Report: ASCE Grant Survey Results

Purpose and Method

To better understand how Alberta School Council Engagement grants are used a survey was prepared by the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) Fund Development Committee and distributed through ASCA's distribution network on September 26, 2024, and closed on October 28th, 2024. The survey was also promoted on the ASCA Social Media accounts.

This report, presented to the ASCA Board of Directors on January 18, 2025, was compiled using responses received prior to the closing date of the survey. In total, there were 97 responses to the survey.

Demographics

As of Oct 17, 2024, a total of 76 responses were recorded, this included 44 school council chairs, 22 school council executives, and 13 parents and community members. When asked "Is this School Council an ASCA Member?" 63% responded yes. When asked about the location 25% *(19) responded Metro, 29% (22) responded Rural, and 45% (35) responded Urban or "Rurban". When asked about school division 80% (60) responded Public, 16% (12) responded Separate, 3% (2) responded Charter, and 1% (1) responded Francophone.

Quantitative Results

When asked "were you aware of the ASCE grant available to your School Council?" 22% (17) responded no or I don't know. When asked "has your School Council used its ASCE grant in previous school years?" 62% responded "yes". When asked if they would like a meeting to discuss "ASCA options for using your 2024 ASCE grant" 29% (22) provided an email address for follow up.

The link to the data of the survey can be found below
Alberta School Council Engagement (ASCE) Grant Survey (1-76) - Prelim responses 10.17.24 - Copy.xlsx

Qualitative Results

Qualitative themes emerged from the survey results and are presented below with the question and multiple quotes from respondents.

What has been the best use of your ASCE grant so far?

1. **Family Engagement Events**
   a. Parents highly value events that bring families together for learning and connection, fostering stronger ties between home and school.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "Having engagement sessions that includes children and their parents. Topics we've covered are 'feeling seen and heard in our classroom.'"
      ii. "Engagement nights that included the entire family."

2. **Mental Health and Well-being**
   a. Mental health presentations for parents and students have made a significant impact by addressing critical needs in the community.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "Sessions on how to deal with children's mental health and cyber security."
      ii. "We did a mental health session once, we also bought books for our library."
      iii. "Mental Health presentation evening for parents. The mental health of parents is important to serve our kids to the best of our ability."

3. **Guest Speakers and Workshops**
   a. Bringing in speakers and hosting workshops on important topics has been a key use of the grant, helping parents and students learn and grow.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "Having a speaker that parents were interested in learning from and buying materials that would help parents deal with anxious children."
      ii. "Our topic-specific speakers have been highly engaging and appreciated the most at this point."
      iii. "We pooled grant funds to have a guest speaker on using the power of community to overcome adversity."

4. **ASCA Conference Participation**
   a. Attending the ASCA conference has been cited as one of the best uses of the grant, providing school councils with valuable knowledge and tools.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "We only used it last year at the conference. It was great."
      ii. "The ASCA Conference and Barbara Coloroso."
      iii. "Sending a representative to the ASCA Conference."

5. **Digital and Cyber Safety**
   a. Educating parents and students on the safe use of technology and social media has been a priority, with workshops providing important guidance.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "Conducting information session on cyberspace safety for children and parents, protecting families from cybercrimes."
      ii. "Online safety webinar for parents."
      iii. "Presentation on safe social media by Jo Social Media."

6. **Literacy and Numeracy Events**
   a. Parents value events that focus on improving literacy and numeracy skills in the home, providing resources and support for learning.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "We had numeracy nights with parents and guests from our University's faculty of Education to showcase easy ways to bring numeracy learning into their homes."
      ii. "We bought numeracy kits that kids can sign out to keep playing games at home."

7. **Workshops for Specific Topics**
   a. The grant has been used to host workshops on important, specific issues such as vaping, drugs, and artificial intelligence, engaging both parents and students.
   b. Quotes:

   i. "Speaker on vaping and drugs."
   ii. "Presentation about Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its application."
   iii. "Workshops about topics chosen by parent body (social media, ADD) and books for parent resource library."

8. **Building School-Parent Connections**
   a. Creating opportunities for families to connect with the school council has fostered stronger relationships and community involvement.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "Provided an opportunity for families to be in our school building - to come together and connect with school council."
      ii. "Parental engagement events to raise awareness of the importance of having a voice in their child's education."

9. **Printed and Digital Resources**
   a. Schools have used the grant to create valuable printed materials and resources that engage parents in their children's education.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "Printed materials to engage parents with school council and engage parents with their children's education needs."
      ii. "We also bought books for our library."

10. **Challenges with Engagement**
    a. Despite efforts, some workshops and events have had low attendance, showing the ongoing challenge of increasing parent engagement.
    b. Quotes:
       i. "Not sure. Our workshop was not well attended. Parent engagement is low in our community."
       ii. "We had limited success hosting a workshop."

What other topics would be important to or helpful for parents at this school?

- **Fundraising and Financial Support**
  o Parents want to learn more about organizing successful fundraising activities and managing funds effectively. Knowing differences between School Councils and Fundraising Societies.
  o Quotes:
    ▪ "Profitable fundraising activities."
    ▪ "Sharing ideas on how to use AGLC funds."
    ▪ "How to work together with fundraising, clarifying their separate roles, and how they complement one another."

- **Community Engagement**
  o Parents seek ways to connect with each other and the school to build a stronger community and enhance their involvement in school councils.
  o Quotes:
    ▪ "Community engagement."
    ▪ "Interaction in general of parents with other parents in the school setting."
    ▪ "Literacy and numeracy, family engagement to bring together community and therefore creating more opportunities to connect school council with families."

- **Mental Health and Well-being**
  - Mental health remains a top concern, with a focus on supporting both children and parents.
  - Quotes:
    - "Mainly mental health and focus on parent engagement."
    - "Our school/province is full of mental health needs. We have so many kids suffering with mental illness. Depression, ADHD, Anxiety, Safe Social Media."
    - "How to deal with anxiety (that might fall under mental health)."

- **Advocacy for Public Education**
  - Parents are interested in learning how to advocate for public education, voicing their concerns, and defending their values.
  - Quotes:
    - "How to advocate for public education in general."
    - "Give parents the confidence and ability to speak out against anything they feel does not represent their values, morals, or ethics, without the fear of repercussions."

- **Cultural Awareness and Anti-Racism**
  - There is a strong desire to address anti-racism, unconscious bias, and cultural integration within the school community.
  - Quotes:
    - "Anti-racism and unconscious bias."
    - "Multicultural integration and we have lots of new cultures to our area so something around language."
    - "Including all despite or even because of race/ethnicity, disability, etc."

- **Learning Styles and Educational Support**
  - Parents want to understand different learning styles and how to better support their children academically.
  - Quotes:
    - "Learning styles."
    - "Tools to help support student and teacher education."
    - "How to increase parent involvement in literacy and numeracy at home."

- **Physical and Health Education**
  - Parents emphasize the importance of physical fitness, nutrition, and addressing issues like addiction among teens.
  - Quotes:
    - "Physical fitness and activities. Having daily movement and gym class for every age."
    - "Physical health of teen/tweens e.g. vaping, smoking, alcohol, drugs, addictions."
    - "Possibly things about health and nutrition for kids i.e.: picky eaters and things to help with that."

- **Career Coaching and Future Planning**
  - Preparing students for their future careers, scholarships, and post-secondary options is a priority for parents.
  - Quotes:
    - "Career coaching."

- "MyBlueprint - preparing students for the workforce. Dual credit courses in high school."
- "Artificial Intelligence, Community Resources, Sports and available funding for kids to play, Scholarships and ways to prepare, Careers, Farm Safety, Drivers Education."

- **Technology and Screen Use**
  - Parents are concerned about the role of technology in schools and at home, seeking guidance on managing screen time and understanding educational tools.
  - Quotes:
    - "Screen use."
    - "School division technologies, such as Powerschool, Google Classroom, etc."
    - "Screen usage at school."

- **Parent-School Communication**
  - Enhancing communication between parents, teachers, and the school is critical to fostering engagement and transparency.
  - Quotes:
    - "Efficiency for communication throughout the schools between teachers and parents."
    - "Surveys like this provided to parents to get their ideas."
    - "How to talk to your teacher/counsellor about your child's needs. So many parents don't know where to start when something is wrong."

What could ASCA do to give you more options for, or value from, your ASCE grant this year?

1. **Pooling Funds for Greater Impact**
   a. Parents suggest combining resources with other councils to maximize the impact of their grant, enabling them to access more valuable content.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "I personally would like the ability to share your classes with other councils so that we could combine our grant resources that currently aren't being used."
      ii. "Coordinate for councils to pool funds."

2. **Access to Speakers and Programs**
   a. There is a strong desire for ASCA to provide a comprehensive list of available speakers and programs to help schools select relevant topics more easily.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "Provide a list of speakers that can address Racism/Anti-Racism."
      ii. "Provide guidance about how other schools have used it in the past."
      iii. "List of speakers available for a variety of topics."

3. **Greater Flexibility in Grant Usage**
   a. Parents feel that the grant restrictions limit their ability to use the funds effectively and want more options for its use.
   b. Quotes:
      i. "Make it more broad in its use. We would like it to be useful for school community engagement activities... We tried to use it for this, but it was declined."

        ii. "Have less restrictions, very difficult to use the grant money because of so few options."

        iii. "Expand allowable expenses to include fire smart sessions."

4. **Support for Mental Health and Well-being**

    a. Parents want more private and tailored sessions related to mental health and well-being for families and students.

    b. Quotes:

        i. "Provide private sessions related to mental health and wellbeing."

        ii. "Suggested topics and speakers list... we struggle looking for qualified speakers on cyber security, social media, etc."

5. **Conference Affordability**

    a. There are concerns about the cost of ASCA conferences, with requests for lower prices so more parents can attend.

    b. Quotes:

        i. "It would be good if 2 people could attend the conference for $500. It's so expensive and no one's paying out of pocket."

        ii. "Make the cost of the annual ASCA conference $500 so we can send a parent without cost beyond that."

6. **Providing More Ideas and Examples**

    a. Parents request examples of how other schools have used the grant effectively to inspire new ways to spend it.

    b. Quotes:

        i. "Provide a listing of options in each of the categories so that we can share how other schools have spent their funds and what we could be doing differently."

        ii. "Provide us with some options other than workshops that the funds can be used for."

7. **Allowing Use for Food and Incentives**

    a. Many parents believe that allowing the grant to be used for food, snacks, or incentives like gift cards could help increase parent engagement.

    b. Quotes:

        i. "Let us use it for food, or prizes."

        ii. "Include food! Providing a meal for parents or families would be a good use."

        iii. "Gift cards for giveaways to attract more parents to be present."

8. **Easier Access and Clearer Communication**

    a. There is a call for simpler access to the funds, clearer communication about how to use them, and faster confirmation of grant availability.

    b. Quotes:

        i. "Easier access to the funds."

        ii. "Allow councils to know if they are receiving the funds as early as possible so we can plan."

        iii. "Get the letter out early and confirm the funds are available."

9. **New and Updated Material**

    a. Parents are asking for more up-to-date and relevant learning materials that reflect the current needs of the school community.

b. Quotes:
   i. "New material, more focused on topics that are relevant to present."
   ii. "Provide more learning material."
   iii. "Increase the options for designed usage."

10. Broader Usage Beyond School Councils
- Some parents feel the grant should benefit the entire school community, not just the council, by expanding usage to general school needs and projects.
- Quotes:
   o "Give more examples and broaden the limitations on what you can do with your grant. Would be nice to be able to use it for the school not just the council."
   o "Expand the use for the grant... Perhaps we can use our grant $ on more things than we are aware we can use it for."

Do you have any other input you would like to provide?

Clarity and Guidance for New Council Members
- New council chairs seek clear guidance on how to use the grant to support their parent communities effectively.
- Quotes:
   o "I really want to hear what I can use the grant for to help my parent community out as I am a new chair for [our] school council."
   o "We are a new parent council so really appreciate all the information."

Access to Speaker Lists
- Parents want easier access to a list of available speakers and topics, making it easier to choose relevant sessions for their communities.
- Quotes:
   o "It would be helpful to have a list of speakers available (and their topics) that we could choose from – to offer as an online session."
   o "Provide a list of speakers that will work for $500."
   o "A list of ways other school councils have spent their grant would be useful."

Appreciation for ASCA's Efforts
- There is gratitude for the grant and ASCA's role in providing resources and support for school councils across Alberta.
- Quotes:
   o "Thank you for the opportunity to utilize this grant. We appreciate the mountain of information you provide on to ensure effective school councils in Alberta."
   o "Thank you ASCA for all the good work you do."

Frustration with Grant Restrictions
- Some parents feel the restrictions on how the grant can be used are too limiting, making it difficult to spend effectively within their communities.
- Quotes:
   o "The list of what you CANNOT use it for is so extensive that it eliminates pretty much everything except spending it back to ASCA on classes or conferences."
   o "Every speaker either comes as volunteer or charges way above $500."

Parental Rights and Influence
- There is a concern that school councils should focus on representing the majority of parents and protecting parental rights.
- Quotes:
  - "ACSA is meant to represent majority of parents' voice and what I see is that it is skewed towards specific controversial issues at the detriment of the majority of families."
  - "Please understand that as parents we are concerned for the direction of the education system and would appreciate a basic education for children and less of a lifestyle and social conditioning type education, especially in K-6."
  - "No council, teacher or government officials should take away parental duties and rights for their own children."

Engagement of High School Parents
- High school parents are often disengaged, particularly in the later grades, and councils seek strategies to re-engage them.
- Quotes:
  - "Need tips or tricks on how to get high school parents involved. I feel that at the grade 10-12 level no one cares anymore."
  - "High school parents aren't interested in ASCA workshops. They are almost done their time and are focused on launching their kids."

ASCE Best Practices
- Many parents want to learn how other councils are successfully using their grants, seeking inspiration and practical ideas to apply to their own schools.
- Quotes:
  - "A list of ways other school councils have spent their grant would be useful."
  - "Provide us with some options other than workshops that the funds can be used for."