



Education Community of Practice Terms of Reference

Background

Autism Alberta's Alliance is an initiative of Autism Society Alberta bringing together stakeholders from a diversity of sectors, including education, employment supports, health professionals, researchers, housing, service and support specialists, Autistic persons, parents, and others.

In 2022/23, the Alliance formed numerous Communities of Practice to address various opportunities to improve experiences, services, and care within and for the autism community.

Education Community of Practice

Alberta's Autistic students receive their education in a variety of contexts including through public schools, private, charter and independent, alternative, as well as participating in homeschooling. Despite the diversity of educational contexts, students' learning goals are informed by the province's (i.e., Alberta Education) standardized curriculum and inclusive education framework. While the provincial curriculum and inclusive education framework meets the needs of most of Alberta's students, Autistic students continue to report experiencing significant challenges within the education system.

With the ongoing support of Autism Alberta's Alliance through in-kind resourcing for project management and administrative assistance, the Education Community of Practice (ECOP) was formed. With the Alliance's support, dedicated individuals who are passionate about education can do the difficult and rewarding work of sharing with Government and the autism community solution-focused recommendations for how to enhance learner outcomes for Autistic students.

Purpose

The primary focus of the ECOP is to understand the educational experiences of Alberta's Autistic students, identify strategies that can be used to enhance their learning outcomes, and to offer an updated and enhanced inclusive education framework. The work of the ECOP focuses on educational practices for students in Kindergarten through Grade 12, attending all educational contexts, in both urban and rural settings. The ECOP's primary purpose is to:

- Share knowledge and experiences, including successes and challenges relating to K -12 education.
- Develop an enhanced Inclusive Education Framework that is informed primarily by the experiences of Autistic students.
- Share current evidence-informed practices for neuro-affirming care that can be incorporated into all educational contexts throughout the province.

Steering Committee

- Co-Chair: Lyndon Parakin (Executive Director, Autism Calgary Association, Vice President, Autism Society Alberta)
- Co-Chair: Dr. Shane L. Lynch (Registered Psychologist, Director of Innovation, The Sinneave Family Foundation)
- Carlene Chrumka (Chief Executive Officer, Janus Academy)
- Dr. Chandra Lebenhagen (Director, Including Autism)
- Shino Nakane (Provincial Director, Autism Society Alberta)
- Amanda Downey (Alliance and Policy Strategist, Autism Society Alberta)

Participants

- Education professionals
- Psychologists
- Autistic persons
- Parents of Autistic persons

Meetings

- ECOP meetings will happen monthly or bi-monthly, as determined by the Steering Committee.
- An agenda will be circulated in advance of every meeting.

Minutes

- Meeting minutes will be circulated to participants within two weeks of the date of the meeting.

Expectations and Deliverables 2024

Deliverable. Using Alberta Education’s existing Inclusive Education Framework as a starting point, the ECOP intends to recommend updates and enhancements that align with the current experiences of Autistic students, parents, and education professionals (e.g., teachers, administrators). Building from the successes of the current framework, the enhanced framework will be used to inform inclusive practices across all schools and jurisdictions throughout the province.

Working Group. A small working group has been developed to create a draft of the enhanced inclusive education framework. The working group reports back to the Steering Committee with updates and to solicit feedback.

Timeline. We are hoping to have a draft prepared by the end of September for the Steering Committee’s review. Following their review, we intend on sharing the results widely throughout the province to all stakeholders (individuals, schools, administrators, and government).