

Feedback for Alberta School Board Association (ASBA) Conversations: Draft K-6 Curriculum

Lethbridge School Division – *DRAFT TO BE FURTHER DEVELOPED WITH PARENT/ COMMUNITY FEEDBACK*

Theme: Curriculum Load

- Subject areas are structured in a manner that can be described as silos. This makes it difficult to integrate outcomes across subjects, subsequently adding to content load. Siloed development of subjects also interferes with the development of larger global concepts (big ideas) in classrooms where critical thinking and integration of ideas is paramount.
- The draft curriculum fails to focus on big concepts for content; the number of outcomes are unreasonable and disconnected. The lengthy list of low-level, knowledge-based outcomes detract from the development of the competencies outlined in the “Guiding Framework” and described as necessary for “successful learning, living and working”: critical thinking, problem solving, managing information, creativity and innovation, communication, collaboration, cultural and global citizenship, and personal growth and well-being (Alberta Ministry of Education, 2020).

Theme: Developmental Appropriateness

- 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.
- The Alberta Teachers Association administered a survey to teachers across the province asking whether the draft curriculum provides age-appropriate content that is logically sequenced. 95% of the respondents indicated the draft curriculum was not age appropriate (ATA, 2021, p. 26).
- Specific to ELA and Literature:
 - It has been communicated by Alberta Education that there will be a literature list comprised of “high quality literature.” This is problematic because we have not seen a literature list to ensure developmental appropriateness. If all students are required to read the same texts, teachers will not be able to reach students at their literacy levels.
 - There is not a scope and sequence provided for the literacy theme and no alignment with Albert Education’s literacy progressions; consequently, many outcomes are not developmentally appropriate (ATA, 2021, p.20).
 - 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, and line/rotation symmetry currently in grade 9 to grade 5. Please see attached Mathematics Scope and Sequence Chart for further examples: [MATH](#)

- Specific to Wellness
 - The physical education and wellness specialists also strongly believed that some of the wellness health outcomes can be dangerous and harmful to elementary students, including body image, abstinence, and the lack of age-appropriate human sexuality information. The draft curriculum outcomes relating to consent and sexuality education must be revised to reflect current research on teaching consent in elementary education and on reducing sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination (ATA, 2021, p.26).

Theme: Diverse Perspectives and Cultures

- The curriculum lacks Indigenous history and perspectives in Grades K-2.

- There is minimal inclusion of minority and BIPOC (black, Indigenous and people of color) voices.
- The curriculum 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.
- There appears to be intentional erasure of some diverse groups such as 2SLGBTQ+, physical and neurodiverse groups.
- There is a Eurocentric presentation of "universal truths" such as beauty, goodness, high arts, and high literature. This fails to recognize diverse world views.
- Generally, diversity is not represented as a positive aspect of Alberta or Canadian society.

Theme: Content Shifts

- The draft ELA curriculum does more clearly delineate phonemic awareness and phonics skills. It is problematic, however, as the skills are not necessarily placed in a developmentally appropriate sequence.
- There is a lack of balance in the emphasis of low-level skills over high level comprehension and expressive use of language. For example, writing is heavily focused on mechanics which will prove to be inadequate for the development of writers who have the skill to generate, organize, and express ideas.
- There is decreased emphasis on comprehension. Students need to be able to understand and apply what they have read to take action in the world.
- 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>
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- The curriculum veers from the what students are supposed to learn into pedagogy—the how to teach and assess. Verbs such as discuss, retell, draw are used in a variety of grade levels and content areas (e.g. Science, Social Studies, ELA and Literature, Mathematics). These are prescriptive in terms of how content will be taught and/or assessed.
- Some oral language outcomes (e.g. from the draft grade 1 ELA and Literature curriculum, “The volume, highness or lowness of the voice [pitch], and the pace [rate of speech] can affect the meaning or clarity of a message”) are not related to the content area and would be better placed in Science or Music.

Other Themes:

- Document structure
 - At times the outcomes are not written as an outcome but as a definition or informational statement [e.g. “Length can be estimated when a measuring tool is not available,” (Mathematics, Grade 2, p. 9), “The main idea of a text is the most important idea” (ELA and Literature, Grade 1, p. 17)].
 - Reading the document is confusing. When looking at the Knowledge, Understanding, Skills and Procedures, it is difficult to discern the weighting of attention between the three.
- Constant changes in posted draft curriculum make it difficult to analyze and provide feedback.
- Implementation of all grade and subjects at once with lack of funding from government for professional learning and resources are concerning.
- Religion should not be explicitly taught in secular public schools. The draft curriculum has Christian references and overtones throughout.

References

- Alberta Ministry of Education. (2020, December). *The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to grade 12 Provincial Curriculum*. [The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Provincial Curriculum \(alberta.ca\)](#)
- Alberta Teachers' Association [ATA]. (2021). *Professional Curriculum Analysis and Critique of Alberta Education's 2021 Draft K-6 Curriculum*. [COOR-184 Curriculum Response Report.indd \(teachers.ab.ca\)](#)