

Administration of Schools

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No administrative function can succeed without a sense of purpose. While the school has been and continues to be subject to competing demands, its primary purpose is to provide educational benefits to students. This rationale forms the basis for administrative activity, for the organization of the structures, roles and processes required to realize the potential of every child within the various educational settings of Alberta's public education system.

The Profession's Vision

The teaching profession has been consistent in its historic espousal of a model of school administration wherein decisions related to the learning needs of students are formulated on a collegial basis. This emphasis on teamwork, on cooperation between professionals, on the free flow of information among all those concerned with the welfare of children is derived from both the experience of the profession and the vision of the school where the unique needs of each child can be best met by informed practitioners.

The Role of the School Administrator

School administrative structures and processes are the product of a complex interplay of legislative, regulatory and policy dictates on the one hand, and social, community and interpersonal forces on the other. This mix of the formal and informal is ongoing and virtually guarantees that no single administrative style will satisfy constant change. It is for this precise reason that all administrative decisions require a sophisticated knowledge of the mandatory and the permissive with the ability to build consensus around the best approach to educational need. In that the focus of our society's expectations for education is placed on the school, and that provincial responsibility for education expresses itself most clearly by defining the role of that institution, the administrative function therein takes up considerable prominence within the legislative framework. The teaching profession recognizes this fact and enunciates a role for the school administrator: the principal and others most directly involved in working with students and teachers. These role descriptors, expressed through policy, are the product of consultation, deliberation and debate within the profession. Key to the function of the school administrator is the facilitation of teaching and learning through the performance of several roles. These include educational leadership or the capacity to bring about shared vision; collaborative decision making ability; managerial skill; advocacy capability; and intraprofessional collegiality.

The educational leadership role, grounded on beliefs and values, expresses itself in the articulation of a direction for the school through staff and community involvement. It is the role that helps staff and students prepare for the future. It is in this role that instructional leadership is most prominent through the assurance of quality teaching, the development of a climate conducive to student learning and the fostering of staff development. The collaborative decision-making role, wherein the school administrator encourages and develops shared leadership and shared responsibility, requires a number of skills in the areas of facilitating, team building, problem solving, leadership development and the empowerment of others. The management of resources, both human and capital, is a role demanding time and skill that can often be best devoted to other administrative functions. It is in this role that bureaucratic procedures can become excessive and distort genuine efforts to improve situations. The keys to this role are balance and efficiency. Advocacy for the school and public education in the community suggests the abilities to communicate, mediate and resolve conflict. In this role school administrators must be sensitive to political, economic, social and cultural issues which may motivate demands on the school.

Preparation for the Role of the School Leader

The Alberta Teachers' Association has a responsibility, in collaboration with others, to determine appropriate preparation and ongoing professional development programs for school administrators. The Alberta Teachers' Association believes that mentorship programs that assist teachers and school administrators new to their role should exhibit the following characteristics:

- Are designed for professional growth.
- Are ongoing rather than short term.
- Are appropriately funded to provide participant release time.
- Are based on current research and best practices.
- Are allowed to constitute the participants' professional growth plan.
- Are voluntary rather than compulsory.
- Are sponsored in collaboration with the Association.

The Association role in preparation and ongoing professional development programs for school administration is essential to ensure that the professional perspective of teachers continues to be a foundation for school leadership and the collegial nature of the role permeates the work of school leaders.

The Collegial Role

Collaboration is the theme of the collegial role, that in which school administrators and teachers work together to provide an educational culture conducive to student learning and teacher professional growth. Among the characteristics of a collegial environment is the recognition by administrators that all professional educators have rights and responsibilities and that administrative tasks are an inherent feature of all professional roles in a school, that the degree of shared responsibility is considerable. Decisions about a school's educational philosophy and objectives and the deployment of staff and resources to realize those objectives are of fundamental importance to the success of schools and must be established by an inclusive process in which the collective voice of all professionals is valued. This mode of decision making also encompasses those major features of a school's operation, such as its program offerings, instructional modes, resource allocations, technology use, student policy and evaluation systems for program, staff and students. Teachers can reasonably expect that a collegial approach will guide any decision having to do with their personal professional responsibilities in a school as well as those of their colleagues. It is within the collegial role in a unified profession that the Association can best take action to protect the role of the administrator as an educational leader who facilitates teaching and learning.

School and Community

School administration increasingly involves responsibilities beyond the student body and professional staff. School councils, health and social agencies, and police and other authorities also have mandates with respect to the educational and other needs of students. Volunteers also provide important services. These and other interactions between school and community take place at numerous points and in various ways. It is imperative, therefore, that school administrators have the authority to speak on behalf of their schools on matters of policy and the right to be included in all district decision making having to do with community liaison. The intensity of their responsibilities requires that principals, in particular, focus their attention on a single school building rather than on multiple structures dispersed throughout various communities.

Governance and School Administration

Historically, governance of the public education system has been acknowledged as a provincial responsibility wherein local need was met through jurisdictional structures. Debates over centralization and decentralization generally involved provincial and school board roles and responsibilities, the assumption being that any devolution of senior government power to local authorities remained strictly within the decision-making authority of the latter. Bureaucratic models dominated resource allocation with little flexibility to meet the needs of individual schools. Within this framework, school-based professionals were incapable of making substantive resource allocation decisions. Much has changed. The consolidation of most Alberta school boards, the centralization of property tax distribution, the policy driven encouragement of school-based resource allocation, the limitation on jurisdiction level administrative growth, the legislated broadening of the principal's role and the expansion of the role of school councils have shifted the focus of public attention to schools. There is, as well, a heightened expectation of performance driven by a provincial government emphasis on accountability. None of these changes, however, diminish the province's responsibility to provide proper funding and to assure that school boards have the capacity to support the program needs of their schools. Administrative processes are not a substitute for adequacy but a means of realizing valid social objectives in a well-resourced education system.