

Outreach Education

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The Association supports outreach education and recognizes its importance in providing educational opportunities for students whose needs are not met through traditional school environments. Outreach education programs increase high school completion rates for students who are at high risk for dropping out of school and provide flexible educational programming for students with complex academic and personal needs. Outreach schools are very unique and as a result no outreach school is the same as other institutions.

Program Flexibility

In order to meet outreach students' diverse needs, it is important for outreach education to maintain program flexibility. Flexibility in the pacing and completion times for courses allows students to continue their studies around work and family commitments allowing for academic success. Beyond these individual course considerations, flexibility is valued in the sense that students receive highly individualized program planning. The flexibility of any outreach program is a strength that is highly contingent upon adequate funding, and strong partnerships with the school district, social support agencies and services, and the community at large.

Community Partnerships

Programming in outreach schools encompasses meeting the needs of the "whole student" by providing additional personal supports. Outreach teachers cannot solely focus on academic work when students are in crisis and/or their basic needs (food, shelter, health care and security) have not been met. Therefore, it is important for outreach schools to establish excellent community partnerships and protocols in order to educate and support the complex needs of individualized students. Such supports as the Police/RCMP, mental health services, healthcare, childcare, and substance abuse counselling are critical links to the success for students in outreach programs.

Outreach schools must have these supports in place as they are essential for their overall success.

Funding

Funding for outreach schools is a critical component to the success of the program. Since outreach schools are a unique entity within the K-12 education sector, it is vital to its operation to provide and maintain appropriate funding that covers all programs, specifically addressing individualized student needs, as well as operation and maintenance costs. Therefore, the Association believes that the Department of Education should develop and implement a per capita program funding formula for all outreach schools. Funding for outreach schools needs to keep pace with increasing operation and maintenance costs reflecting the increased economic reality that schools are constantly faced with. School jurisdictions should also ensure that instructional grants are used solely for program delivery.

The current practice within many of the traditional schools is that when a student transfers to an outreach school after September 30, the funding does not follow the student. This creates financial problems for the receiving outreach school. As such, the Association believes that the Department of Education should mandate that funding and resources allocated to a student are directed, on a prorated basis, to the receiving outreach school upon transfer.

Outreach high school students have high needs and challenges and are generally low credit producers. The credit enrolment unit funding model is appropriate for use in traditional high schools, but it does not match the needs for outreach schools to provide individual specialized program needs for its students. School jurisdictions should fund their outreach schools through a centralized funding model in order to provide a better financial structure for outreach schools.

Technology

Technology has been an ongoing and an important issue for outreach teachers as each school jurisdiction deals with technology differently. The Department of Education should ensure that all outreach students have equitable access to technology in order to maximize the delivery of electronic curriculum and effective technology to support distributed learning and online learning opportunities. Access to online services and computers are a key part of student learning in outreach education. For outreach schools that are located in areas that are not supported or have limited access to the most current technology, print-based modules would still be required in order to meet student needs.

Onsite Administrator

In alignment with the Association's position on administration of schools, it is fundamental to ensure that there is a full-time administrator in each outreach school. The principal's presence in the outreach school has a direct and positive impact on students' behaviour and conduct. There are reasons why schools have an onsite administrator, given that the administrator is involved with the daily operation of a school. In their administrative capacity, they are involved with the supervision of the students and teachers. Due to the nature of the principal's responsibilities it is important that they focus their attention on a single school building rather than on multiple school sites.

Staffing and Administration

Working alone is cited as an important concern among outreach educators, especially for female teachers, and in isolated locations. It is essential for the benefit of staff and student safety that school jurisdictions ensure that schools have at least two staff members onsite when open to students or the public. Staff support must be in place in order to manage a crisis and provide assistance in case of an emergency. Accordingly, it is imperative that all outreach school facilities develop an appropriate emergency plan based specifically upon each school site. Procedures need to be in place to safeguard against any adverse effects.

High staff to student ratios makes it more difficult to manage behavioural issues. Often staff do not have the training that they require to respond to students mental health needs, manage violence/aggression, and diffuse potentially harmful incidents. Due to the unique educational environment of outreach schools and the fact that outreach teachers deal with diverse needs the Association believes that school jurisdictions should educate outreach

school staff in the areas of first aid, emergency response and conflict management. Each school jurisdiction should ensure that the safety concerns of outreach school facilities are assessed and addressed.

A difficulty that administrators/teachers of outreach schools face is the concern that there are no standardized criteria for student placement in many outreach schools. As a result of no established criteria, outreach schools receive students with varying academic and emotional histories, thus affecting the student makeup of an outreach school either positively or negatively. In some cases, students and parents are self-selecting the outreach program to meet their own needs whether it is an appropriate placement or not. To avoid inappropriate placements, school jurisdictions need to have a well-developed student intake policy. In addition, problems arise when a student's cumulative information file is slow to arrive at an outreach school hence delaying proper student programming. School jurisdictions should ensure that outreach schools receive student records in a timely manner. Good communication between schools is necessary for the smooth transition of students between the traditional and outreach school and it ensures that the receiving school has information to assist with emergencies, health and safety issues. Before transferring student records, the student cumulative files should contain complete and accurate information to ensure the shared goal of a student's successful program completion.