

Education Finance

[1967, revised 1973, 1979, 1989, 1996, 2016]

Public Education—An Investment

Public education is a commitment by the people of Alberta to the children of the province. Its funding, from Kindergarten to Grade 12, is an investment in the future well being of the individual and of the society. The investment is justified by: our concern for individual development, our desire to maintain and to foster a democratic state, an informed public and a spirit of free inquiry and, our need to provide Albertans with the requisite knowledge and the skills to cope with an increasingly complex environment.

Investment in the future requires social and governmental commitment to a financing scheme designed to withstand short term economic dislocations. The attainment of education goals and, by extension, individual, social and economic objectives must be seen as related to investment in education. Therefore, education investment cannot be tied solely to economic variables. The qualitative aspects of education that lead to the development of an intelligent and sophisticated citizenry require funding that is not restricted to the immediacy of current income.

Role of Government

The provision of public education is a provincial responsibility. The obligation of the provincial government to its populace should be constitutionally guaranteed, organizationally elaborated through governance structures and financially secured through the use of a funding program based on the widest possible access to revenue sources. All political parties should make public policy on education a matter of the highest priority and should translate such policy into a finance program capable of realizing public objectives.

The role of the federal government in matters related to education should be (a) to assure provincial access to equalization revenues so as to reduce educational disparity among provinces, (b) to provide research funding for the study of national issues related to education and (c) to assume the major portion of higher education funding in order to discharge adequately its responsibilities in several areas, among which are human resource planning, labour mobility, regional expansion and science and technology.

While, school financing should be structured so that the major part of expenditure on early childhood to Grade 12 education is borne by the Government of Alberta and implemented through a comprehensive education finance plan, the role of local and community authorities in the financing of public education should be determined by the requirements of local need and those groups should be empowered to make such decisions..

Revenues for Education

The criteria to determine the amount of financial support for education by each level of government must include (a) actual program costs, including consideration for all needed resources and supports, while taking into account forecasts of future requirements based on present trends and needed improvements, (b) all staffing costs, (c) a concern for the equitability of educational opportunity, and (d) assessments of the responsibilities of respective levels of government.

At the provincial level, the criteria can best be met within a financing system consisting of a provincially guaranteed level of support designed to provide school systems with predictable and necessary resources to accomplish their educational responsibilities. The general principle that ought to apply in seeking revenue to support a provincial education program is that such revenue should be provided by a variety of tax sources, in order to assure financial equity and revenue stability. In general, monies for education at the provincial level should be raised by taxation from a diversified economy and from productivity and income based taxes.

Distribution of Funds

Public funding must serve public needs. Those needs cannot be unilaterally determined by any single agency involved in the educational process, but must be the subject of intense study and consultation among all interested parties. Their common objectives should be the maintenance of a high standard of education for all children and the improvement of those aspects of the education system wherein a better quality of service can be provided. The distribution of public funds to private schools cannot be supported, since such public funding takes away from the common good of public education.

Grant systems must be concerned with resources, innovation and equity. Grant structures should be designed so as to foster consistent upgrading of facilities, equipment, programs and personnel. The objective of quality improvement must be realized, in part, through provincial experimental funding available at both the local system and the school levels. Both equitability and equalization should be an inherent part of any distribution plan for basic education.

The nature of the education program and its success in meeting the needs of children is best determined at the local level. Those responsibilities cannot be met in a finance plan that prescribes the education program. Professionals at all levels of a school system and the profession must actively participate in the establishment of priorities and related expenditures for education.