

## **Support for Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action**

### *Background*

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was established on June 2, 2008, as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, and carried out a mandate based on “an emerging and compelling desire to put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future. The truth telling and reconciliation process as part of an overall holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy is a sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing. This is a profound commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect that will forge a brighter future. The truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation.” [Mandate Introduction, Schedule N, Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.] The TRC conducted extensive hearings across the country, eventually concluding its work in December 2015 following the release of a lengthy report. The report included 94 “calls to action” for Canadians, to help us move forward together.

While many of the TRC’s calls to action relate to matters under the jurisdiction of the federal government, or otherwise outside the mandate of the Alberta School Councils’ Association (since our focus is on provincial education), three calls appeared under the heading “Education for Reconciliation” that the Alberta Ministry of Education would have a direct role in implementing. (A fourth call under this heading relates to federally funding research into reconciliation.) These three calls are:

“62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

“63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

“64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.”

In addition, some of the calls to action under the heading Education relate very closely to the work and mandate of the Alberta School Councils’ Association regarding education in schools on reserves in Alberta, and relating to parents’ involvement in those schools. Specifically, Call to Action 10 is:

“10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

- i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
- ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
- iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
- iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
- v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
- vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
- vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.”

[source: [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)]

There are many ways in which ASCA can support this work, and has been supporting it. It is important both symbolically and procedurally for this work to have the explicit support and approval of the membership.

#### *Motivation*

Whereas 6.3% of the population of Alberta is of “Aboriginal identity,” representing 15.8% of the Aboriginal population of Canada [Statistics Canada National Household Survey, 2011];

Whereas we value the history, traditions, and cultures of the indigenous people of Alberta, which are part of our history and heritage as residents of Alberta whatever our racial or ethnic origins;

Whereas we acknowledge that great harm was done to the indigenous people of Alberta through the residential school system; and

Whereas we wish to support the efforts begun through Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission to find ways to work towards a stronger and healthier future, therefore

#### *Motion*

**Be it resolved that the Alberta School Councils’ Association (ASCA) recognises our shared responsibility to raise the next generation of Albertans in the spirit of reconciliation. To that end, ASCA supports the work that has been done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as an important step toward reconciliation, and will endeavour to support the work of implementing the Calls to Action from the TRC report as opportunities arise.**

**Be it further resolved that ASCA work together with Alberta Education to provide resources and information for parents and school councils who want to inform themselves about the history of residential schools, and the ongoing process of reconciliation.**

**Be it further resolved that ASCA call on the Alberta Ministry of Education to implement those Calls to Action from the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in which the Ministry has a direct role: Calls 62 through 64, under the heading “Education for Reconciliation.”**

## **Addressing all learning needs**

### *Background*

In May 2013, the Alberta Teachers' Association struck a Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools to study and report back on the state of inclusion in Alberta. The Panel released its report in September 2014. It concluded that inclusion has not been adequately addressed in the Alberta Education system, and its report included a variety of recommendations to address this.

In the context of the new curriculum development currently underway, it is particularly important to add the voice of parents in support of Recommendation 14 of that report, asking the government to address the needs of all learners when developing new curricula and related resources. The exact wording of the recommendation is included in the motion below.

The background provided for that recommendation in the report states: "In Setting the Direction Framework: Government of Alberta Response (Alberta Education 2010b, 3), the government committed to 'provide tools to help school authorities adapt and utilize the current Programs of Study and learning and teaching resources for students with specialized learning needs within the context of the student's school and community.' This was never completed, and within the current curriculum redesign process, having curricula to more easily plan for the range of student learning in classrooms is not a readily apparent goal. As this work progresses, it is critically important to keep this at the forefront of the design of both new curricula and the resources that will be based on these programs. In the survey conducted for the blue ribbon panel, only 8 per cent of teachers indicated that they had satisfactory access to specialized learning resources, compared with 49 per cent in 2007. If new curriculum is too general, it will still fall on the shoulders of teachers to recreate programs without assistance from core documents. In addition, the government must require that resources developed are multileveled and multifaceted to meet the wide range of learners in the classroom. There are models available, including Universal Design for Learning, that could be used as a lens for resource development (Rose and Meyer 2002)."

### *Motivation*

Whereas our Alberta curriculum is currently undergoing significant redevelopment; and

Whereas we as parents see the need to include and support all of our children through this new curriculum, therefore

### *Motion*

**Be it resolved that the Alberta School Councils' Association call on the Alberta Ministry of Education to "require that all curriculum documents that are developed from this point forward clearly address the full range of learners in the school system, and require that related resources developed address the wide range of student learning needs in classrooms," as proposed in Recommendation 14 of the report of the Alberta Teachers' Association Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education.**

## Funding for Inclusive Education

### Background

In May 2013, the Alberta Teachers' Association struck a Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools to study and report back on the state of inclusion in Alberta. The Panel released its report in September 2014. It concluded that inclusion has not been adequately addressed in the Alberta Education system, and its report included a variety of recommendations to address this.

Recommendation 15 of the report recommends tracking and assessing the funding provided by the province for inclusive education and the amounts spent on inclusive education, to ensure that school districts are funded adequately to support all students.

As background for this recommendation, the report states: "Inclusive education funding is now allocated in a block to school jurisdictions. Having some kind of monitoring or reporting mechanism for these funds would assist in determining the kind of support provided and the true costs of support.

"Many schools and school jurisdictions report that the funds provided for inclusion do not come close to the true costs of inclusion and that money must then be taken from programming for other students. One superintendent remarked, *It's taking the funding that we receive and trying to make that funding stretch in so many different ways. . . . With the increase of the type of students and the complexity of our students, certainly our greatest challenge would be to see more funding to provide those services and supports to our children.*

"Another superintendent said, *When we talk about diverse students, they're the highest cost to our system, and we spend way more supporting our diverse students than we ever receive from the government. So that resource allocation is very skewed. We don't feel that the money that we get to support our diverse learners is accurately reflected in the funding distribution model that we have from the government. We've voiced that to them, and we've gone through and listened closely to the research behind it and the criteria and how it was worked. We have a very, very clear understanding, but it still doesn't equate to front-line resourcing and how that looks. . . . In a time where we're implementing inclusion...we need additional resources, and it's crucial to...get buy-in and support from teachers and students, but we were getting fewer resources. So that allocation of internal resources has had to offset that need, because the need doesn't go away and we can't not resource it appropriately.*

"A second issue is the tension between local decision making and ensuring that policies are being followed. This trend is also seen in other provinces: *Decentralization is a double-edged sword. On one hand, districts have been given more flexibility to make decisions about how best to offer required Special Education services to students within their individual contexts. On the other hand, the Ministry has distanced itself from monitoring the educational value of decisions being made—some with the best of intentions but limited financial means. (Fewster et al 2007, 9).*

"That tension was listed as a challenge in the Setting the Direction Framework, and it remains a challenge: "Local decision making . . . results in inconsistencies across the province in implementation of policies and procedures, and in the provision of services and supports" (Alberta Education 2009b, 7). This inconsistency will continue until policies, regulations and regular assessment of inclusion happens in the system. The Government of Alberta must pay whatever it takes to provide the education all students deserve."

### Motivation

Whereas the funding formulas and mechanisms used by the government to provide funding for inclusive education in Alberta schools have not been tracked or assessed to determine their adequacy to meet the needs they are designed to address;

Whereas it is impossible to assess whether or not existing funding for inclusive education is adequate without first monitoring what that funding is currently being used for, what student needs are and are not being met by that funding, and the costs of meeting any needs that are not being met; and

Whereas all parents want our children to receive the funding required to support their education effectively, and do not want school districts forced to make choices between the needs of various children if the available funding is not enough to support them all adequately, therefore

*Motion*

**Be it resolved that the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) call on the Alberta Ministry of Education to "monitor inclusive education funding provided to school jurisdictions and determine the actual costs of supporting all students effectively," as proposed in Recommendation 15 of the report of the Alberta Teachers' Association Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education.**

**Be it further resolved that, should such a monitoring process determine that the funding provided does not meet the actual costs of supporting all students effectively, ASCA call on the Ministry to eliminate any shortfall by providing the full funding required.**

## **District Budget Consultations**

### *Background*

Parents, School Councils, and Councils of School Councils (or comparable groups) often participate in the annual preliminary budget consultation process undertaken by school boards. The information provided by the districts to aid in the consultation is complex, and at times incomplete and lacking in options. The consultation process sometimes offers little or no choices enabling parents to provide clear feedback as to what measures they prefer, or as to programs they may no longer want. The information provided is not always in a standard format, so as to enable direct comparisons between districts or in some cases even to compare against prior years in the same district. The proposed budget is often made available mere days before the final budget decisions must be made. All of these issues can make it difficult for parents to provide meaningful feedback.

This resolution is designed to provide parents with accurate information, choice, and the time for careful consideration of the alternatives. This will lead to boards making better decisions about what parents want in their children's schools and to a better education system. Ideally, the provided information would:

- be complete;
  - be easy to understand;
  - be in a standard and comparable format for all districts;
  - include a list of all budgetary items and amounts that are not mandated by the Ministry of Education;
  - provide significant choice in measures that will increase or decrease the size of the district budget;
- and
- be provided to parents in time for a meaningful consultation to take place, including revisions when appropriate.

### *Motivation*

Whereas giving parents adequate information, time, and options to provide meaningful feedback on proposed district budgets is a vital part of the active, informed dialogue needed for boards to make wise decisions about the needs in their district; and

Whereas existing processes and formats can have the effect of frustrating and silencing parents who have well-considered ideas relating to their district budget, therefore

### *Motion*

**Be it resolved that the Alberta School Councils' Association work with the Alberta School Boards' Association, the Alberta Association of School Business Officials, and the Ministry of Education to develop and implement standards and processes to improve the transparency and clarity of district budget consultations. These should include standardizing the format and content of information provided during budget consultations, and recommended timelines for the consultations.**

## **Cost Neutral Carbon Levy**

### *Background*

At the time of writing this motion, the Alberta government has announced a carbon levy to be included in the price of all fuels that emit greenhouse gases when combusted. The levy is planned to take effect on January 1, 2017, before this motion comes to the floor of the Alberta School Councils' Association.

Significant concerns have been raised by school boards on the effect this levy will have on their budgets, and the cutbacks that could need to be implemented in order to cover this new cost.

### *Motivation*

Whereas the funding for public education in Alberta is provided by the government of Alberta in order to cover the full costs of educating our children (a public benefit and responsibility); and

Whereas the costs of educating our children are rising very directly as a consequence of the new carbon levy, therefore

### *Motion*

**Be it resolved that the Alberta School Councils' Association call on the government of Alberta to either:**

- **exempt school districts from the newly-created carbon levy indefinitely, or**
- **provide new funding to cover the full costs that school districts will incur due to the carbon levy.**

## **Publicising Behaviour Guidelines for Persons working on School Property during School Hours**

### *Background*

Activities (e.g. construction, contract work, etc.) taking place on school property during school hours can sometimes involve the presence of individuals working on school property who are not employees of the school district. On occasion, this can lead to uncomfortable situations where children are forced to deal with workers who may not be adapting their behaviour to the presence of children. Examples of inappropriate behaviours may include offensive language, suggestive comments and gestures, or smoking. A child may be unable to avoid encountering the workers at school, and school teachers or administrators may not always be present, and in any case have no direct control over the behaviours of the workers. Clear expectations of behaviour for these workers are included in the agreements that are signed as part of the bidding procedure for the work. Processes for dealing with complaints are also in place. However, to a parent or other member of the general public it is not always clear how to report or deal with concerns about their behaviour, since these workers are not directly answerable to the principal of the school at which they are working.

### *Motivation*

Whereas our children have a right to expect certain standards of behaviour from the adults they see at their schools, and

Whereas the processes for bringing forward any concerns about the behaviour of adults working at a school, even if those adults are not employees of the school, should be easy for members of the public to find and follow, therefore

### *Motion*

**Be it resolved that the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) call on the Alberta School Boards' Association to ensure that the behaviour guidelines for persons working on school property during school hours, and the procedures for dealing with complaints about such behaviour, are easy for members of the public (including parents) to find.**



## **Incorporating Knowledge & Employability and Life Skills into the regular curriculum**

### *Background*

Some students who have special needs are put into separate “Life Skills” or “Knowledge & Employability” (K&E) classes in which they are supposed to develop their abilities in literacy, numeracy, and other basic skills. The names of these courses sound wonderful and are reassuring to parents, but these classes fail to be inclusive, as they are not open to other students in the school. They also have the effect of segregating and labelling the children who are enrolled in these classes.

Many of the goals and outcomes that parents and teachers want children to gain from the Life Skills and K&E classes fall within one of the regular curricular areas, and in fact, in the curriculum for grades 8 and above, the academic courses have titles like “K&E English Language Arts 10-4”, “K&E Science 20-4”, etc. In keeping with the goal of inclusivity and transparency in education, it would make sense in the development of the new curriculum to remove the labels from these core courses, and to extend the current range of core courses available if necessary so that they can include all of our students. This could be accomplished by renaming the courses as simply “Mathematics 10-4,” “English Language Arts 20-5,” etc., and making them open to all students, with varying curricula and expectations depending on the suffix number. Enrolment numbers might dictate that some of these classes (e.g. Math 10-4 through 10-8) be taught in the same time and place. In keeping with the goals of current programming, these courses should be designated as either non-credit, or as only providing credit toward a certificate of completion (not a diploma) so that students who are more advanced in those areas wouldn't be taking these levels for easy credit.

### *Motivation*

Whereas Alberta's goal of inclusive education should not shunt children with special needs into classes that are not inclusive, therefore

### *Motion*

**Be it resolved that the Alberta School Councils' Association advocate for all children to be included within any new curricula, through the inclusion of multiple levels of core courses, each with its own set of curricular goals and outcomes. These courses should be open to all students, although some might provide credit towards a Certificate of Completion rather than towards a Diploma.**

## **Mental Health component in curriculum**

### *Background*

About 15-20% of children and youth in Canada suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder. The average age for the onset of depression is 23; for anxiety disorder is 12; for substance abuse is 18. Of course, since this is an average, for many individuals the onset is earlier; about 70% of young adults who have been diagnosed with mental health issues report that their symptoms began in childhood. About 75% of children or youth who experience mental health problems do not seek out services and treatment.

Suicide is the leading cause of death in Alberta among males aged 10 to 49. Alberta's suicide rate is the second highest in Canada (after Quebec). Although 4 times as many men actually commit suicide as women, women attempt suicide 2-3 times as often as men. In 2012, 44 youth between the ages of 15 and 19 committed suicide in Alberta; this number was in keeping with annual rates from the past few decades.

[Sources: "Positive Futures: Optimizing Mental Health for Alberta's Children and Youth, a framework for action," Alberta Health 2006; Alberta Health "Health Trends Alberta: Teen Suicide" info sheet; Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta web site; Mental Health Commission of Canada web site; Centre for Addiction and Mental Health web site.]

Mental wellness and well-being is often addressed in health classes, but our children also need to be taught about mental health (and its flip side of mental illness). This can give them coping tools if they recognise some of the symptoms in themselves (naming their condition and learning about it can give them power over it). It can also help them recognise danger signs for eating disorders, depression, suicidal tendencies, self-harm, etc. in their friends, and to seek help for them. As diagnoses of mental illnesses have been increasing, it becomes increasingly important for all of us to know how to recognise and deal with mental illness when we encounter it. Tips, techniques, and tools for dealing with common conditions could be introduced gradually in health classes at age-appropriate levels. As new Alberta curriculum is currently in the early stages of development, it would be relatively easy to introduce this topic into the new curriculum.

### *Motivation*

Whereas recognising the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders can be extremely valuable to our children, both in understanding any issues they themselves may be facing, and in providing assistance and support to friends who may be developing disorders; and

Whereas it would be both easy and appropriate to incorporate these topics into the new curriculum for health classes; therefore

### *Motion*

**Be it resolved that the Alberta School Councils' Association call on the provincial government to incorporate information about mental health disorders, including their symptoms, into the new health curriculum.**