Phase 4 Spring Update

Government Response

The work on *Setting the Direction* is continuing and remains a priority for the ministry. The proposed *Setting the Direction Framework* is going through the policy approval processes of government.

Educational Reform

The ambition of *Setting the Direction* is articulated in its vision statement of "**One inclusive education system where each student is successful**." The following underlying concepts have been the foundation of our thinking as we work toward developing an inclusive education system:

- Shifting from a dual system of mainstream education and special education to **a system that takes responsibility for ALL students**. Sharing a commitment to building an inclusive education system that meets the needs of a diverse student population in all school settings becomes a focus of the reform of Alberta's education system.

- Replacing the emphasis on special education "programming" with an **emphasis on achieving outcomes for ALL students**. This emphasis will be built into the inclusive education funding and accountability model.

- Developing the comprehensive supports and services required to take responsibility for all students and to work in an outcome-based way. *Setting the Direction* is exploring **a continuum of support**, where classrooms, schools, school authorities and the specialist community are equipped to make it possible for all students to have their needs met. This collaborative model advocates a collective responsibility for the success of each student.

- Taking **an asset-based approach** to meeting the needs of students with special needs and placing the emphasis on what students *can* do, rather than the limitations of their diagnosed condition. This approach focuses on making changes in the environment in which students are learning so that they can be more successful.

- Respecting and **using data gathered at all levels of the system**, beginning with the teacher and family and including specialist reports from medical and education experts. This honours the expertise that lies at every level.

- Recognizing that a successful school journey for all children **begins with quality early learning and care** and concludes with positive high school completion and a **supported transition out of the school system**. This includes an acknowledgement that smooth transitions throughout the school journey are critical elements of success.

- **Working together to support students in schools** with the supports that they need – which may not be exclusively educational services—delivered collaboratively in the most logical and natural setting, thus "wrapping" around the student.

Short Term Priorities

Recognizing that many of the recommendations outlined in the framework are complex and will take time to fully implement, Alberta Education has identified areas of work that were already underway within the ministry or where work had started in fall 2009 in order for change or progress to begin in September 2010. The following short term priorities are identified under the goal areas described in the *Setting the Direction Framework*.

Curriculum

Inclusive Education Planning Tool

The Inclusive Education Planning Tool is a digital resource for enhancing teachers' capacity for meeting the diverse learning needs of all students in their classroom. Teachers will be able to use the tool to identify starting points for instruction within the Alberta Program of Studies, select effective supports for learning and social inclusion and develop class profiles to inform planning and instruction. The working team is currently developing plans for a limited "early adopters'" pilot that will begin in September 2010. Its focus will be on Grades 1 to 9 in English language arts, French language arts and Français, as well as social inclusion.

Meaningful Data – Information Analysis

Initial work in this area is focusing on the identification and assessment of the current information that is being collected and/or used to inform special education decisions within the Ministry of Education.

Capacity Building

Learning coaches

Throughout the *Setting the Direction* consultation we heard the need for a province-wide expectation that school-based expertise will be in place to support teachers in meeting the needs of students with diverse needs within learning environments. Recognizing that promising practices are currently underway, our initial work will be to incorporate what is already working and what needs have been identified by school authorities across the province. A resource is being developed to support teachers and school leaders with identifying where they are in terms of inclusive education practices and will assist them with identifying strategies that work toward greater inclusion.

Learning teams

The concept of the learning team has been around for a number of years; however, consultation with Albertans indicated a desire to use learning teams more effectively to ensure that parents are important team members. A series of concise, accessible resources for parents, teachers, students, school leaders and specialists is being developed that supports this collaborative relationship.

Guidelines for Accessible Learning Resources

The goal of the *Guidelines for Accessible Learning Resources for All Students* is to inspire the development and selection of resources that will improve learning opportunities for all students. These guidelines go beyond the international standards for baseline accessibility and incorporate the extensively researched components of user-centred design, universal design for learning and related research. The *Guidelines for Accessible Learning Resources for All Students* are currently under development.

Policies for inclusive education
Alberta Education's current legislation, policies, standards and guidelines are being reviewed and revised to reflect an inclusive education approach.

Competencies for teachers and school leaders
The *Teaching Quality Standard* is currently under review, which provides an opportunity to review competencies for teachers to ensure that they reflect inclusive education practices. Work is also underway that looks at the competencies for school leaders that would support inclusive education.

Collaboration

Collaboration is an essential foundational piece that is referenced throughout the *Setting the Direction Framework*. As we explore possibilities for regional collaborative models we recognize there are lessons to be learned from existing collaborative practices. Collaborative initiatives such as the Wraparound Research Project, which focuses on the identification of key principles for the wraparound approach and promising practices for the delivery of supports and services, and the work that the Early Learning Branch is doing on coordinated service delivery will all help to inform and shape a new collaborative model.

Funding and Accountability

We learned from the *Setting the Direction* process that we cannot transform our current system toward an inclusive education system without understanding how accountability measures and funding mechanisms need to be integrated to support this work. We are in the process of analyzing our current information and answering the following questions:

- What information that is currently collected can add value to our understanding?
- How can we enhance this information through new analytic methods or by aligning with other current or additional information?
- What funding and accountability design features are needed to respond to the needs of all learners?

We are in the early stages of discussion about resource guidelines that would be set province-wide and would define what is needed to provide a continuum of support for all students.

Next Steps

Throughout the *Setting the Direction* process, we have said that implementation of parts of the framework will begin in September 2010. We still say September 2010 is the beginning of implementation, but until the government has released its response, we won't know exactly what elements of the framework will be advanced. We know that any future changes will be well communicated and will ensure enough opportunities for stakeholder input and response. The next update on *Setting the Direction* is currently being developed and will be communicated through a variety of means such as e-mail and the website. Please watch for further information.