



The Sturgeon Public School Division
Review of the Draft Alberta Curriculum for Kindergarten to
Grade 6 released on March 29, 2021

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Division Context

Sturgeon Public Schools made the decision that our teachers would not pilot the draft curriculum in the fall of 2020, well before its release on March 29, 2021. After completing our review of the draft curriculum in April and May, feedback from the Curriculum Review Committees support this decision. The draft curriculum requires significant editorial work, with many areas requiring knowledge or skills that are not age appropriate. In addition, a substantial amount of content is being added or moved to younger grade levels, which will leave students unprepared to attempt this draft curriculum.

Sturgeon Public Schools wishes to thank 40 teachers who reviewed the draft documents for their dedication and hard work. Each took time away from classroom instruction to discuss the draft curriculum and provide insights and feedback for Alberta Education.

Project Intent and Approach

On Monday, March 29, the Education Minister unveiled a K-6 draft curriculum to be implemented in September 2022 by all school divisions in Alberta. To better understand the proposed curriculum, its implications for teaching and learning in the classroom, and to provide actionable feedback to Alberta Education, Sturgeon Public Schools invited 40 teachers to join Curriculum Review Committees in the spring of 2021.

Curriculum Review Committees were composed of classroom teachers with significant experience and demonstrated skill in the grade level or subject area reviewed. Teachers met in small groups for three half-day meetings per subject and grade level. A total of 18 meetings were hosted by the Associate Superintendent of Education Services and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction with over 80 breakout sessions to cover the core subjects of English Language Arts, French Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. The following broad questions were discussed as a grade level team, and then time was given for teachers to review each knowledge, understanding, skills and procedures in the curriculum:

- Are the organizing ideas, guiding questions, learning outcomes, knowledge, understandings, skills and procedures developmentally appropriate for the age or grade level? Are they written in language clear for teachers and parents?
- How does the draft curriculum support coherent and progressive building of knowledge, understanding and skills for students within and across grade levels? Where is this progression unclear or how might students miss key concepts?
- How does the draft curriculum lead students to a meaningful respect for and understanding of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives? How can it be improved?





- Are there specific areas that have errors or are inappropriate for the subject, grade level, or learning within an inclusive, respectful Alberta classroom?

Broad Themes from Review Committees

After considering the feedback from across the grade levels and Review Committees the following comments or themes have been identified.

The Volume of Required Knowledge, Skills and Procedures is Extremely High.

- Universally across the subjects and grade levels teachers have identified that the volume of knowledge, skills and procedures that students are expected to understand and demonstrate is significantly higher than the current curriculum. At each grade level the content expectations placed on students in the draft curriculum are far above appropriate expectations for what students should be able to understand and demonstrate.
- Teachers are concerned about the amount of time that will be required to teach the increased volume of information. In earlier grades, there may not be enough minutes assigned to cover the content required in Social Studies or Science, and teachers at all grade levels are concerned there will not be enough time for meaningful discussion or to engage in projects that build connections or develop critical thinking.
- Given the increase in knowledge, skills and procedural expectations, teachers are concerned that classroom assessment practice may move toward testing recall and not allow students to demonstrate deeper understanding of subject matter.

Approaches to Understanding are Not Age Appropriate.

- The approach to teaching early literacy does not allow for the development of pre-reading skills, nor does the approach to teaching early numeracy allow for pictorial or concrete representation of quantity and operations. Focusing on systematic phonological development and numeracy skills is important, however, the pace in this draft curriculum is ahead of physical and neurological development within children. This may result in parents believing their children are behind, when they are actually developing at a normal rate.
- The Social Studies curriculum contains significant content across grade levels that is not developmentally appropriate, nor useful for building stronger awareness of self, others, and community. The whole Social Studies curriculum should be re-written before piloting or release.

Knowledge or Skill Acquisition is Promoted at the Cost of Critical Thinking.

- Teaching about the scientific method is different from using the method to investigate our world. The current draft curriculum values understanding of facts or procedures above the ability to create new questions and work to discover the answers. More time and focus should be devoted to discussion, investigation, and student collaboration to build essential skills and competencies in our students and prepare them to be successful for future career and educational goals.





- In the humanities, students are asked to spend time appreciating examples of writing or speaking styles without creating and discussing their own pieces. This may lead to disengagement and students with lack of initiative or confidence in their own learning and ability to demonstrate that learning.

Inclusion of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Knowledge and Understanding is Poorly done.

- Most additions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit knowledge and understanding are only moderately connected to the learning outcomes. The curriculum often encourages students to consider, but not interact with the meaning and experience of Indigenous learning.
- The progression of cultural understanding presented in the social studies curriculum is an example of a colonial world view. It reinforces the belief that critical thinking and religious enlightenment started in the Mediterranean and then covered the world.
- Most Review Committees indicated the inclusion of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit knowledge and understanding did not appear authentic, nor meaningful. Instead, examples felt forced or that the content was included to meet a specific mandate.

Statement about French Language Arts

- In a French Immersion program, French Language Arts is not just a subject, it is the language used to learn all subjects.
- The draft curriculum does not take into account what is developmentally appropriate in the language acquisition process. French Language Arts outcomes presented would be more appropriate if the learners were learning in their first language.
- Second language learning is not honoured in this draft curriculum. French Language Arts outcomes are mechanics based instead of language acquisition based.

Supports Required for Implementation

Curriculum Review Committees were also asked what professional development or resources they would require to successfully implement a new curriculum in 2022. Considering their feedback, the following themes were identified.

Subject Specific Professional Development

- With some concepts being entirely new, or coming down from a much higher grade level, teachers require time with experienced educators or teacher trainers to improve their own skills and abilities.
- A consistent jurisdiction approach for teaching how to read and develop phonic understanding should be developed for grades 1 to 3.
- With the introduction of specific computer science outcomes, many teachers will need training in teaching these outcomes.

Collaboration Time with Grade or Subject Level Colleges





- Teachers require time to discuss the new curriculum, design units or common lessons, and begin to identify and build resources.
- Teachers require time to discuss how to scaffold and support students who will transition to the new curriculum. These students will be engaged in learning new outcomes without having acquired the needed prerequisite knowledge or understanding as they are out of sequence with the new curriculum.
- Working with regional learning consortia, teachers across school divisions should meet to share insights and approaches to teaching the new curriculum. Resources could also be developed and shared.
- Collaboration time should continue into the first year of teaching to discuss and confirm what is working and what needs to be revised to meet the needs of students.

Development of Subject Leaders in the Division

- Small groups of skilled teachers in a subject area should meet to build resources or exemplar units to help general teachers who are responsible for a broad range of curricula.

Learning Directly from Indigenous Knowledge Keepers or Elders

- Interest was expressed by teachers regarding the need to improve the inclusion of Indigenous understanding or approaches to learning in all areas of teaching and learning.

Summary of Recommendations

The Alberta draft curriculum released on March 29, 2021, contains errors, and a volume of content that would make piloting and teaching it undesirable for students and teachers. It fails to build needed competencies and critical thinking skills in students, reinforces problematic pedagogy that encourages disengaged learners, and is a step backwards for inclusion, diversity, and promotes a society that disrespects Indigenous ways of learning.

The draft curriculum does present a systematic approach for learning how to read and write, and the development of common approaches to numeracy are welcomed by teachers and will help all students succeed in gaining foundational literacy and numeracy skills. It is important for any new curriculum to promote computer literacy and financial literacy skills, which this draft release does. The Social Studies curriculum is not age appropriate, contains an incredible volume of facts and information, and promotes a white, Eurocentric worldview that will not build a strong, inclusive society.

Sturgeon Public Schools Curriculum Review Committees recommend Alberta Education rewrite the draft curriculum to:

- Reduce the volume of simple facts or isolated topics and include outcomes which connect students with knowledge across subjects or grade levels.





- Reduce the focus on building a static body of subject knowledge and instead provide outcomes that allow students to evaluate information and synthesize or create new solutions to problems or challenges.
- Include outcomes that promote collaboration, meaningful communication and critical thinking in students.
- Align outcomes and expectations with current research on physical and neurological development in children. This would allow for teaching pre-reading skills in literacy and concrete or pictorial representation in early numeracy.
- Reduce the pace of introducing concepts across grade levels for numeracy. Some concepts can be introduced earlier than the progression in the current curriculum, however the number of concepts that have been moved into earlier grades is too high.
- Promote the engagement of scientific inquiry instead of rote memorization of scientific approaches. Ensure key science topics are revisited at higher grade levels to build deeper understanding.
- Integrate computer science skills across subject areas and build financial literacy skills through approaches that respect the different social and economic realities across the province.
- Reduce the French Language Arts outcomes that are mechanics based and include outcomes that are focused on language acquisition.
- Respectfully include Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding at all grade levels. Encourage students to engage in Indigenous approaches and experience learning in traditional ways.
- Rewrite the Social Studies curriculum to positively recognize the diversity in our classrooms, and to respectfully build greater awareness of self, others, and our communities in a strong, pluralistic Alberta.

Sturgeon Public Schools will continue to build learning environments that promote student achievement, in a context that allows students to develop critical thinking skills, and 21st century competencies needed in current and future career and educational markets. We remain committed to strong public, rural education and are concerned that the current draft curriculum does not support this goal for our students.

Respectfully submitted,

Sturgeon Public School Division

