

Teacher Education and Certification

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The quality of service given by the teaching profession is a major determinant of the standards of education in the province and, therefore, of the status of the profession. Hence, the Association is vitally concerned with the creation and maintenance of a competent and effective teaching force. The Association must be the principal partner in making decisions affecting the preparation of teachers, including recruitment, selection, admission, institutional preparation, internship, placement and programs of support in the early years of practice. The Association recognizes that other institutions have a legitimate interest in teacher education and certification. These include the Department of Education, teacher education programs in Alberta universities and the Alberta School Boards Association.

Teacher education and certification is the responsibility of the Government of Alberta. However, some responsibility is delegated to the teaching profession through the *Teaching Profession Act*. This act recognizes teaching as a profession and gives legal status to the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Recruitment and Selection into the Profession

The aim of recruitment is to provide adequate numbers of capable teacher candidates, while the aim of selection is to ensure that only competent teachers reach the classrooms. Since the quality of entrants affects the profession and the quality of education, the Association must be consulted in matters of recruitment and selection. University entrance into a teacher education program should be based on standards equivalent to those of other professional programs, with an emphasis on selection factors that research has demonstrated to be relevant to teaching success to assist both the candidate and those involved in teacher education with developing an understanding of the candidate's suitability for teaching. The Association provides to prospective education students information on what will be expected of them as teachers and what they can expect in return for their services as teachers.

Teacher Education Programs

The granting of degrees in education in Alberta should be through teacher education programs within Alberta universities recognized by the Association, who in their primary function of teacher preparation should be dedicated to excellence in teaching, learning and research. These institutions need to provide a teacher education program that promotes collegial, collaborative, reflective professional relationships and practice. The program incorporates and integrates a balance of (1) high-quality undergraduate teacher education programs with strong field experiences, (2) service to the professional teaching community through continuing professional development opportunities and (3) established research and graduate study programs. Further, teacher education programs should employ academic staff who are certificated teachers; who have demonstrated excellence in teaching experience in elementary or secondary school; and who maintain their currency through frequent contact with schools and teachers through research, visitation and professional activities. Teacher education programs should ensure that faculty members associated with teacher education programs emphasize and model the application of current educational theory to teaching practice.

The minimum preparation prior to first certification should be four years of university-based teacher education culminating in a degree that includes general education, subject preparation, study of pedagogical strategies and field experiences based on a professional practice standard determined by the profession. The Association advocates that at least two years of the four-year teacher preparation program should be taken on the campus of a degree-granting institution where the teacher education program assumes responsibility for the design, approval and continuous evaluation of the teacher education program with the direct involvement of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

The final two years of a teacher education program should include the pedagogical strategies and field experiences prerequisite to initial certification as well as instruction by a certificated teacher in the legal, ethical and professional nature of teaching with an emphasis on the services, structure and function of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Teacher education programs should structure their programs to emphasize skill development in the areas of planning for teaching, identifying and responding to learner needs, pedagogical practice, assessment and reporting methods, clear communication, and classroom management. Teacher education programs in Alberta should ensure that the preparation of teachers to work with a diversity of students is comprehensive and includes elements that prepare teachers to respond to the socioeconomic, ethnocultural and linguistic diversity of students and to support the success of Indigenous students. Teacher candidates must be prepared to plan effectively for the inclusion of students with exceptionalities so they can implement effective instructional practices for a wide range of learners within inclusive learning environments. Teacher education programs must also prepare teacher candidates to implement effective instructional practices within multigrade classrooms and to recognize and respect the range of gender and sexual identities.

Teacher education programs in Alberta universities should provide expanded opportunities for postgraduate education programs through off-site courses, flexible scheduling, modified residency requirements, portability of course credits, extended program completion time limits and alternate forms of delivery.

Certification

Certification is the crucial checkpoint in determining who shall teach in Alberta schools. Teachers prepared in Alberta should be certificated only on the recommendation of an Alberta university. The certification of authority to teach and the decision to discontinue such authority is a responsibility of the profession. The Association accepts responsibility for the development and application of procedures for certification to assist those teachers who experience difficulty and, if necessary, to suspend or cancel certificates of those deemed to be lacking competence.

The basic preparatory requirement for certification should be a four-year course or equivalent in an education faculty. Requirements for permanent certification of teachers prepared in Alberta or whose first certification is in Alberta should be the successful completion of one full school year of teaching experience or equivalent in an internship. The same requirements for certification should apply to teachers prepared outside the province as apply to those prepared in Alberta. There should be one type of permanent Alberta certificate, and all teachers, including teachers of special subjects,

librarians or school counsellors, should be required to hold this certificate. To ensure that the profession remains current, any teacher returning to teaching after an absence of five continuous years should be required to meet the minimum requirement in effect at the time of return.

To adhere to both legal and ethical requirements and to protect the interests of learners and society, school authorities must ensure that no person be permitted to commence teaching in a school in Alberta until issued an Alberta teaching credential. While in emergency situations the use of a letter of authority as a teaching credential is sometimes used, the use of letters of authority should not be expanded.

Field Experience Programs

Field experience refers to a combined minimum of a one-semester or equivalent period of not less than 13 weeks of full-time, classroom-based experience as part of the requirement for initial teacher certification. It has the status of a regular credit course toward the bachelor of education degree.

The Association recognizes that an effective teacher education program must integrate educational theory with teaching practice. Consequently, the nature of classroom-based field experiences for teacher candidates is of vital concern to the Association. Substantive changes in field experience programs should occur only with the consultation and approval of the Association. The Association's position on the nature of a suitable field experience and the role of practising teachers in its design and implementation is as follows.

Teacher education programs in Alberta universities and the Alberta Teachers' Association jointly acknowledge that field experiences are key processes in teacher education, which require for their success a close collaborative relationship between the teaching profession and the preservice teacher education program. Field experiences create conditions that recognize and promote teaching as a reflective and collegial practice. Teacher education programs in Alberta universities and the Alberta Teachers' Association are committed to field experiences that develop the student teacher's reflective capacities for observation, analysis, interpretation and decision making as well as the competencies required for effective teaching and learning.

Field experiences provide opportunities for inquiry into teaching and an orientation and socialization to the teaching profession. Field experiences provide an opportunity for prospective teachers to consider how students learn and why, their own teaching strategies, and the social and cultural milieu that influences learning and teaching within schools. Field experiences provide a forum for preservice teacher education program faculty, professional teachers and preservice teachers to engage in meaningful discourse regarding competing ideas, approaches and pedagogical strategies that inform teaching.

Teacher education programs in Alberta universities and the teaching profession share in the commitment to foster these opportunities. The field experience program will continue to be a matter of ongoing examination, refinement, enrichment and improvement involving preservice teacher education programs, the Association, the Department of Education and other relevant government departments as well as partner groups.

An effective field experience must incorporate the following basic features: (1) a graduated set of classroom-based field experiences extended throughout the teacher preparation program; (2) appropriate orientation of the student teacher to the school, the system and the profession; (3) procedures that will provide for effective evaluation of student teachers during each phase of the field experience program; (4) an opportunity for field experience in both rural and urban settings; (5) formative and summative evaluation consistent with Association policy; (6) each field experience connected to a specific on-campus course; (7) participation by the Alberta Teachers' Association in the resolution of professional conduct disputes related to field experience programs in schools; (8) an appeal procedure for student teachers who are unsuccessful in their field experiences and a remediation plan, developed by the teacher preparation program and provided to the cooperating teacher, for those students who must repeat a practicum; (9) evaluation of a student teacher's performance as a shared responsibility of cooperating teachers and preservice teacher education program personnel, provided that cooperating teachers have the major responsibility for final evaluation; and (10) safeguards to ensure that the field experience is not compromised by activities related to teacher recruitment.

Field Experience Implementation

The implementation of a comprehensive and effective field experience program requires that the Government of Alberta make sufficient resources available to provide (1) inservice opportunities for cooperating teachers, (2) travel and expense allowances for student teachers that ensure equitable supports regardless of location of cooperating school, (3) ongoing communication with all personnel involved in the field experiences, (4) personnel to offer consultant services to cooperating teachers and student teachers, (5) compensation for cooperating teachers and (6) teacher secondments to teacher education programs in Alberta universities.

Secondments of practising teachers to teacher education programs, for up to two years to assist with the design and implementation of field experiences, must be accompanied by a written agreement with their employers that guarantees their return to a position no less favourable than that held immediately prior to the effective date of the secondment.

The Association represents teachers on bodies that determine and implement criteria and procedures for the recruitment and selection of cooperating teachers. The Association is obligated to ensure that classroom teacher involvement in field experience programs remains on a voluntary basis and that conditions for teacher participation are satisfactory.

Cooperating teachers for field experience programs should be selected on the basis of the following criteria: (1) a bachelor of education degree or its equivalent and a permanent Alberta teaching certificate; (2) three or more years of successful teaching experience; (3) ability to project a favourable image of the teaching profession; (4) ability to establish and maintain good interpersonal skills and to apply mentoring, communication and supervisory skills effectively; (5) ability to analyze and evaluate teaching and learning skills effectively; (6) willingness to participate in meetings, consultation, seminars and other activities related to field experiences involvement; and (7) possession of active or associate membership in the Association.

As it represents the interests of the profession, the Alberta Teachers' Association must be the principal partner in decisions that determine and implement criteria and procedures for the recruitment and selection of cooperating teachers. It is central to the interest of the profession that cooperating teachers' involvement in field experience programs and activities be voluntary, with decisions made at the school level, by the teacher and in consultation with the school principal. Prior to implementation of any field experience program, sufficient resources, including time and inservice, must be provided so that school-based certificated personnel can meet their commitments to both their students and student teachers.

Honoraria should be provided to cooperating teachers to acknowledge their contributions. The honoraria should be based on factors such as current teacher salaries and time devoted to the field experience program. These honoraria, sponsored through grants given by the Government of Alberta and administered by the teacher preparation programs, express appreciation for the valuable contributions made by cooperating teachers.

Student teachers' participation in their field experience program should be evaluated by a pass/fail method and supported by a written description of performance. Wherever possible, teacher education programs should ensure that school-based administrators are not used as faculty consultants or advisors for field experience assignments in the school in which they serve as principals. This will help safeguard the field experience component from activities related to teacher recruitment.

Internship

Internship is a period of supervised practice in a school following initial certification but preceding permanent certification. Internship provides an orientation to school systems, to the community and to school operations, as well as a lower-stress opportunity to try out teaching styles and techniques. The intern assumes the role of a teacher colleague rather than that of a student. The Association must have a key role in internship programs.

The Association believes that an effective internship program must incorporate the following basic features: (1) Appropriate teaching opportunities (for one full school year or equivalent), which allows the intern to experience a full range of in-school teaching assignments. Such an assignment would initially be no more than 40 per cent of a regular teaching load and, in the latter portion of the internship, no more than 80 per cent; (2) An opportunity to observe and/or participate in administrative, curriculum, policy, extracurricular and other appropriate activities at both school and school system levels; (3) Formative and summative evaluation consistent with Association policy; (4) Active membership in the Association and subject to the Code of Professional Conduct; (5) An Association inservice program meeting intern and school system needs associated with the internship program; and (6) Successful completion of the internship program leading to permanent professional certification.

The Association supports preservice institutions with teacher education programs in their efforts to maintain the integrity and to build the capacity of their teacher education preparation programs. The future of the profession depends on responsive, comprehensive and effective teacher education programs, supported by those in the profession, and further depends on certification requirements that honour and maintain the high standards of the teaching profession.