



## Black Gold Draft Curriculum Review Summary Report

*This report provides a summary and brief overview of the Review Teams findings and includes examples from each of the Draft Curriculum of some of the strengths and challenges that were identified. The detailed response to Draft Curriculum will be shared with the Ministry.*

Alberta Education released the Draft K-6 Curriculum on March 29, 2021, the first day of Spring Break for Black Gold School Division (BGSD). When school resumed on April 6, 2021, BGSD recognized the importance of engaging teachers in a review of the Draft Curriculum for all six subject areas: Fine Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, and Visual Arts), Language Arts and Literature (English and French), Mathematics, Physical Education and Wellness, Science, and Social Studies. The review encompassed all 7 grade levels: K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

A call for volunteers was issued to BGSD teachers on Wednesday, April 7th and it closed at noon on April 9th. Despite the short timeline (48 hours), 64 teachers completed the application. Selection of Review Team members was based on expertise in curriculum, child development, learning, and both First Nations, Métis and Inuit as well as Francophone perspectives and included a balanced representation of communities and experience. The review process began on Monday, April 12 with the Review Teams and concluded on Monday, April 19th with a session for elementary school principals.

There were eleven Review Teams; 7 grade level teams (K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) met for two- half days each to review (Mathematics, Science, Drama, Visual Arts, English Language Arts and Literature, and Social Studies). Three subject teams (French Language Arts and Literature, Music, and Physical Education and Wellness) met for one half day to review their subject from K - Grade 6. Finally, an elementary administrators team met to review Science 5.

This document provides a summary of the review and will highlight components of the Draft Curriculum and comments from our various Review Teams in each Curriculum area. There are many comments available online regarding the Draft Curriculum and everyone involved in this process set aside any biases that online comments may include. On many occasions during the review process, teachers commented on the fact that they had no idea how the facilitators felt about the Draft Curriculum as they maintained a high degree of impartiality in leading the review sessions.

Social media is rife with comments on the Draft K-6 Curriculum, and this has devolved into personal attacks in many cases. Considering this BGSD has committed to keeping the names of teachers and administrators who participated in Review Teams confidential. The detailed Curriculum review will be shared with Alberta Education.

### **English Language Arts and Literature (ELAL)**

The Draft K-6 ELAL Curriculum is built around the five pillars of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. There is a focus in the early years on teaching reading and this includes specificity in all areas of the Curriculum. Teachers at multiple grade levels identified that this level of specificity is an improvement over existing Curriculum as it ensures that all students at a given grade level receive the same breadth and depth of instruction. Teachers noted that there needs to be consistent resources to support some of the identified requirements of the Curriculum (i.e., frequent letter-sound correspondences, high frequency word lists, Tier 2 words, Tier 3 words). All Review Teams noted the emphasis on speech and public speaking and appreciate that the scaffolding of these skills is evident. In grades 4 through 6, teachers noted that the Skills and Procedures were, using Webb's scale, at a low depth of knowledge and should instead have an increasing depth to build understanding. Lower depth of knowledge requires lower levels of student thinking and reduces flexibility of pedagogy. If appropriate feedback is incorporated, this could be a strong Curriculum. Most grade levels noted some challenges around the way that nonfiction is presented including the knowledge, understanding, and skills and procedures but agree that this can be refined. There is a lot of content in ELAL, and it is generally felt that

this is largely due to the level of specificity; there are positives and challenges to this. Finally, teachers identified a lack of First Nations, Métis and Inuit connections in this Curriculum and felt that when it was included it was generally not an authentic connection.

### **French Language Arts and Literature (FLAL) Français immersion et littérature**

The FLAL Draft Curriculum is very similar to the ELAL Draft Curriculum and as such many of the comments from ELAL are applicable here. There are Connaissances, Compréhension, and Habiletés et procédures (knowledge, understanding, skills and procedures) that need to be refined as some are introduced too early, the depth of knowledge needed is too low or too high, and they are not inclusive of students with language delays.

### **Mathematics**

The Draft K-6 Math Curriculum generally provides a developmentally age-appropriate foundation for children. However, there are opportunities for improvement. In Kindergarten, students are not required to print natural numbers to 10 and they are not required to use objects, pictures, words, and numbers to “compose quantity within 10”. In developing an understanding of numbers, children need to make connections between multiple representations of quantities. While we want Grade 1 students to be able to work with money, asking them to understand the monetary value of 50- and 100-dollar bills implies that they have seen this, which is not the case for those in a lower socioeconomic stratum. There is a lack of manipulatives included in the Curriculum, and these are major stepping stones to mathematical understanding. As student understanding moves from concrete to abstract, it is essential that they interact with concrete tools in addition to learning basic facts. The Review Team feels that inclusion of ‘reflections’ of 3D shapes in Grade 2 will overwhelm students. Reflections of 3D shapes are more abstract than the other translations; reflections of 3D shapes should be moved to grade 3. In grades 5 and 6, skills and procedures become more prescriptive in some Learning Outcomes which results in more limited pedagogical approaches. This is problematic in our inclusive classrooms as teachers work hard to meet individual student needs. Grade 4 and 6 Review Teams expressed concern about the complexities surrounding the expectations with fractions and question whether they are introducing too much too soon. The Grade 6 Review Team’s consensus is that the Curriculum is missing an emphasis on number sense and in general, thinking levels are too low in most areas; this is primarily reflected in the skills and procedures identified in the document; what students do to demonstrate their understanding, and this results in less pedagogical flexibility to meet the needs of individual students.

### **Science**

There is a shift in the organization of Science from topics (i.e., magnets, dinosaurs, etc.) to the branches of Science (i.e., matter, energy, living systems, etc.). Concerns were raised about the availability of resources that align with this shift. Review Teams found that much of the Draft Science Curriculum is developmentally and age appropriate however they believe there is too much content in all grade levels. The language used in the skills and procedures is often passive; identify, describe, explain, and research can all be accomplished without being actively engaged. There are some incongruencies in alignment of Learning Outcomes with Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills and Procedures (KUS). For example, including sunlight in the Grade 4 Learning Outcome “Students investigate the systems of Earth and reflect on how interconnections sustain life.” It is clearly stated that there are four systems of Earth and the sun is not one. While the sun is needed to sustain life on Earth, this is misleading and can create misunderstandings for students and ambiguity for teachers. The teams also have concerns about the depth of knowledge throughout; in the early years, the depth is often too deep (i.e., “explain the relationship between suitability of materials and purpose” is too high level for Grade 2) and in the later years the depth is often too shallow; Grade 6 team noted that “Skill and process verbiage needs to be pushed beyond basic level thinking.” These low-level expectations limit teacher flexibility of instruction and assessment in meeting the individual needs of students. It is important to reiterate that the Science Curriculum is too content heavy in all Grades and the Review Teams feel that there is not sufficient time for students to build understanding of all the content.

## Social Studies

The Social Studies Curriculum does not align with the Guiding Framework. “Students build on prior knowledge and experiences in a systematic way, with time in the curriculum to cycle back to use prior knowledge and skills.” Rather than building on prior knowledge or experience this Curriculum has been structured chronologically which does not align with child development. Children develop understanding from themselves at the center and move out gradually to encompass aspects of family, community and beyond. Once they understand ‘today’, then they have the experience and understanding to begin to look at history moving from today back to ancient times. European and Ancient histories can then begin to be understood as students have prior knowledge of something relevant in their own world to connect to as they build their understanding. In taking the current approach in the Draft Social Studies Curriculum, it requires the lowest level of Bloom’s Taxonomy - which is linked to memorization and not thinking. The identified ‘flow’ of Curriculum does not align with children’s development of historical thinking. The research article [Historical Thinking in the Elementary Years: A Review of Current Research](#) describes the developmental stages of historical thinking. Students connect first with what they know; themselves or ‘me’ and their family. From there they can develop understanding of community - first their school community and then their broader community.

Basic history about their own community is the first step in the exploration of history at this point. An understanding of the world they see allows them to then build an understanding of other communities. As they move further from themselves at the center, they can understand Alberta as it is now, and beginning to explore the history of Alberta is a logical next step, including the history of various cultures (Muslim, Hutterite, etc.). Moving from Alberta to Canada and understanding the history of Canada and how it connects to Alberta still supports connecting to prior knowledge and understanding history. There is so much potential in Social Studies to be engaged, connected, celebrate diversity, and build an understanding of community. All of these are not part of this Curriculum. The Review Teams feel that the focus of the Curriculum needs to be on culture, not on religion. In Grade 2, the knowledge related to Judaism and Islam is presented as what Jewish people believe and what Muslims believe while the knowledge related to Christianity is presented as fact and not beliefs. One teacher on our Review Teams shared the following:

*“As a Christian, I am frustrated that the majority of the Social Studies grade 2 curriculum is predominantly Euro-Christian Centred. Not all students in Alberta are able to understand and see value in this perspective. It would be my fear that parents and the community would be so frustrated that they do not identify with this Christian centred curriculum that it would potentially create disinterest in learning, or even worse, anti-Christian sentiment because they feel that they are being forced to learn about a religion that is not their own. If the hope of the writer is that this will positively influence people’s perception of Christians in Alberta, I will sadly inform you, that this curriculum will do the opposite.”*

There is no aspect of the Social Studies Curriculum that is supported by any of our Review Teams and teachers unanimously agree that it needs a complete rewrite. Financial Literacy is important but must be approached in a culturally appropriate and family sensitive manner that acknowledges the socio-economic diversity that exists in many classes. In Grade 3, students are to answer “What money is spent on you – per day, per week, over a month? What proportion goes to basic needs, entertainment, or fun activities?” and Review Teams feel that this is completely inappropriate information for students to bring into the classroom.

## Physical Education and Wellness (Mandatory Curriculum)

From Kindergarten through Grade 6, there are seven organizing ideas. Two of these are related to physical movement and activity (active living and movement skill development) and the remaining five include: character development, safety, healthy eating, healthy relationships, growth and development.

In looking at the first two, there is a thread of physical fitness embedded which creates an inherent risk that Physical Fitness tests may become part of school classes. Research is clear that there needs to be a focus on joy and purpose in physical movement if it is to become a lifelong habit. Specific knowledge, understandings, and skills and procedures are misaligned to student development and ability. For example, “The element of effort determines speed, time, and force.” is currently included in Grade 3 while it should be in Grade 1; by Grade 3, students should be adjusting force, speed, and time to achieve physical goals. Conversely, the inclusion of muscular strength in Grade 4 is much too early as their physical development does not align. Much of the Character Development section was deemed age appropriate but anomalies persist here as well; in Grade 3, students are to “Examine how life and career stages or circumstances can influence roles.” This is far beyond them; it would be appropriate to “Explain the various roles of people in their life.” Consent is included in Safety and the Review Team feels that strategies that are age appropriate need to be included in the Curriculum as the way it is currently presented is ambiguous; there should be consistency of breadth and depth. The section on Healthy Eating, seems designed to create stigma around eating at a very young age. In Grade 2 students are to ‘Apply recommendations from nutritional guidelines and health professionals to individual food decisions.’ At this age parents/guardians provide the food that is available to students and developing good food habits relies on the availability of healthy foods in the home. The focus on nutrition at this age can promote hyper-vigilance in this area which can lead to eating disorders later in life. Healthy Relationships are represented well but refinement is still needed throughout. The Growth and Development section is too complex for all Grade levels. Kindergarten students are expected to “describe physical changes in the body since birth”, Grade 1 students are introduced to body mass and this can lead to body shaming, Grade 2 students need to recognize how a variety of factors (food, mental health, physical activity, rest, environment, and family traits) can affect healthy growth, and the list goes on. This section needs to be reset to align with development.

### **Fine Arts (includes 4 different Curriculum: Music, Visual Arts, Drama and Dance)**

All 4 of the Fine Arts Curricula include the same three Organizing Ideas: Foundational Elements and Principles, Creating and Presenting, and Appreciation.

#### ***Music (mandatory Curriculum)***

It is quickly apparent that this Draft Curriculum will need to be taught by a teacher with strong musical expertise. The first concern is that not all elementary schools have a music specialist, and this is needed. Classrooms will need access to musical instruments if students are to achieve the Learning Outcomes. The Review Team found the language used was often convoluted and needs to be simplified. For example, in Grade 2, to ensure clarity, “Beat groupings are known as measures and are divided up using bar lines when notated.” should be split into two: A beat group is a measure.” AND “When notated, measures are divided using barlines.” The historical connections embedded in the Appreciation are linked to the Social Studies Curriculum and as you have read in this report, the Review Teams do not support that Curriculum. The examples of music exclude different styles of music in Canada (i.e., Acadian, Métis, Newfoundland, Maritimes, Indigenous, etc.). Overall, there is a lot of content in the Draft Music Curriculum, too much in each grade.

#### ***Visual Arts (mandatory Curriculum)***

The Appreciation section throughout the Fine Arts has conceptual merit but misses the mark completely. The attempt to create a cross-curricular connection to Social Studies means that art is first examined from an historical context. Art is something to be enjoyed as a young child and that is missing from this Curriculum. It is through experiencing a variety of art forms from a variety of sources, that people begin to develop appreciation. Throughout the K-6 Draft Curriculum, there is an obvious lack of BIPOC examples of artworks. There is a missed opportunity to include art from a variety of cultures so students can see aspects of their culture represented in their learnings. The motor skills needed to create art are not included, for example, nowhere do students learn cutting skills and cutting tools. Finally, as with the rest

of the Draft Curriculum that was reviewed, teachers feel that there is too much content included in this Curriculum.

### ***Drama (optional Curriculum)***

The Drama Curriculum is a ray of sunshine and the teams feel that the first two sections (Foundational Elements and Principles, and Creating and Presenting) should be mandatory and embedded throughout all subjects. These Learning Outcomes not only encompass the connection between play and learning but also provide a myriad of opportunities for students to be actively engaged in their learning. The section on Appreciation has much room for improvement. Drama, and indeed all the Fine Arts do not only support students in 'recognizing beauty, goodness, and truth' but also to see pain, struggle, and untruths. Finally, the focus on historical connections in Drama is linked to the Social Studies Curriculum and as you have read in this report, the Review Teams do not support that Curriculum.

### ***Dance (optional Curriculum)***

There was no review of the Draft Dance Curriculum done. This is an optional Curriculum and as Black Gold does not have Dance programs in our schools currently, it was felt that we did not have the necessary expertise to provide input into this Curriculum.

### **General Comments**

In all subjects at all grade levels, the Review Teams feel that First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives, as well as Francophone perspectives are underrepresented and when present, not authentically represented. Most of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit connections feel like they were afterthoughts, and the word tokenism was used frequently by Review Teams. Ironically, there are many places in all the Curricula where an authentic, rich connection could and should be made and it has not been. There is no alignment to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The teams were dismayed to see that First Nations, Métis and Inuit are primarily included in a historical way and their current place in society and contributions are ignored.

New Draft Curriculum does, technically, reduce the number of Learning Outcomes in each subject at every grade level. However, the content in the Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills and Procedures, has bloated these Learning Outcomes. Every Review Team repeatedly stated that there is too much content in every Curriculum. Teachers express genuine concern about the pressure that children and students will be under to 'get through' Curriculum. This is especially true in Kindergarten which is an optional half-time program. The sheer volume of content is unreasonable for 5-year-olds.

To validate/pilot the Draft Curriculum would be an enormous challenge. While there are some components of some subjects that are ready to be tested in classrooms, there are many more that require extensive refinement and rewrites. In providing rich feedback to Alberta Education based on teacher experience and expertise, teachers are fulfilling their professional responsibility to ensure that our students are educated based on the highest quality and standards of education.

Alberta Education has not identified the gaps that exist between current Curriculum and Draft Curriculum and students will be unable to engage with Draft Curriculum unless, and until, those gaps are identified and a plan to close them has been developed. The work required to plan, teach, and assess Draft Curriculum without resources is enormous.

COVID-19 has already increased the workload and stress for teachers and the Review Teams expressed their concern that engaging in validation/piloting would simply be too much.

The Review Teams feel that using the current version of Social Studies Draft Curriculum in classrooms poses a risk to our students. The content is not developmentally or age appropriate and will cause young

children to disengage from the learning process at a time in their lives when they are generally the most curious.

It is also important to note that since the Draft Curriculum was released, it has become politically charged and is being widely dissected on Social Media. Parents have been clear that they believe any involvement in the validation/piloting process will be harmful to their children. Teachers want to do what they can to ensure quality Curriculum while at the same time they have strong professional and personal relationships with parents and their communities. Many teachers on our Review Teams expressed their concern about the damage that could be done to these relationships if they were to participate in validating/piloting Curriculum.

The teachers and administrators who participated in the Draft Curriculum Review expressed their sincere thanks to Black Gold Administration and the Board of Trustees for providing them the time to do this work. The Review Teams appreciate that the Division did not make a decision regarding validation/piloting until they gathered teachers' voices.