



Lethbridge School Division Brief - Draft K-6 Curriculum APRIL 2021

This brief does not cover all the concerns Lethbridge School Division has regarding the Draft *Alberta K-6 Curriculum* but does delineate examples underlying the concerns as expressed in the April 10, 2021 Board Media Release.

BOARD MEDIA RELEASE APRIL 10, 2021

Lethbridge School Division will not be participating in the 2021/2022 piloting of the Draft Alberta K-6 Curriculum, released by government on March 29.

School Division trustees and Division administration have reviewed the content and engaged in discussion regarding alignment of the draft curriculum with the vision, mission and priorities of Lethbridge School Division. Unfortunately, the draft curriculum does not support quality learning that will develop innovative thinkers or responsible citizens with inclusive mindsets.

We recognize that piloting curriculum typically comes with many benefits, including direct feedback opportunities and professional learning support.

The draft curriculum as presented, however, includes significant structural and content changes that alter how education is delivered. These types of major adjustments are typically not the outcome of a pilot.

"Alberta has been renowned for a world-class curriculum," said Christine Light, Chair of the Lethbridge School Division Board of Trustees. "The Board of Trustees does not believe it would be ethical or responsible to have our teachers and students navigate the proposed draft curriculum that has an abundance of content that is not age-appropriate, fails to adequately address diversity, fails to further contemporary learning competencies and lacks coherence and integration of ideas. We are committed to continuing to work with Alberta Education in whatever capacity we can to bring about change to the current draft document, as we believe it is not currently in a form we can support or pilot."

Lethbridge School Division calls for government to pause the pilot process, reflect on the resounding feedback that has been expressed province-wide regarding problematic content threaded throughout the draft, and engage in a process that is authentic, transparent and well-informed.

Lethbridge School Division is hopeful Alberta Education will work with stakeholders, including the Division's knowledgeable and highly capable teaching force, to bring forward a draft curriculum suitable for piloting that is research-based and grounded in the needs of contemporary learners.

"Minister LaGrange stated in a press conference on Saturday, April 10, that school divisions who participate in the pilot process for the curriculum will be "leaders" able to give "rich feedback". To this I say: Lethbridge School Division is a leader in our province," added Light. "Lethbridge School Division, along with the other divisions who are standing against the proposed curriculum and choosing to not participate in the validation process, are the leaders in our province. We are leaders in saying to the Minister, as well as the provincial government, that this curriculum is inadequate to meet the present and future needs of Alberta students."

Light added the curriculum does not align with the values, mission or vision of the school division.

"The mark is so far off that we are not allowing this pilot to enter into our front door. That fact alone should send a profound and rich message to the province. Again, we ask the minister to hear the voices of students, hear the voices of trustees, hear the voices of parents, and hear the voices of educators. Stop the pilot process, take this curriculum back, and create a rich curriculum that will benefit our students and our province going into the future."

A. Historic Development of Alberta Curriculum

It appears that the determination on the part of the Ministry to roll out the draft curriculum despite widespread opposition has been politicized. A review of the historic development of the previous curriculum draft that was close to ready for roll-out points to the development of a curriculum that had its roots in the *Inspiring Education* initiative. This was spearheaded by Minister Hancock (PC) in 2010 and furthered by Minister Johnson's (PC) Ministerial Order on Student Learning in 2013. Still under the PC government, curriculum re-design was forwarded in 2014. A sound curriculum that later engaged extensive Alberta teacher working groups, it was built on a foundation of numeracy and literacy, was to be digitally based and competency focused (competencies deriving from the Ministerial Order on Student Learning 2013). The curriculum that was designed during a PC government became more refined with teacher working groups over the time NDP was the provincial government. Contrary to the UCP claim that "NDP tried to smuggle politics into the classroom," the curriculum remained in the basic framework established through the previous years (2010-2015). Overall, the draft curriculum that was ready for partial implementation in September 2019 was broadly supported by educators and school boards. Eight years in the making, it remained a strong curriculum. Unfortunately, this curriculum was paused and the UCP put together an advisory panel consisting of members absent of current K-12 teaching experience to work on a draft *Ministerial Order on Student Learning*. Subsequent to the Ministerial Order, small working advisory groups were assembled to review the curriculum. One cannot help but wonder why these small groups of individuals had to sign confidentiality statements regarding their work and feedback. The *Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum* was changed December 2020. The vision maintained literacy and numeracy as foundational building blocks that was the initial foundation in 2010, which is positive. There was a critical change in focus however with literacy and numeracy across all grades and subjects moving away from being woven into contemporary student competencies to the following: (1) "knowledge development" with "the appreciation of the great works and ideas of world history," (2) character development, and (3) community engagement. This critical change in focus is of deep concern to us as we believe students need to be equipped with competencies that are designed for success in the contemporary world.

Given the historic development of the previous draft curriculum that had its roots in the PC *Inspiring Education*, and further refinement through curriculum re-design with a PC Minister, with final touches mostly relative to visible diversity added by teacher working groups during the NDP government, it does not make sense for the current UCP government to continue condemning the broadly supported curriculum as an NDP curriculum. We believe that this curriculum that was developed over the course of eight years should be brought back on the table and given the final touches for a draft by current teachers in the field.

B. General Areas of Concern Identified by Lethbridge School Division as Problematic

Examples of shortfalls in the draft curriculum are structured below to align with Lethbridge School Division's media release regarding the decision to not participate in piloting the curriculum. Also included at the end are some notes regarding plagiarism. We consider plagiarism within a curriculum document a significant breach of ethics.

It can be noted that the province continues to describe piloting of the draft curriculum as an "opportunity to strengthen" our curriculum. The difficulty with this is that it is too riddled with problems to 'strengthen.' What is even more problematic is that the piloting is allowing for "maximum flexibility" by allowing jurisdictions, schools and/or teachers to choose specific subjects. This will never solve the problem of the "lack of integration" across subjects if they are to be viewed as separate and discreet curriculum programs.

Content that is not age-appropriate

- Overall, the draft is developmentally inappropriate given the kinds of topics elementary-aged students are expected to be knowledgeable of (e.g., ancient cultures in grade one SS, Gregorian Chant in grade 5 music). Our youngest students need to first understand who they are and how they fit into a community before they understand other cultures, especially ancient ones. Below are some examples of age-inappropriate content. It must be kept in mind that these are only *some* examples among many.
- Some specific examples for ELA:
 - The draft ELA and Literature curriculum is developmentally inappropriate more so in the early grades. One example of this in grade 1 is, "add or remove suffixes to change the tense of words." This is developmentally more appropriate for late grade 2. Students in grade 3 are expected to know and identify the poetic structure of sonnets. This would be more appropriate in late elementary or middle school. Ironically "determine if a text's readability is too easy, too difficult, or at an appropriate level," is not expected until grade 3 and yet that should be taught in grade 1.
 - Grade 6 study of Greek epic poems, classical dramas from the same era, and speeches by Aristotle and Cicero.
- Specific to Music:
 - At the grade 6 level students study forms of music and dance of the Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, Enlightenment, French Revolution and Colonial America. It seems age relevance and leveraging fine arts to engage student interest has been forgotten.
- Specific to Drama:
 - Study includes Greek and Roman playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, and Euripides and theatre of the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and 20th Century America (very American). While these works represent a classic history that is to be appreciated, it is astonishing to think that elementary age students would find these accessible or aligned with interest and life experience.
- Specific to Social Studies
 - Grade 1 students learn about the Renaissance, and Grade 2 students learn about the fall of Rome and the reign of Charlemagne. Currently, the social studies curriculum starts

- with “family” and “local community.” Starting with understanding self and family and growing this understanding to include community is far more age appropriate.
 - Grade 4 students are asked to write a business plan for a large corporation (e.g. CP Rail) including “costs, market [and] tracking of revenue and expenses.” This would be a high school level expectation.
- Specific to Mathematics
 - The mathematics draft curriculum is not developmentally appropriate and does not align with the developmental ages identified in research and not even with Alberta Education’s own Numeracy Progression. There is a major focus on procedures and skills (e.g. standard algorithms, foundational skills and procedures) with little attention to mathematical understanding. Much content has been moved to lower grade levels. The “Organizing Ideas and Guiding Questions” are, in many cases, misaligned with the stated “Knowledge, Skills, and Procedures.”
 - Some specific examples of very challenging concepts moved to lower grades without scaffolding (development of prerequisite understandings) include: moving current grade 5 triangles topic (scalene, isosceles, equilateral, etc.) to grade 3; line and rotation symmetry currently in grade 9 to grade 5.

1. Fails to adequately address diversity

- The curriculum lacks Indigenous history and perspectives in Grades K-2
- Minimal inclusion of minority and BIPOC (black, Indigenous and people of color) voices
- Does not uphold the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee
- Social Studies, in general, is Eurocentric, has a colonial lens, and places emphasis on rote memorization of historical figures (again, from a Eurocentric delineation of history)
- Specific to ELA: We have not seen the literature list yet. It has repeatedly been said that students will explore “great literary works.” Who determines what is great? There seems to be an emphasis on the classics rather than diverse texts that are culturally responsive. This will clearly direct attention to Western knowledge and classical works written through a Eurocentric lens. Our students need to see themselves in the books they interact with. According to Rudine Sims Bishop, books can be windows, sliding glass doors or mirrors.
- Specific to Social Studies: Grade 6 curriculum includes studying the Ku Klux Klan in the U. S. and Canada. The outcomes for skills and procedure are, “where was KKK membership the highest?” and “why did it find some support in Canada?” Knowledge level questions requiring no reflection on racism truly fails to help students better understand the harm of racism, how such ideas have been denounced and why.

2. Fails to further contemporary learning competencies.

- It can be noted that the framework and front matter continue to include the learning competencies first identified in 2010 and further refined in 2016, but the competencies are not integrated with the curriculum. The emphasis is on acquiring knowledge with little opportunity to understand it. In a day when we can “google” historical facts and dates, this curriculum would push teachers back into being the knowledge keepers and disseminators. This pedagogical approach (“sage on the stage”) has been proven to be ineffective in creating students who are independent thinkers and problem solvers and, as such, is used in a very limited way in our

classrooms from Kindergarten through grade 12. Opportunities for higher order thinking are limited given the amount of knowledge and the time required to disseminate it.

- The guiding framework for the curriculum over-emphasizes knowledge with 115 references to the word and repeated reference to “great” or “greatest” works of art or literature. As pointed out by one of our teachers, this is more aligned with a post-secondary syllabus than a K-6 curriculum.
- Specific to ELA: There is an emphasis on foundational knowledge (literacy and numeracy) which is good, but that isn't enough. Students need to do something with that knowledge. Students should use their literacy skills to take action through inquiry, problem-based learning, etc. This is when we see innovation. There is heavy emphasis on “retelling” in the draft. This is an important foundational skill, but not enough. Much of the current research indicates that we are waiting too long to work on higher level comprehension strategies such as inferring which isn't mentioned formally until grade 3 in this draft. There are developmentally appropriate ways to work with higher order comprehension strategies such as visualizing from the start of school. In the guiding framework in relation to writing the emphasis is on spelling and conventions not on ideas. All the spelling and conventions in the world will not help you if you don't have ideas. The 2 big rocks of writing are ideas and organization (structure) followed by elaboration, yet they seem to be second to mechanics.
- Specific to ELA: Comprehension is thinking and yet in the entire K-6 draft of the ELA and Literature curriculum it only appears 21 times. Most of the time it is used at a surface level. There is little deep or critical thinking present.
- Specific to Mathematics: Key outcomes linked to developing ability to reason flexibly and solve complex problems is a big miss. While the idea that students need to undertake some rote learning of basics, these do not teach students how to understand concepts and apply higher order thinking which is essential for a contemporary curriculum.

3. Lacks coherence and integration of ideas

- It is difficult to uncover connections from one topic of study to another. Scaffolds that ensure understanding and application to allow learning to go deeper from one topic or grade level to another is lacking. There are not a lot of specific examples because it is simply “lacking” attention to scaffolding, cross-curricular concepts, coherence across subjects, integration of ideas within and across subjects.
- ELA: Lacks a theoretical foundation about language and literacy development (current curriculum has this). Two problematic areas (among many more) identified by Dr. Robin Bright, a literacy expert, from the U of L are as follows: (1) The language arts are presented as “silos” and does not present the interrelationships among the language arts, (2) writing is mostly referred to as “mechanics”... lacks attention to outcomes related to talking about content/ideas, organization, vocabulary, or purposes of writing. Note that the source for these two problematic areas is a Twitter Thread (<https://mobile.twitter.com/drrobinbright/status/1378051798288592898>)
- The Social Studies draft emphasizes history. It must be kept in mind that Social Studies includes history, geography, anthropology, archaeology, political science, sociology, and other social science disciplines. One of the most important goals of social studies is to help students understand how knowledge is constructed and interrelated among the disciplines, and how the

framing of knowledge and subsequent action informs civic competencies. This goal cannot be met without integration across the disciplines and coherence with other subjects, such as ELA, to facilitate cross-curricular planning.

- A thorough review of the Physical Health and Wellness curriculum in the draft was conducted by Healthy Schools Lab. The comments regarding the lack of coherence and integration are drawn from a post on the website of Healthy Schools Lab (<https://hslab.ca/2021/04/14/review-alberta-educations-draft-k-6-physical-education-and-wellness-curriculum/>). It is noted that it is important to be able to understand the big ideas that drive knowledge, understanding, and skills and procedures, but the draft curriculum does not provide the critical front matter to decipher the big ideas. It is pointed out that how physical education and wellness components align is not clear, and that the format does not allow for clear integration of concepts. Healthy Schools Lab also points out the number of areas that are lacking to reflect current research including physical and health literacy, positive mental health, a focus on active healthy lifestyles, healthy relationship with food, and a comprehensive approach to health.

4. Lacking Identification and Development of Resources

- Curriculum people in school jurisdictions have been repeatedly told that the resources we currently use will align with the new curriculum. This is not possible as topics in this draft are either not in our current curriculum or are not introduced at the age level expected with the draft. This is significant for expectations with piloting. Historically, when a curriculum reaches a pilot level, it includes some basic resources that have been carefully selected over the course of a year by curriculum resource committees comprised of teachers across the province. This has not been a step with this curriculum. The communication regarding drafting indicates that resources will be identified sometime over the summer and/or as the piloting unfolds. Finding and/or creating resources will take up a huge chunk of teachers' time. Not to mention, some teachers may need to spend time themselves learning about the content before they feel comfortable teaching it.

5. Plagiarism

- Plagiarism is problematic on a number of fronts. First, the concept of plagiarism is in the curriculum to teach students that it is unethical. How can we expect students to adhere to this when the curriculum itself is riddled with plagiarism? Second, the inclusion of plagiarized (word for word or close to word for word) work demonstrates a lack of careful review. It is sloppy academically.
- Framework contains the wording, "[Alberta students] will gain the essential knowledge and skills to shaper their future with wisdom, prudence, and hope" and in the vision statement, "They will become life-long learners, who will cultivate the virtues of wisdom, courage, self-control, justice, charity, and hope." These appear to be drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_virtues).
- An analysis done by a University instructor (Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton) pointed out that "...content has been lifted or borrowed from multiple original sources, not just one or two. The approach of taking bits and pieces of others' content and stitching it together into an allegedly new document is called patchwriting, a term used extensively by plagiarism scholars such as Rebecca Moore Howard and Diane Pecorari. Patchwriting happens when writers lack the skills or

confidence to paraphrase effectively and is widely regarded as an indication that the writer needs support.” (See <https://drsaraheaton.wordpress.com/2021/04/03/analysis-of-plagiarism-in-the-draft-alberta-k-6-curriculum/>)

Specific Examples:

- Grade 6 Social Studies:
“A popular theory, proposed as a way of drawing a distinction between two different societies, the United States and Canada: It suggests that there is a difference between the Canadian mosaic, where ethnic groups have maintained their distinctiveness while functioning as part of the whole, and an American melting pot, where peoples of diverse origins have allegedly fused to make a new people.” (p. 32)
Exact duplication from [1976 article authored by Howard Palmer, published in the *International Journal*](#).
- Grade 2 physical education curriculum matched a Vancouver-area recreation centre’s website. The curriculum reads: Adventurous play can: promote independence and problem solving; provide direct experience of cause and effect; develop children’s coordination and bodily control; boost self-confidence and emotional resilience; reduce stress; satisfy curiosity and a need for challenge.
The adventurous play section of the North Vancouver Recreation Centre’s website says it: Promotes independence and problem-solving; Provides direct experience of cause and effect (natural consequences); Develops coordination and bodily control; Boosts self-confidence and emotional resilience; Promotes self-regulation; Reduces stress and fears; Satisfies natural need for challenge and thrill.
- Grade 6 social science curriculum segment copied from Wikipedia.
The curriculum reads: “The religious affiliation of most Albertans is Christian, and the largest denominations are Roman Catholic, United, Anglican, Lutheran, and Baptist churches.”
The Wikipedia page on Alberta’s demographics reads: “Over 60 per cent of Albertans identify as Christian, while almost 32 per cent of residents identify with no religion. The largest denominations are the Roman Catholic, United, Anglican, Lutheran, and Baptist Churches.”