



Northern Lights

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Working Together to Help Every Student Learn and Excel

February 6, 2025

sent via email: education.minister@gov.ab.ca

The Honourable Demetrios Nicolaidis
Minister of Education
423 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

Re: Provincial Data Collection

Dear Minister Nicolaidis,

Northern Lights Public Schools (NLPS) shares the concerns that some other Alberta school boards have expressed regarding Alberta Education's data collection and reporting processes. Our Board is committed to using accurate and timely data to enhance student learning. However the current delivery processes for the Alberta Education Assurance (AEA) survey and provincial assessment data present significant challenges. Issues with survey accessibility and design, and the timing of the release of provincial achievement data, hinder our ability to make informed decisions. NLPS would like to offer recommendations for improvements that we believe would increase the quality and reliability of data.

Low Parental Participation Rates in the AEA Survey

The Challenges:

- For the 2023-2024 survey our parental participation rate dropped by nearly 12%, affecting data accuracy.
- Parents must wait for an access code to come through traditional mail or request a paper copy from the school principal, which must then be mailed. This leads to lost or ignored surveys due to mailing address changes in our transient communities and the survey being mistaken for junk mail and thrown away.

Proposed Solutions:

- Consider alternate survey delivery options for parents/guardians, such as QR codes, email links, or allowing school divisions to provide access through their well-established communication platforms.
- Expand survey participation to families of all grade levels, instead of just grades 4, 7, and 10, to provide a more complete picture of the parental experience over time.

Survey Design Issues

The Challenges:

- Some survey questions are ambiguous or difficult for respondents to answer due to missing context, lack of relevance to their experience, or the potential for varying interpretations. For example, the interpretation of the question “Your child is learning what they need to know” could include anything from learning cursive to learning household maintenance, or they could refer to curriculum changes. When a question is too vague, it is very difficult for school boards to implement changes to address dissatisfaction.
- “Don't Know” responses are currently counted as negative, when respondents may not have intended to express dissatisfaction.

Proposed Solutions:

- Ensure survey questions are clear and specific to provide actionable insights.
- Consider excluding the “Don't Know” responses from the calculations.
- Add clear instructions to all surveys: “If the question is not applicable or you do not wish to answer, please leave it blank or fill in the circle under ‘N/A’”; currently, this appears to be missing from the parent survey.

Misleading Data Presentation

The Challenges:

- Parents made up only 11.5% of respondents in 2023-2024, but were weighted as one-third of the assurance measurements.
- Low participation rates sometimes lead to data suppression, or an inaccurate representation of results. For instance, some schools' results are based only on staff surveys because of grade configuration, or only on student surveys because staff and parent results have been suppressed.
- Small fluctuations (3.84% or less) can be presented as “significant”, potentially creating misleading conclusions.

Proposed Solutions:

- Adjust weighting formulas to reflect actual response proportions.
- Provide greater clarity in how year over year fluctuations in data are evaluated.

Timeliness of Data

The Challenges:

- School Boards receive data too late (late October), making it difficult to do a thorough and thoughtful analysis of all of the results before the Annual Education Results Report deadline of the end of November.
- Budget and Education Plans require approval and submission in May, five months before our most recent data is available, forcing Boards to make decisions and allocate resources based on data that is dated. For example, when NLPS approved its 2024-2027 Education Plan, we relied on achievement data from the 2022-2023 school year.

Proposed Solutions:

- Consider adjusting the timelines for either data collection or reporting to better inform planning.
- Provide Boards with adequate time after the release of provincial data to analyze results before reporting on the data.

Conclusion

NLPS values the data collected through the AEA Survey and provincial assessments, and we believe addressing these concerns would enhance their accuracy, relevance, and usefulness. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with Alberta Education to refine these processes and ensure school divisions have the high-quality data needed to support student success and provide assurance to our stakeholders. We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations and look forward to further discussion.

Sincerely,



Karen Packard
Board Chair, NLPS

cc: Honourable Brian Jean, Minister of Energy and Minerals
MLA Scott Cyr, Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul
MLA Glenn van Dijken, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock
Marilyn Dennis, ASBA President
Dennis MacNeil, PSBAA President
Alberta School Board Chairs