Section B – Assurance Framework

Accountability and Assurance in Alberta's K-12 Education System

The priority of the K-12 education system is the success of every child in school. Educating Alberta students is the responsibility of the provincial government and is governed by the *Education Act*. Subject to the provisions of the Education Act, education is delivered by a system of schools operated by school authorities. For the purposes of this section, school authorities are **school board**s, **charter school**s and **accredited funded private school** operators. Each type of school authority is accountable for assuring the quality of education for its students, while the **Department of Education**[1] is responsible for assuring the quality of education provided by school authorities.

In Alberta's K-12 education system, school authorities are accountable organizations. The **Department of Education** allocates funds to school authorities so they may fulfill their delegated responsibilities of providing education programs for Alberta's K-12 students This practice creates an **accountability** relationship between the department and the school authorities which requires transparency and the obligation to answer for, and publicly report on the spending of public funds and results achieved by the accountable organization through the discharge of responsibilities. This **accountability** relationship is established in legislation and regulation.

In addition to the department, school authorities are also responsible for providing **assurance** to their local stakeholders and the public that they are fulfilling their responsibilities and students are successful. This **assurance** arises from the combination of policies, processes, actions and evidence that help build public confidence in the education system. It is achieved through relationship building, engagement with education partners and by creating and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement and collective responsibility.

Legislative Authority

The following pieces of legislation and regulation dictate the responsibilities of **school board**s related to the **accountability** relationship with the **Department of Education**. Where the highlighted legislation references '**school board**s', it also applies to **charter school**s as per Section 27 of the *Education Act*.

- Section 10(2) of the *Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act* requires accountable organizations, including **school board**s, under the jurisdiction of government ministries to prepare business plans and annual reports for each fiscal year "in the form, at a time and containing the information, acceptable to the responsible Minister[1]."

- Section 7 of the *Education Grants Regulation* under the *Government Organization Act* requires recipients of grants from the **Department of Education** to provide the Minister, upon request, any information the Minister considers necessary for the purpose of determining whether or not the recipient has complied or is complying with the conditions of the grant.

- Section 67 of the *Education Act* requires **school board**s to develop and implement a reporting and **accountability** system on any matter the Minister prescribes. It also requires schools **board**s, according to the manner the Minister prescribes, to use any information in reports and accounts under the reporting and **accountability** system and to disseminate this information to students, parents[1], electors or the Minister.

- Section 33 of the *Education Act* outlines key **board** responsibilities related to governance and **student** achievement. The list of responsibilities reflects a student-centered focus and the principles of inclusiveness, fairness, diversity and excellence. Engagement of parents, students,

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[1] See Section M: Glossary

staff and other key stakeholders on **board** matters and plans contribute to shared governance. Fulfilling these responsibilities is central to school authority **accountability** and **assurance** in the education system.

- Section 139 of the *Education Act* outlines the expectations for financial reporting for **school board**s. Sub-section 2 requires that **school board**s annually prepare and submit to the Minister, a budget for the upcoming fiscal year on or before May 31; and, to submit to the Minister, in a form prescribed by the Minister, on or before November 30, copies of the **board**'s financial statements, the auditor's report on the **board**'s financial statements, and, any written communications between the **board** respecting the systems of internal control and accounting procedures of the **board**.

- Section 12(1) of the *School Councils Regulation* under the *Education Act* requires **school board**s to provide school councils with the opportunity to provide advice on the development of the school's foundational statements (vision, principles and beliefs); Education Plan; annual results report; and budget. Section 12(2) requires **school board**s to provide the school council with the results for the school from provincial assessments and an interpretation of those results as well as, the information that the **board** disseminates through its reporting and **accountability** system per Section 67 of the *Education Act.*

The responsibilities of accredited funded private school authorities related to the **accountability**

relationship with the **Department of Education** are outlined in:

- Section 7 of the *Education Grants Regulation,* noted above;

- Section 16(1) of the *Private Schools Regulation,* which requires operators of funded **private school**s to submit to the Minister, in a form prescribed by the Minister, on or before November 30, the audited financial statements of the funded **private school**, an auditor's report in a form prescribed by the Minister, and copies of any written communications between the auditor and the operator respecting the operator's internal control systems and accounting procedures. Sub-section 2 requires operators to annually submit to the Minister, in a form prescribed by the Minister, a budget for the upcoming fiscal year on or before May 31; and

- Section 19 of the *Private Schools Regulation* under the *Education Act* that establishes the requirement for operators of **accredited funded private school**s to prepare an Education Plan and Annual Education Results Report as required by the Minister, with regard to financial reporting.

School Authority Accountability Policy

School authorities are accountable for results achieved from carrying out their responsibilities to provide education programs to Alberta students. As accountable organizations, school authorities are required to:

- Establish a system of **accountability** for results that encompasses their schools.

- Interpret and report results to parents, students, the **Department of Education** and the public in a manner and at a time the Minister prescribes as part of ensuring transparency.

- Use results to improve the quality and effectiveness of education programs provided to their students and to improve **student** learning and achievement.

Assurance Framework

Overview

Since the introduction of the current **accountability framework**, the education system has continued to evolve, as has the thinking about the best ways to support continuous improvement and to build public trust and confidence in the quality of education provided. Over the years, education partners have been engaged on how to enhance the current **accountability framework** within the context of system improvement and enhanced public confidence.

Through this work, it has become clear that our current approach to **accountability** must broaden to encompass both the relationship between school authorities and the department, as established in legislation and policy, and demonstrating to stakeholders and the public that the education system is meeting the needs of students.

A broader and more balanced approach to **accountability** will result in enhanced public **assurance** and is the basis of the **Assurance** Framework. In this framework, all education stakeholders accept responsibility for building capacity of the education system — in classrooms, schools, school authorities and in government. Ensuring continuous improvement throughout the system necessitates a collective approach that recognizes diversity within Alberta, relies on evidence to make decisions, and is responsive to the needs of students in their local contexts.

The **Assurance** Framework, developed collaboratively with education partners, outlines key guiding principles, **domain**s and processes for enhancing public trust and confidence that the education system is meeting the needs of students and students are successful.

Guiding Principles for Assurance

The guiding principles below describe the ideals that all education partners must embrace to ensure sound and consistent decision-making in all areas **assurance** is provided. Public **assurance** providers:

- Recognize that all education partners, each with unique contributions, share responsibility for **student** growth and achievement;
- Build professional capacity and a commitment to continuous improvement;
- Facilitate communication and the ongoing engagement of all education partners in respectful collaborative action;
- Engage regularly with education partners, across the spectrum of public engagement strategies (informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering)[2];
- Acknowledge that communication must be a constant throughout the engagement process;
- Consistently use evidence from a variety of sources to ensure responsive and transparent decision-making;
- Reflect local and societal contexts, enabling innovative and flexible responses in classrooms, schools, school authorities and the government;
- Recognize the unique learning needs of students and foster equitable and inclusive learning environments;
- Commit to demonstrating fiscal responsibility and effective stewardship of resources in supporting system/**student outcomes**; and
- Provide a structure to ensure that what is measured and reported is consistent with the best interests of **student** growth and achievement, and the goals of education in the province of Alberta.

[2] International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)

Assurance Domains

Assurance in the education system happens when community members, system stakeholders and education partners engage across five **domain**s:

- **Student** Growth and Achievement;

- Teaching and Leading;

- Learning Supports;

- Governance; and

- Local and Societal Context.

For the purposes of this document, a **domain** is an area of activity where education partners have specific responsibilities that they are accountable for and provide **assurance** about. Fundamentally, **assurance** is reflected in what the public understands, perceives and knows about **student** growth and achievement, where the quality of the daily interaction between teacher and **student** is paramount. Assuring the public that the education system is successfully supporting **student** growth and achievement requires engagement and thoughtful action across all five **domain**s.

Student growth and achievement is the primary purpose of the education system and is the core outcome **domain** for the **assurance** framework. The **domain**s of Teaching and Leading, Learning Supports and Governance support and enable **Student** Growth and Achievement. Local and Societal Context while a separate **domain**, operates across and is integrated into the others. For the purposes of description, the **domain**s are considered discrete and separate. However, in practice, they overlap and are interconnected and interdependent, as depicted in the graphic below:
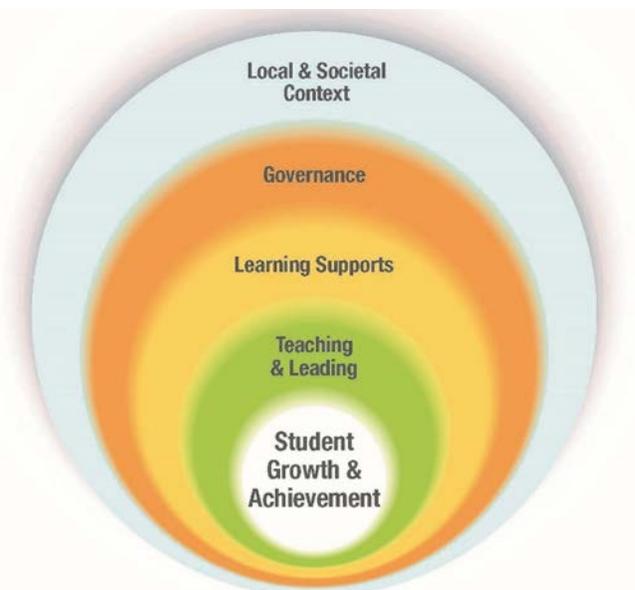
Each of the five **domain**s is defined below. The descriptions provide a succinct overview of each of the **domain**s and help demonstrate how the **domain**s are distinct yet interconnected. The "**key elements**" provide some important indicators of public **assurance** for each **domain**. The **key elements** are primarily illustrative and are provided to help those providing **assurance** (in classrooms, schools, school authorities and government) answer the question "What should be happening consistently in our education system to build public trust and confidence about the **domain**?"

Student Growth and Achievement

Student Growth and Achievement refers to the ongoing progress students make in their learning, relative to identified provincial learning **outcomes** and consistent with their needs, interests and aspirations.

Public **assurance** occurs when the public has trust and confidence that students demonstrate citizenship, engage intellectually and grow continuously as learners.

Key Elements:

- Students use ongoing assessment feedback to reflect continuously on their progress, identify strengths and areas of need and set new learning goals.

- Students achieve prescribed provincial learning **outcomes**, demonstrating strengths in literacy and numeracy.

- Students are active, healthy and well.

- Students apply knowledge, understanding and skills in real life contexts and situations.

- Students advance reconciliation by acquiring and applying foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit experiences.

- Students demonstrate understanding and respect for the uniqueness of all learners.

Teaching and Leading

Teaching and Leading refers to teachers and leaders analyzing the learning context; attending to local and societal considerations; and applying the appropriate knowledge and abilities to make decisions resulting in quality teaching, leading and optimum learning for all.

Public **assurance** occurs when the public has trust and confidence that certificated teachers and certificated leaders demonstrate their respective professional practice standards (Teaching Quality Standard, Leadership Quality Standard and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard).

Key Elements:

- Teachers and leaders respond with skill and competence to the unique learning needs, interests and cultural, social and economic circumstances of all.

- Teachers and leaders improve their professional practice through collaborative engagement in processes of growth, supervision and evaluation.

- Collaboration amongst teachers, leaders, students and their families, and other professionals enables optimum learning.

- All teachers and leaders are accountable to a standard of professional conduct and a standard of professional practice.

- University teacher education, university leadership education and on-going professional learning programs prepare teachers and leaders to meet the standards for professional practice.

- Teachers and leaders use a range of data arising from their practice to inform cycles of evidence-based continuous learning.

Learning Supports

Learning Supports refers to the mobilization of resources (including expertise, facilities, human and community services) required to demonstrate shared, system-wide responsibility for all children and students, and the application of these resources to ensure quality teaching and leading and optimum learning for all.

Public **assurance** occurs when the public has confidence that resources are managed effectively in establishing learning environments where local and societal context is recognized, diversity is embraced, a sense of belonging is emphasized and all students are welcomed, cared for, respected and safe.

Key Elements:

- Learning environments are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe.

- Learning environments are adapted as necessary to meet learner needs, emphasizing a sense of belonging and high expectations for all.

- Education partners fulfil their respective roles with a shared understanding of an inclusive education system.

- Students and their families work in collaboration with education partners to support learning.

- The school community applies the resources needed to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit **student** achievement.

- Cross-ministry initiatives and wraparound services enhance conditions required for optimal learning.

- Infrastructure (e.g., technology and transportation services) supports learning and meets the needs of Alberta students and their families, staff and communities.

Governance

Governance refers to the processes by which policy leaders attend to local and societal context; determine strategic direction; evaluate policy implementation; and manage fiscal resources to ensure learning supports, quality teaching and leading and optimum learning for all:

Public **assurance** occurs when the public has trust and confidence that policy leaders demonstrate stewardship of system resources with an emphasis on **student** success, generative community engagement, transparency and **accountability**.

Key Elements:

- Governors engage students and their families, staff and community members in the creation and ongoing implementation of a shared vision for **student** success.

- Legislation, policy and regulation provides clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of education partners in matters of governance.

- Fiscal resources are allocated and managed in the interests of ensuring **student** success, in alignment with system goals and priorities and in accordance with all statutory, regulatory and disclosure requirements.

- Curriculum is relevant, clearly articulated and designed for implementation within local contexts.

- Governors in school authorities and in government employ a cycle of evidence-based continuous improvement to inform ongoing planning and priority setting, and to build capacity.

Local and Societal Context

Local and Societal Context refers to the engagement practices of schools and communities, with support from the broader system, in identifying and responding to the learning needs, interests, aspirations and diverse cultural, social and economic circumstances of all students.

Public **assurance** occurs when the public has trust and confidence that the education system responds proactively to local and societal contexts.

Processes and practices than enable attending to local and society context are woven throughout each of the other four **domain**s.

Key Elements:

- Education partners anticipate local and societal needs and circumstances and respond with flexibility and understanding.

Continuous Improvement Cycle

Successful work within and across the **domain**s occurs within a continuous improvement cycle. There are a variety of approaches to improvement[3] and some of the key components include:

- **Explore:** Involves accessing, analyzing and interpreting accurate and relevant data and, identifying and understanding an issue, concern or problem. Key question: What is going on here?

- **Develop:** Involves Identification of a problem or challenge that can be addressed; identification of potentially successful strategies to address learner-centered problem/challenge; and developing an action plan. Key question: What needs to be improved? How?

- **Take action:** Involves learning as you implement the plan and making adjustments through formative feedback. Key question: How are we 'actioning' the plan?

- **Evaluate:** Involves evaluating the impact of the plan. Key question: Did our planned strategies have the desired **outcomes**? What next?

Key Enabling Processes for Continuous Improvement

Key enabling processes that must be part of all phases of a continuous improvement cycle (see graphic below) include:

Evidence-informed *decision-making*: In a continuous improvement cycle, participants are persistently attentive to gathering ongoing, triangulated evidence to inform next steps.

Engagement: Effective engagement processes rely on education partners working together for the purposes of bringing about positive change, with all partners recognizing that the nature of the engagement will vary according to the needs of the participants.

Learning and Capacity Building: In **assurance**, reflection on learning is critical. Because the provision of **assurance** is a dynamic process, the opportunities for building capacity for change and improvement must be ongoing.

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[3]Education Review Office and the Ministry of Education, New Zealand Government, 2015, *Effective School Evaluation*. Retrieved from :https://www.ero.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Effective-School-Evaluation-web.pdf

National Forum on Educational Statistics. (2012). *Forum Guide to Taking Action with Educational Data*. (NFES 2013-801). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C: National Center for Educational Statistics. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013801.pdf

Timperley, H., Kaser, L., & Halbert, J. (2014). *A framework for transforming learning in schools: Innovation and the spiral of inquiry*. Melbourne: Centre for Strategic Education, Seminar Series Paper No. 234. Retrieved from https://www.parahills4.com/uploads/1/2/1/5/121554660/spiral_of_inquiry_paper_-_timperley_kaser_halbert.pdf
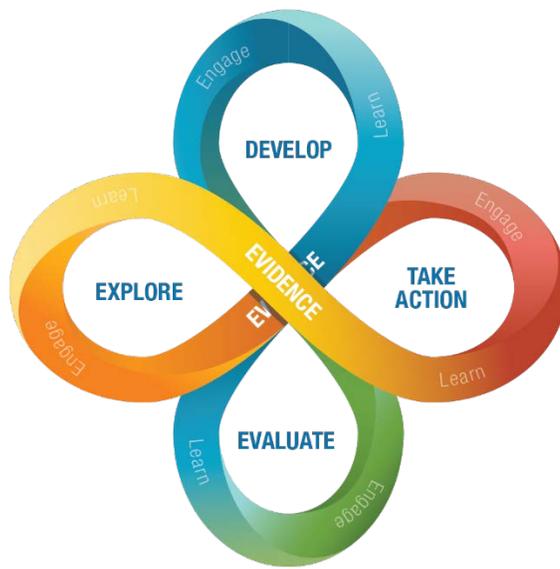
While the **Assurance** Framework is applicable to all education partners across the education system who provide public **assurance** based on their respective responsibilities, this document focuses primarily on school authorities and how they fulfill their responsibilities, demonstrate continuous improvement and provide **assurance**.