

Education Services Agreement Standards

First Nations students to feel more welcomed and supported in provincial schools

What Education Services Agreements (ESAs) are

ESAs, formerly referred to as tuition agreements, are agreements between school boards and First Nations – or the Government of Canada on behalf of First Nations – to enable First Nations students living on-reserve to attend provincial schools. The Government of Alberta is not party to these negotiations or the agreements.

What we are doing

Alberta's government is establishing provincial standards for ESAs to help school boards and First Nations work together when First Nations children choose to attend a provincial school.

The draft ESA standards were informed by recommendations provided by First Nations, provincial school boards and the federal government. A number of changes have occurred within the education system since this last round of public engagements in 2018.

As the government moves toward establishing ESA standards, key changes to the draft standards are proposed and engagement will be held in summer and fall of 2021. Once feedback has been incorporated, updated ESA standards will be established through a Ministerial Order.



Why we are doing it

Currently, ESAs across the province differ considerably and tend to focus mostly on tuition. The establishment of ESA standards will, over time, broaden the scope of ESAs across the province, including the programs, services and supports offered to First Nations students.

The proposed ESA standards put the child at the center. They are principle-based—focusing on a child's learning needs, culture, language, identity and unique circumstances—and promote dialogue and collaboration.

First Nations students with ESAs in Alberta

Approximately 5,700 First Nations students living on-reserve attend provincial schools—through either a tuition agreement or ESA. Right now, there are more than 100 agreements in place between 41 provincial school boards and 48 First Nations.

There are approximately 12,000 students living on-reserve attending First Nations schools. In both cases, the financial responsibility for the education of First Nations students falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government. Provincial school boards receive ESA fees annually from First Nations and Indigenous Services Canada (2020/21 fees totaled approximately \$100 million).

What ESA standards will do

Standards are intended to support the development of comprehensive, transparent, fair and accountable ESAs between provincial school boards and First Nations (or Canada). They are designed to provide guidance for school boards and First Nations during ESA negotiations. They provide an opportunity to explore and discuss programming and relationships that focus on student success.

Standards are non-prescriptive and are intended to provide guidance for school boards and First Nations. They will apply only to new agreements signed after the standards are implemented. Standards also reflect the need to collaborate and hold the federal government accountable.

How ESA standards were developed

ESA standards were developed from 2014-18 with feedback from numerous stakeholders, including First Nations, provincial school boards, the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) and the federal government.

The draft 2018 standards were never put into effect. A number of changes have occurred within the education system since the last round of public engagements in 2018. To update the draft standards, key changes are proposed for stakeholders' consideration.

Reciprocal agreements

Reciprocal agreements, which enable students living off-reserve to attend First Nations schools, also exist in Alberta. There are about 625 students living off-reserve that attend First Nations schools through reciprocal agreements.

The ESA standards do not apply to reciprocal agreements. Section 63 of the *Education Act* applies only to ESAs for the education of First Nations students attending a provincial school division. However, school boards and First Nations may choose to apply the same or similar standards to reciprocal agreements for provincially funded students attending schools on-reserve.

Share your feedback on the draft ESA standards by September 15, 2021

In order to provide adequate time and space for an open dialogue on the proposed standards, a series of in-person and virtual meetings are being held.

Should you wish to submit written feedback, or to arrange a virtual conversation to discuss the draft standards further, please contact Lynda Burgess, Manager, Policy and Intergovernmental Collaboration, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Directorate, at 780-422-3281 or lynda.burgess@gov.ab.ca. Written feedback on the draft standards can be submitted on or before **September 15, 2021**.

What will happen when engagement on draft ESA standards is complete

Once feedback has been gathered and incorporated, the standards will be presented to Minister for consideration. If approved they will be established through Ministerial Order and posted online. Resources to support implementation will be made available. The approved standards will only apply to new ESAs.