be established with respect to age of access are:

- Will all boards be compelled to offer completion opportunities for students to complete any provincially acceptable credential?
- Will a shift to a student centred learning system allow students to custom design their high school exit credential to fit their post high school plans?

If the right of access to education is primarily based on age, should school boards have the ability to restrict access to programming based on a determination that the student's education needs have been met? If so, how should this be determined?

In order for this question to be addressed, ASCA sees that the following questions need to be answered:

- Should boards be able to make the determination on a board by board basis?
- Should there be a provincial policy regarding the number of successful completions of a high school credential that a student may acquire through one board, or can a student complete as many credentials as he/she wants up to and including the age of 21?
- What is the implication of access to education primarily based on age, to credential completion rates for ELL and students with exceptional learning needs?
- Should boards register students who have successfully completed a high school credential(s) through one board to enable those students to complete additional credentials?
- As this conversation primarily addresses the high school years, should parents be consulted by boards in order that they can weigh in on the age range of individuals that may be part of a school community?
- Age of access linked to student residency – if the age of access to credential completion is adjusted upward to 21, how is the residency issue to be considered when a 'student' could transport him/herself to wherever he/she needs to be to complete a credential, or if a 'student' no longer resides with his/her parent?

General impact on ASCA questions: *Although students are currently considered to be adults at the age of 16 in high schools in Alberta, will a change to age of access necessitate a change to legislated participants for school councils, either people who may be eligible for executive positions or people with a vested interest in participating at council meetings?*

AGE OF COMMON ENTRY

Should the *School Act* be amended to legislate a common age of entry into Alberta Schools?

Currently the *School Act* does not have a regulation on common age of entry, however, the funding manual states that a child entering ECS (kindergarten) has to be 5 years old by March 1.

When the *Education Act* was being developed the proposed common age of entry date was December 31. The *Education Act* has not yet been proclaimed, therefore, the current *School Act* remains silent on this issue.

Question: Does the common age of entry need to be legislated in the *School Act* or should that be a decision of the individual school board to set its own policy in consultation with constituents? (which is currently the case).

ASCA currently has this position on age of common entry, passed by the membership at the 2010 Annual General Meeting.

10-9 Common Provincial Kindergarten Entry Age (2017)

That Alberta Education legislate a common kindergarten entry age cut-off date for all school authorities in Alberta for parents who choose to have their children attend kindergarten. (Learning Opportunities)

EDUCATION SERVICE AGREEMENTS BETWEEN SCHOOL BOARDS AND FIRST NATIONS

First Nation bands are funded federally for education on reserves. When parents wish for their children to be educated at a provincially funded school, agreements are developed between the First Nation and the school district. Education service agreements allow for an exchange of funds between the First Nation and the school board – essentially a tuition agreement.

ASCA has no policy specific to this subject.

SCHOOL FEES

ASCA has been involved on an ongoing basis with the discussions relating to Bill 1 and is looking forward to receiving feedback from member school councils on their experiences with Bill 1 implementation.

ASCA currently has this overarching policy position with respect to school fees.

ASCA supports the development of legislation on school fees at the provincial level and correlating school fee policy development at the school board level. ASCA believes that school fees should be established based on the following principles:

Transparency

Schools must demonstrate to the fee payers (parents) the need to charge fees; school boards need to demonstrate to fee payers, the need to charge fees.

Consultation

Those paying the fees must be consulted prior to the fee being levied.

Assurance

Those paying the fees are entitled to an assurance that the fees paid were used for the purpose for which they were collected.

Fairness

A fee waiver for those unable to pay is advertised and implemented in cases of need. Residual fees (if any) are returned to the payers, or applied, on behalf of the family, the following year.

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

ASCA currently has the following overarching policy position with respect to student transportation.

ASCA supports students being provided with safe, dependable transportation to and from school and/or school related events either curricular or extracurricular. ASCA believes:

- the amount of time a student must spend being bussed should be determined collaboratively by families, schools, school districts and municipalities
- the transportation provided should be appropriate to any special considerations of the student
- school bus drivers must be in compliance with Alberta Transportation and Alberta Education standards
- school and school board field trip safety and first aid policies must be considered in the transportation of students
- district owned vehicles must be maintained according to stringent safety standards, and operated by qualified, certified personnel
- parents must be informed clearly and provide consent about plans to transport students to or from school
- school boards should work collaboratively to provide the best possible transportation service for students to any school in their geographic area
- school boards need to arrange for universally recognized signage at identified high risk bus stops