
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.

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 that 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 boards related to the accountability relationship with the **Department of Education**. Where the legislation references "school boards," it also applies to charter schools per Section 27 of the *Education Act*.

- Section 10(1)(b) and 10(2) of the *Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act* requires accountable organizations, including school boards, 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."
- Section 8 of the Ministerial 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 boards to develop and implement a reporting and **accountability** system on any matter the Minister prescribes. It also requires school boards, 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**, parents¹, electors, or the Minister.

- Section 33 of the *Education Act* outlines key school 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**, staff and the community, including municipalities and the local business community, contributes to successful shared governance. This engagement should occur on goals and targets in school board Education Plans. Fulfilling these responsibilities is central to school board **accountability** and **assurance** in the education system.
- Section 139 of the *Education Act* outlines the expectations for financial reporting for school boards. Section 139(2) requires that school boards 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 school 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 boards to provide school councils with an opportunity to provide advice on the development of the school's (a) foundational statements, if any, respecting the school's vision, principles and beliefs, (b) policies, (c) education plan; annual results report required by the Minister to be reported under section 67 of the Act, and (d) budget.
- Section 12(2) of the *School Councils Regulation* under the *Education Act* requires a school board to provide the school council with (a) the results for the school from provincial assessments and an interpretation of those results, and (b) the information that the school board disseminates through its reporting and **accountability** system per Section 67 of the *Education Act*.

The responsibilities specific to charter school authorities related to the accountability relationship with the Department of Education are outlined in:

- Section 4 (d) where the charter included the goals of the charter school expressed as measurable outcomes; 4 (e) a description of the improved student learning outcomes to be attained by each student; and 4 (h) any curriculum to be offered by the charter school in addition to the Alberta Programs of study.
- To support the long-term renewal of a charter, Section 8(1) requires the charter school authority to provide assurance to the Minister that student achievement is consistently strong or improving; there are multiple indicators of the charter school's ongoing commitment to engaging students, teachers, parents, and community members in a collaborative model of continuous improvement, and there is evidence that the charter school used research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning outcomes.

The responsibilities of **accredited funded private schools** related to the accountability relationship with the **Department of Education** are outlined in:

- Section 8 of the *Ministerial Grants Regulation*, noted above.

- Section 16(1) of the *Private Schools Regulation* under the *Education Act* that establishes the requirement for operators of **accredited funded private schools** to prepare an education plan and annual education results report (AERR) as required by the Minister, in addition to financial reporting.
- Section 16(3) of the *Private Schools Regulation* states that the operator of more than one funded private school may include all those schools in the same education plan and annual results report.
- Section 15 of the *Private Schools Regulation* requires operators of a funded private school to establish a parent advisory council if the parents of students enrolled in the school do not constitute a majority of members of the governing body of the funded private school. The parent advisory council provides advice to the principal of the school and the governing body of the funded private school respecting any matter relating to the school.
- Section 20 of the *Private Schools Regulation* requires operators of funded private schools to submit to the Minister on or before November 30, in a form prescribed by the Minister, the audited financial statements of the funded private school. The submission must also include 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.
- Section 21 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.

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

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

In the **Assurance Framework**, all education partners 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.

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. School authorities:

- 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 meaningfully with education partners, across the spectrum of public engagement strategies (informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering)¹.
- 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.
- Respond to 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.
- Provide an intentional framework 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.

Assurance Domains

Assurance in the education system happens when community members and education partners engage across five **domains**:

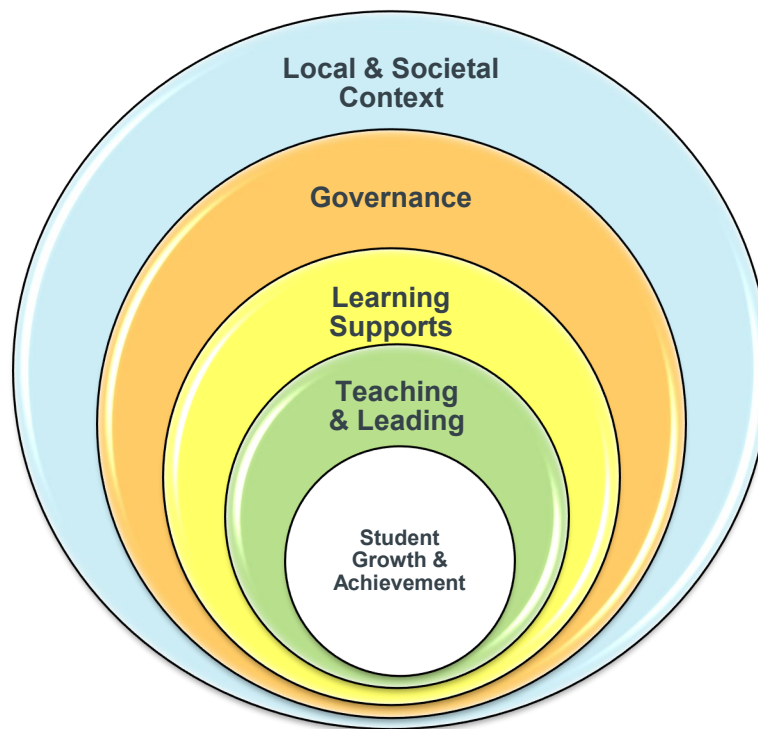
- Student Growth and Achievement;
- Teaching and Leading;
- Learning Supports;
- Governance; and
- Local and Societal Context.

For the purposes of this document, a **domain** is an area of activity where school authorities have specific responsibilities for which they are accountable and provide **assurance**.

Student growth and achievement is the primary purpose of the education system and is the core **outcome domain** for the **assurance** framework. The **domains** of Teaching and Leading, Learning Supports and Governance support and enable Student Growth and Achievement.

¹ International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)

Local and Societal Context, while a separate **domain**, operates across and is integrated into the others. For the purposes of description, the **domains** are considered discrete and separate. However, in practice, they interconnect, as depicted in the graphic below:



Each of the five **domains** is defined below. The descriptions provide a succinct overview of each of the **domains** and help demonstrate how the **domains** 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 stakeholders.

Public **assurance** occurs when the public has trust and confidence that certificated teachers and certificated leaders (principals or school jurisdiction 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 stakeholders.
- 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 ongoing 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 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:

- Members of the governing body provide for, where appropriate, the engagement of **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 **school** authorities, 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 that enable attending to local and society context are woven throughout each of the other four **domains**.

Key Elements:

- **School authorities** anticipate local and societal needs and circumstances based on stakeholder feedback and respond with flexibility and understanding.

Continuous Improvement Cycle

Successful work within and across the **domains** occurs within a continuous improvement cycle. There are a variety of approaches to improvement² and many include the following components:

- **Explore:** Involves accessing, analyzing and interpreting accurate and relevant data and identifying and understanding an issue, concern or problem.
 - What can be learned about the school authority's practices as a result of the data?
 - How might analyzing data lead to developing targeted strategies that yield continuous improvements?
- **Develop:** Involves identifying of a problem or challenge that can be addressed; identifying of potentially successful strategies to address a learner-centered problem/challenge; and developing an action plan.
 - What are the learning priority areas that need to be improved?
 - What are the strategies that can be implemented to target these areas of improvement?
 - What timeframe would make sense for implementation?
- **Take action:** Involves learning as the plan is implemented and making adjustments through formative feedback.
 - What ongoing benchmark measures might you use to track progress?
 - How will the monitoring of ongoing data lead to continuous improvement over time?
 - What will need consideration when making adjustments throughout the process?
- **Evaluate:** Involves evaluating the impact of the plan.
 - Did planned strategies have the desired results?
 - How might these strategies support continuous improvement?
 - What are the priority areas that need to be strengthened?

²Education Review Office and the Ministry of Education, New Zealand Government, 2015, *Effective School Evaluation*. Retrieved from : <https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/effective-school-evaluation>

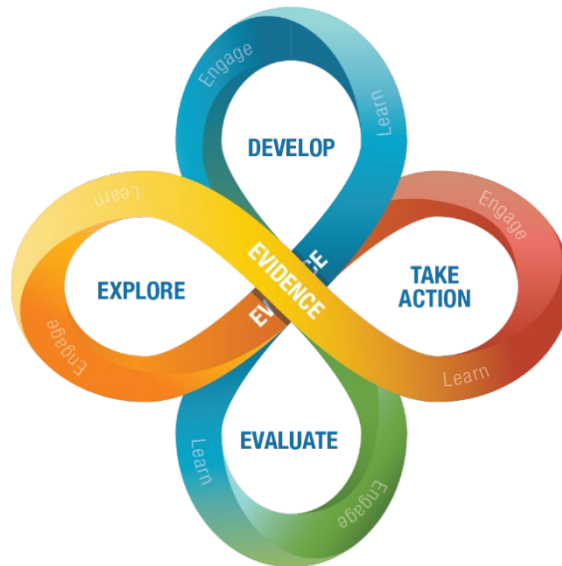
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ENABLING PROCESSES FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

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.



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**.