

## **A summary of: Choice in Alberta Education - Challenges and Opportunities for Public Schools**

The research paper provides a comprehensive overview of Alberta's public school system, delving into its historical evolution, current challenges, and opportunities. Despite challenges stemming from complex learning needs surpassing available supports, Alberta's public schools remain dedicated to student-centered learning, fostering relationships, ensuring student success, and nurturing empowered citizens.

A prominent aspect of Alberta's K-12 policy landscape is the emphasis on "choice in education," allowing parents to select from various school systems including public, separate (Catholic), francophone, charter, private, or homeschooling. Despite having the broadest array of school choice in Canada, the paper examines how public school authorities specifically implement "choice in education" in Alberta.

Through interviews with Superintendents from public school divisions, the research reveals that public schools in Alberta realize choice through diverse mechanisms and strategies. These include leveraging economies of scale to offer a wide range of cost-effective programs and services, enhancing choice through community involvement and partnerships, and conceptualizing choice as diversity in learning opportunities tailored to meet diverse student needs.

A key thought brought up among the interviewed Superintendents is the notion that choice is about public confidence and assurance in schools. It is explained that the underlying premise of school authorities is to expand student growth and achievement.

It is important to note that the paper highlights examples of the challenges to choice in public schools. Research shows that because provincial funding is tied to enrolment, many smaller rural schools do not receive the same programs as bigger schools across the province.

Additionally, educational policies, practices, and programming based on open school boundaries enable students to attend schools outside their designated catchment areas, facilitating choice for families. Public schools also have the flexibility to offer locally developed courses reflecting community needs and interests. Innovative funding models and priority budgeting practices are encouraged to manage finances efficiently and diversify programming options, ensuring public assurance and confidence in public school provisions.

In summary, the research underscores the importance of programmatic choice in Alberta's public schools as a means to foster inclusivity, equity, and student success while meeting the diverse needs and preferences of families and communities.

### **Recommendations:**

By offering programmatic choice within public schools, educational institutions can promote equity by ensuring that all students have access to a high-quality education. Redirecting public funds to support systems-level choice can lead to resource disparities and redundancies. Programmatic choice allows resources to be distributed more equitably and effectively, serving the diverse needs of students.

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