

# ASCA Member Conversation Exchange Summary

## 2021 Annual Conference

### Curriculum

#### ASCA Member Perspectives

The 2021 event considers “School Council: Leading with Purpose”, promoting the work of school council in the school community to benefit student success. Sessions will offer elements of inclusion, diversity, student wellbeing, digital technology, healthy schools and advancing reconciliation.

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The three (3) questions for the conversation exchange are:

1. How has your school council made the school community aware of the Draft K-6 Curriculum and opportunities for parent feedback?
  2. What are your top two (2) concerns with the Draft K-6 Curriculum?
  3. What would you change within, or about, the curriculum?
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Question #1: How has your school council made the school community aware of the Draft K-6 Curriculum and opportunities for parent feedback?

Communication:

- Communicating with people via phone to bring awareness.
- The school has a school council page and the chair asked to place information on there as well as the survey and there will be discussion at a future meeting.
- Sent out little blurb through school e-mail a couple days after the meeting featuring that discussion and a link to a survey.

Division:

- Decided to write a letter on behalf of parents and sent it in to the school board regarding their views on the curriculum.
- Personally wrote a letter and forwarded to her board.
- Board did have an info session (about 300 parents attended) about the good and bad points, went through subject by subject

Media:

- Shared the social media posts from their local educators to bring awareness within the division.
- Facebook page - private messaged people, one to one contact. +2
- News media and social media have done a pretty good job of doing this themselves. Parents in our school community have been vocal about their opposition to a variety of aspects of it, particularly pertaining to the age-appropriateness of much of the social studies curriculum.

Meeting:

- Needed to have a special meeting, information was coming in from all over the place so fast that what I decided to do was put together, kind of what I could find- website, links, comparison tool etc.

Principal/Trustee/MLA:

- Had a trustee attend our council meeting to go over curriculum and go over each point, and what their thoughts were on it.
- General letter to trustee circulated for parents to add their name to.
- Trustees talking about it at council. +1

- Helped with comparing current to draft. A lot of parents are not aware so it was good information.
- Trying to kick off advocacy work – and pivoted to curriculum. Met with MLA and Trustee (all SC exec) talked for 1.5 hours. Felt heard and some commitments were made. Didn't get a great response after the fact. Waiting for ASCA resolution to pass. Want to follow up with MLA and talk with community at large.
- We held a meeting with our Admin team and discussed the school's perspective on the curriculum. Parents were able to ask questions, there was no time limit, it was very open.
- Held a very well attended emergent parent-trustee forum. The slides and videos from that presentation were discussed and shown. Parents also acted individually and signed a petition regarding ditching the draft.
- Our SC has written a letter of advocacy to our School Board Trustee, School Principal, MLA, and the Minister of Education. We have not yet done more to engage the larger parent community for our school.

#### Rural:

- Our school council has a really great relationship with our administration and teachers. We are a small rural community and a lot of sharing of information comes from meeting at the grocery store, on the street and at kid pickup. Many of our concerns are brought to our trustee and school district through student council and our administration. Our school community has been chatting about what does this look like for our school and our school division has replied with great strategies moving forward.

#### Survey:

- Release information about the government survey on curriculum and ways to communicate.
- Suggestion to create a survey to get feedback and provide results to division level.
- Could SCs share their surveys. Rather than reinventing the wheel, that could be helpful. It would be good to have standard questions so the data is easy to use.

#### Miscellaneous:

- We had the draft curriculum on our agenda at our recent meeting and we had an open discussion. We then put the subject into our monthly newsletter encouraging parents to read the curriculum and provide feedback to government. We also provided links to other resources for information both for and against.
- In the SC meeting, a member wanted to propose a deeper discussion about it and doing a draft motion but principal pushed back. Suggestion of sub-committee was put forward, but school is too small. A member created an information meeting and invited 3 experts – SS curriculum expert, preliminary results of teacher survey, community member with nutritional expertise. Finding resistance coming from staff informing the community about the information session. Did get to send the email out to school families in the end. One of the questions that creates tension is what is neutral, what is partisan, what is political. Finding that politics are confusing discussions around the curriculum. School doesn't have a Facebook page and the school is not being helpful about getting information out there. Planning to move outside of the school and operate independently after the information session.
- Fortunate that they have an excellent relationship with school admin and trustee. Advocating to and through the minister for over a year now. 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> letter in the past year is being sent out. Ensuring that administration knows, making sure the principal has a copy, of the letter (as well as the trustee).
- Where do we go from here? Limbo feeling of not really knowing what they can do next besides take the survey and write some letters.
- Council has a great relationship with the school and the trustee but struggles with parental engagement and attendance at SC meetings. Parents approach her on the school grounds but they won't come to the meetings "don't want to get involved in politics, cause problems, etc". Some people who approach her and like the curriculum are just "putting their heads down".
- Sent the links to class reps and also discussed at April School Council meeting.
- Admin exchange updates from super to all parents in div – parents had 5 days to input – one big thought exchange – broad representation. In addition to the thought exchange the district held an emergent parent trustee forum where there was a speaker to each portion of the curriculum. They went over the good and the

bad and encouraged us to share the link to the curriculum as well as the thought exchange. We are promoting this on social media.

- Provincial announcements.
  - Comments regarding HOW TO have discussion; most people do not understand how to pick apart curriculum, so a discussion guide would be most useful.
  - Summary - small school, overloaded staff, experts previously engaged in curriculum had been excluded. Our admin team and superintendent continue to press the ministry on the speed of the roll out, and we are waiting for our subject experts to review what's there and make recommendations.
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Question #2: What are your top two (2) concerns with the Draft K-6 Curriculum?

Content:

- Parent and have a PhD in Canadian history, it is patently racist, there is a stink of racism across all curriculum areas, history is taught as a glorious progression, it is seen as a positive progression, it is frightening from a professional historian perspective.
- Positive- feedback with respect to literacy, dyslexia research-based approach to teaching literacy, had some positive feedback on mathematics and finances.
- Age appropriateness of some of these things is insane, almost concerned about my child failing, and not in the sense that they don't feel like they can accomplish things, I don't have a background to help her when it comes to Ancient Greece, the social studies curriculum is not age appropriate. +1
- I like the financial literacy and that it is starting young, the other part is that is good is some of the coding.
- Looking at the material that our children will be learning is not content appropriate and the words utilized to present the content are not age appropriate.
- Particularly concerned with the content and the concepts, don't know if they've ever met a child, when looking at the understanding of western culture and different religious etc.- for that age group children still believe in Santa Claus, math change is good- discovery math did not work well for our family.
- Some issues also with the science curriculum, some concepts, talked about discussing diverse perspectives in science and that wording is worrisome, not for fact...
- Topic of consent, asking grade 1 to set fitness goals, framing consent in the terms of refusal, I'll be damned if my child is going to weigh themselves at school, framing consent as a woman's ability to refuse, we have come so far in terms of agency over our own bodies and that is throwing it out the window, this curriculum isn't just social studies it's dumpster fire, potentially setting our children up for eating disorders.
- Expectation to understand these religions at that age is a concern.
- SS is number one or number 2 concern. Grade 2 specifically is really concerning, concerned about a 7 year old learning about Genghis Khan or learning about slavery in grade 3. Can't think about a Playground where you would learn that and then go play with your black friend. Not developmentally appropriate. Who made this draft? How did this come about? Would like to know more about who they consulted with. Finds that the previous draft was more "open" with that. Would like some justification about why this is becoming a reality.
- We need to look more at our history. BIG CONCERN – talking about BMI. It's great to teach kids to eat healthy and such but we cannot start weighing kids, talking about nutritional "issues" to babies. Skewed curriculum, body positivity and healthy eating would be better. If parents wanted their children to really learn religion, they would send their child to a religious school. Why force learning religion on others.
- Concerns that involve science. There is zero information that talks about oils negative impacts on the environment. Also, there's very little talk about climate change. We need to equip these kids with information to ensure we can live on the planet for the next 200 years, composting, gardening, recycling, wish cycling.
- Concern – do not understand the focus on knowledge prior to skills. Would rather children learn skills (critical thinking) before facts to memorize. Changing the way kids should be learning. Obsession with new math (scary & bad thing) but educators would recommend that it is a good way for kids to learn math. Odd backlash on new math, seems regressive to get rid of it in this curriculum.

- Many challenges with the existing curriculum – background in computer science – worried about not preparing our kids for the future. I.e: kids in kindergarten are already learning AI. Significant amount of change is needed – a lot of focus on knowledge. What you can create vs what you know.
- The students need a foundation (basic math, able to read and write) before they can comfortably develop critical thinking skills, etc. Memorization works the brain, developing it.
- Allegations of plagiarism.
- Phonics – doesn't work for his child.
- Improved on the Science.
- Memorization of facts vs more hands on learning approach.
- Language Arts is not entirely awful – content is sketchy but we can fix with feedback.
- Math is salvageable.
- Math/Social Studies hard to understand as parents. So if parents don't understand how can they help their children.
- French language arts curriculum is only available in French – with 85% of French immersion students' parents being unable to speak French, they will be unable to help with homework, or not at all if student sent home in COVID environment.
- Some reported feeling insulted – hard to take seriously when poorly written with many spelling and grammatical errors.
- Great that Gr 6 explores world religions, but many religions are poorly described, and tenets maybe even not accurately captured.
- Content consistency is a concern. Diverse learners (ie math) early grades allow for different strategies, after Gr 2, there seems to be one standard algorithm accepted, and that doesn't allow for diverse learners to achieve outcomes.
- Huge amount of religion in the curriculum - not respectful.

#### Division:

- Some school boards are deciding not to pilot.
- Not piloting - decided it wasn't a good time based on other challenges.

#### Document Review:

- Would like material from Minister to share that breaks it down for parents.
- The biggest thing is for people to review it!! As outlined on [alberta.ca/curriculum](http://alberta.ca/curriculum).
- Need support. Have been waiting for more support. Too daunting of a document for parents to read/understand/hard to dissect.
- Not user friendly.
- Too massive to review. I only reviewed summary sheets.
- How can we give a proper review, when the 7 - 12 draft isn't ready yet. they are linked!

#### Funding:

- Very expensive to change curriculum, especially in a time when the economy is not fantastic, the schools are losing funding, having issues with enrolment and schools are having trouble in that regard, they are going to be expected to make these changes with either the same resources they're getting now or less.
- What is the cost? If funding isn't increased where will PD funding, and resources funding, come from?
- Speaking of resources - would text books come out of a school budget, a district budget? In the French Immersion environment, there is already a shortage of resources that have to be 'created'. this will create extra work.

#### Move Forward:

- I agree we need to take advantage of what we do like and find a way to move it forward and concentrate our objections on the very specific points we object vehemently to.

- How do we not throw out the baby with the bathwater. We need to change the curriculum - particularly regarding literacy and numeracy. I agree that implementation all at once is likely to fail. But, we need to move forward.
- I think ASCA can be most helpful by building consensus on what, if any, of the curriculum changes they can support being implemented and put forward a plan for how they want to see them implemented.

#### Students:

- How will students in each grade get "caught up" with respect to the requirements with the new curriculum - eg. my fifth grader not knowing the facts of grades 1 to 4 AFTER changes to the curriculum are made.
- Children are online learning and they return in September, if they bring it in right away, then my children would be behind, already because of covid and then additionally because of the curriculum gaps, also concerned about the subsequent curriculum pilots and timelines.
- Should be what's best for students.

#### Survey:

- Government survey very hard to answer – no chance for questions of clarification; most parents, not being knowledgeable in the world of curricula, have no opportunity to get a good footing in order to answer the survey questions.

#### Teachers:

- If teachers are having an issue with it then we should trust them and get info out to the community. Support teachers and administration. We should be focusing more on safety right now.
- Teaching stresses – dealing with pandemic and now having to deal with curriculum.
- Duty to support our teachers, if the teachers are not on board we need to support that.
- Hearing from teachers, negative comments.
- Amount of time for teachers to learn new curriculum is a concern as a Trustee – time and energy spent from teachers.

#### Timing:

- Current curriculum does need revision, but the timing is very bad.
- Timing is so wrong, kids are suffering right now on top of two messed up years, they are not solid, they are not a good foundation, and you're piling on top of the teachers and students etc. I am an immigrant and I moved to Canada and I want my children to learn about Canada not Europe, coming from a country that has rote for math, which can make children not want to learn and enjoy learning.
- Why does it all have to roll out together, that is a lot of change and a lot of new stuff to have to present, roll it out as one subject at a time, that might be a reasonable expectation, still work to build in the cross curricular connections...
- Stability? Additional stress at this time?
- Not enough of a feedback timeframe before implementation (1 year pilot and make changes before implementation is inadequate and even un-doable).
- If class was to pilot – would be almost impossible to judge effectiveness/progress in this current Covid environment.
- Piloting for a division in a COVID environment could be hugely problematic if students are switching from an on-line teacher to another classroom teacher.
- After Covid, I do think we will all need a period of healing and an opportunity to get back to normal life and a normal school year. This past year has taken a huge toll on our kids, teachers and parents.

#### What's the rural view? We need everyone's opinion.

- Community of 4000 we are very much concerned. K – 12 school. Agree a survey is a good idea.
- Teachers, school staff say not been positive – math may be positive but overwhelmingly a negative view of curriculum as a whole.

#### Miscellaneous:

- Some would like to move ahead with something, as the current curriculum is very old.
  - Parents will know what is best for their children.
  - Parents do not need to be the expert in curriculum.
  - Financial burden/funding going down, How/what will happen?
  - How does a high school council incorporate this discussion into their agenda?
  - Showboating? Political motivation?
  - More educators should be involved.
  - School Councils have a louder voice than teachers & parents.
  - Delegate was part of the draft and states what came out is only a small portion of what went in – all the effort to put in feedback and not enough was used.
  - Fatigue of not listening.
  - Appreciates that ASCA didn't rush into an opinion.
  - No Transparency - People involved had to sign non-disclosure agreements.
  - Standard practice to sign non-disclosure to protect teachers.
  - Disappointed with inadequate and non-transparent engagement.
  - Emphasis on knowledge acquisition vs environmental/enquiry-based learning huge concern – noted that preschool and K are based on the latter, so transition to grade 1 format could be problematic as they will be unprepared for work.
  - Truth & Reconciliation is sadly lacking.
  - ABED isn't going to take into consideration the full weight of ALL stakeholders: allow enough time for edits, changes, consultations.
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#### Question #3: What would you change within, or about, the curriculum?

##### Content:

- Ask that within SS curriculum, go back to Canadian content, take out a lot of the Eurocentric content. Recognizing more age appropriateness, kids are not at the age in grade 1 and 2 to grasp. Redevelop the health and wellness curriculum. Also the consent aspect and how that has been drafted out.
- Take out the US stuff and put more Canadian content in. We need to learn about our own country first.
- It's not that parents are against everything that's going in to this curriculum; it's more about age appropriateness.
- More Canadian content.
- Revisit the social studies.
- Would like to see people educated in the area to review the draft so age-appropriateness is considered. You can't expect such young children to learn concepts that they can't comprehend.
- Outdoor education – integrating with communities – get outside – no focus on that – need movement and physicality.
- Health curriculum expanded – Covid has taught us the importance of health – give kids tools around self-regulation.
- Consent – the way consent is framed is troubling. Not just the act of refusal. What grade? Grade 3.
- Relationship with food in their bodies. Low grades taught to weigh themselves and count calories. Danger of eating disorders. Especially with females and social media.
- Social Studies being racist? What specifically.....history is taught as a positive progression, Colonization as a good thing, the word sacrificial used with Indigenous people. Very white focused curriculum. Not a lot from minorities. Not equitable. Removing black musicians from the study of Jazz.
- Reduce content amount, especially K-3.

- Change the religious part – a subject that is not black and white is a tough one for teachers to try to teach – interpretation could be very different. Needs to be more “across the board”. Could be very insightful, but not at a K-6 level.
- Teaching about compassion and inclusion is something we should aspire to, however trying to do so through teaching about religion misses the mark completely.
- Way too many outcomes in K and Gr 1.
- Enquiry-based programming over knowledge acquisition.
- Consent. The definition is 'give permission for something to happen' - not sure that this is what is intended (because it implies a "yes") - I would prefer a different word. What exactly are we looking for? I want my kids to learn to say "no" -does the word "consent" reflect "no"?
- Does "consent" set boundaries?
- Inclusiveness and 'boundaries' and tech skills do need to be updated. Where are the good things from 2013, 2017 and what is currently in place?

#### Creators:

- We need to talk about who wrote this thing who are the experts that turned this into a real thing on Easter weekend, that really needs to be addressed, where is the expert panel, because if there was I don't think we would be having this discussion, that needs to be discussed.
- A curriculum expert from another country was endorsing our curriculum, why are we having someone from another country give advice related to our curriculum as opposed.

#### Flexibility:

- For the curriculum it would be helpful if it were reduced in scope. Less descriptive, more room for flexibility for the teachers to teach. Quite a few things that were “not in the right year”. Curriculum is too inflexible. Let our teachers and our school boards come up with what works best for them and their students.
- Leave the flexibility up to the teachers as opposed to “dictating what their day is going to look like”. Less direct content and more flexibility with how to get to the end goal.

#### Government:

- We need to de politicize this and stop accepting political interference in curriculum, I engage online and there are lots of non-partisan people in Alberta who want politics out of their lives, the entire conversation is being dominated by highly politicized figures- example go to speaker it's a doctor for math, as opposed to a curriculum expert.
- Needs to be an independent process for developing curriculum. More independent of the government.
- Politics should be removed from the timeline.

#### Move Forward:

- Can we utilize the areas that have less controversy?
- Can we agree to a stepped roll out so we can move forward with some and change the others?
- Deal with the ones that are not as politically volatile or problematic and give the public, us, people who have a vested interest a chance to give feedback on the problematic areas.
- More authentic consultation needs to happen, and in any conversation where we are talking about moving forward with some of it.
- The most fundamental thing that can happen now, the feedback that has been received, and people can compare the concerns, there is a drop in trust and buy in, it's going to be a lot of work, they need to be able to see that their concerns are addressed in a very real way, unless the government is willing to do that, then there will be no trust because there's been no transparency.
- Do not bring out the whole curriculum at once. Bring changes in “a ladder way” instead of all at once. Too much stress on teachers and on kids. Burdensome financially, burdensome on teachers.
- Roll out subjects one at a time.
- Look at existing for improvement, rather than starting over.

- Ideally – go back and work on what we already had, just tweak. Too much deep learning.
- There are some nuggets in this curriculum that are good - where is that conversation? Financial literacy may be one of those nuggets? ..... It is, but it's placement in the SS curriculum isn't a good place to start with. Unfortunately, not everyone has had the opportunity to really dig into the curriculum to look at it from a positively critical way.
- Have heard some good things about the math curriculum, except too much knowledge on memorization vs understanding..... Agree there are some good things in math fundamentals. One basic way with lots of practice is good.

#### Pilot:

- Am concerned about what is going to happen if there is no feedback, it almost feels like we should be piloting it so we can give her real, evidence-based feedback.
- School boards don't have to take it on at 100 percent capacity, one school, could take on some capacity or subject and that would be a way to pilot and give feedback to the places that don't need a significant overhaul.
- Charter school rep spoke to impact that larger districts can make a big political statement, but smaller areas need to make decisions related to their capacity- especially if they have to implement this later...might be beneficial for some to pilot, what can we do to add value to this.

#### Teachers:

- Teachers' perspectives are very important in curriculum development. They are the experts.
- Everyone's input needs to be given full weight, including teachers'.

#### Timing:

- Put this on pause for at least two years. The kids aren't there mentally, dealing with too much. K students were not at the right level moving into grade 1, it's unfair to throw something else at them. We need to listen to the experts (teachers, educational staff, etc).
- Listen to the education experts, listen to the ATA, listen to ASBA, CASS. Listen to parents that are saying that this is not the right time, our students are tired.
- Most important thing is that we ask the government to put a pause on this. Take some of the feedback to tweak before going out for a pilot.
- Perhaps this is why curriculum is being snuck in now when people are going through stresses and difficulties.
- New curriculum during a pandemic is not good. Too many various types of learning going on.
- Shouldn't start anything at all until we're more normal or settled. When rollout does start, using a timed, staggered rollout would be more sensible than all K-6 at once.

#### Miscellaneous:

- 2019 curriculum was favorable. Maybe go back and look at the 2019 version.
- More input from Métis, FNMI.
- Review panel to look at both curriculums.
- Minister's comments (PISA Standings and feedback from employers about students not being prepared) – I would like to see more Self-directed education – space within education for self-direction in public education – great research showing teaching responsibilities.
- Not sure where failing of performance is coming from as students are leaving universities well educated.
- How would this make cross-curricula work impossible?
- From what I've heard - the level the new curriculum starts at is going to be so much higher than where they are now, in a lot of the topics. All learners (home or in-school) are going to face a "huge jump" when they advance to the next grade. Creates learning gaps.
- Challenges if we're going to implement K-6 all at the same time, students in 4-6 haven't had the same 'build up' or pre-work, and they'll sink or swim. Haven't seen much about inclusion (IPP etc.). Haven't seen much at a level that engages all students. And, around French Immersion - we also need to look at linguistic ability when changing to the new curriculum (Ancient Egypt and hieroglyphics).