

Subject: Setting the Direction for Special Needs -- ASBA Email

Hello Everyone

This is the first formal communication to school boards to update you on the Department's "Setting the Direction for Special Needs in Alberta" exercise. As you know, I have the honor to represent the ASBA on the working committee for the review - and it's my intention to keep you as fully informed as possible - and to seek your advice, and direction, as this exercise unfolds. I want to let you know that I am ably supported in my work by Steve Cymbol, who has been assigned to this work as well.

The Stakeholder Working Committee has met three times in recent weeks to begin the work supporting the review. To date, much of the work has been focused on developing the process of consulting Albertans (including school boards and education stakeholders). It is hoped that many organizations and individuals will take advantage of opportunities to provide input electronically, however, it is recognized that there will also be a number who will wish to make their views known in a more traditional session.

Current plans for "in-person" consultation sessions - which will be confirmed shortly - include the following:

November 12th	Red Deer
November 18th	Fort McMurray
November 20th	Grande Prairie
November 25th	Hinton
November 26th	Edmonton (two sessions)
December 3rd	St. Paul
December 8th	Lethbridge
December 11th	Calgary (two sessions)
December 12th	Medicine Hat

As I mentioned - dates and venues will be confirmed shortly - and we will send these to you, but wanted to give you as much time as possible to schedule an appearance should your board wish to attend. I certainly hope you will - as this is an extraordinary opportunity to shape the future of special needs education in the province.

The consultation will take the form of reacting to a discussion guide (which will also be released soon) - which will ask key questions. I would also like to encourage you to dialogue locally with your school councils, your staff, and your entire school community and consider the merits of joint submissions, or coordinated messages.

Remember --the more voices delivering the same message - the louder the voice!

We will be putting links to all the key documents on the ASBA web site as soon as they become available - so stay tuned.

At recent zone meetings, I, Jacquie Hansen, your Vice President- or David Anderson urged each board to establish a trustee "point of contact" so that we have a network in place that can react quickly to requests for input. If you have not yet had this discussion at your board - I urge you to do so soon. And please let us know the name, phone number and email address of your trustee contact. We'll send information out directly to that person as it becomes available and use those links for input as we move forward.

In closing, I'd like to ask whether you wish ASBA to organize a special "one-day" issue forum for school boards to enable us to develop and refine our messages. If there is enough interest, we would be pleased to arrange such a session. Please send your response to danderson@asba.ab.ca. Be sure to identify the subject of your email as "special needs meeting" to ensure your response is logged.

I'm very excited by the possibilities of this new direction - and looking forward to much dialogue and discussion.

Heather Welwood
President, Alberta School Boards Association
heather.welwood@nlsd.ab.ca
Home: 780-639-3888 Cell: 780-812-1895