A Philosophy Of Public Education For Prince Edward Island Schools

Purpose

The purpose of the Prince Edward Island public education system is to provide for the development of children so that each may take a meaningful place in society.

While on one level this purpose is direct and may be considered self-evident, on another level it raises questions about the principles underlying the education process and the specific goals of education.

The following is a brief explanation of the principles and expectations that apply to the Prince Edward Island public education system. Specific direction is then provided by a statement of the goals supporting the purpose and principles. The statement of philosophy concludes with a brief discussion of the roles played by learners, educators, parents, and other members of the community in the education process.

Basic Principles

Society recognizes a set of widely-held principles which provide a framework for public education. The principles identified for the Prince Edward Island education system are as follows.

Public education in P.E.I. is based on a quality program that respects the intrinsic value of the individual and centres on the development of each child.

Respect for the individual is exemplified in a number of ways. It includes promoting educational practices that reflect a variety of learning styles, that present intellectual challenges appropriate to each student, that permit flexibility for students with special needs, and that stimulate students' interests and imaginations.

The development of the child implies providing each student with the basic education required to
participate in and contribute to society. It also means preparing students with the knowledge and intellectual training needed to enter the work force or to pursue post-secondary studies.

The public education system recognizes that education is a responsibility shared among the school, the family, and the community.

In the first few years of children's lives, the immediate family plays the dominant educational role. As children grow, so does their involvement with their environment. They develop interests in a variety of forms of play, in books, in radio and television, and in community experiences initiated by the home.

When children begin to attend school, additional, more specialized educational tasks become the responsibility of the school. At the same time, their participation in community activities such as church, sports, and clubs provides them further opportunities for learning.

Throughout the school years, the family continues to play a central role in education. Thus, it is essential that family and school regularly communicate.

The public education system demonstrates respect and support for fundamental human rights as identified in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the P.E.I. Human Rights Act.

The fundamental rights of citizens involve a number of areas which have either specific or broad application to education. These include support for the principle of gender equity, recognition of the bilingual nature of this country, and the need to ensure equality of access for individuals with mental or physical disabilities.

Respect and support for fundamental human rights require application of the provisions of the Charter and the Human Rights Act and promotion of the principles they embody by example and through the programs and materials used in schools.

The public education system reflects the character, cultural heritage, and democratic institutions of the society it serves.

Prince Edward Island society and its educational institutions have been shaped by many factors. The insular nature of the land, the rural character of the environment, the relation to the sea, the contributions of aboriginal peoples, the settlement by a number of distinct cultural groups, and the prominent role of religion have all contributed to developing a society with a strong identity.

Island society is also influenced by the wider Canadian society, by changes in transportation, communications, and patterns of trade and commerce, by the migration of members of communities, and by the presence of new cultural groups within society.

The public education system is based on a recognition of the beliefs and values shared by the Island community and by the wider Canadian society. These include respect for the individual, for heritage, for multiculturalism, and for democratic principles.

The programs in the public education system reflect a contemporary view of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are of most worth to the individual and to society.

It is essential that the education provided today be grounded in the experiences of the past while
preparing students for the future. The content of education is not static. While a core of objectives has been with us since the beginning of public education, even what is considered basic changes over time.

To keep the school program current requires a systematic review process and the involvement of knowledgeable people. All participants in this review process must recognize that the scope of human knowledge is so vast that only a small fraction of it can be presented in the school program.

**Goals**

While the principles form the base upon which the education system is placed, a more precise set of goals is required to define the specific areas that are addressed by the public education system.

The goals of public education are to enable the student to:

- develop an appreciation for learning, an intellectual curiosity, and a desire for lifelong learning;
- develop the ability to think critically, apply knowledge, and make informed decisions;
- acquire the basic knowledge and skills necessary to comprehend and express ideas through the use of words, numbers, and other symbols;
- develop an understanding of the natural world and of the applications of science and technology in society;
- acquire knowledge about the past and an orientation to the future;
- develop an appreciation for one's own heritage and a respect for the culture and traditions of others;
- develop a sense of self-worth;
- develop a respect for community values, a sense of personal values, and a responsibility for one's own actions;
- develop a sense of pride and respect for one's community, province, and country;
- develop a sense of stewardship for the environment;
- develop creative skills, including those in the arts, and an appreciation of creativity in others;
- develop skills and attitudes related to the work-place;
- develop good mental and physical health and the ability to creatively use leisure time;
- acquire a knowledge of the second official language and an understanding of the bilingual nature of the country;
- develop an understanding of gender equity issues and of the need to provide equal opportunities for all;
- develop an understanding of fundamental human rights and an appreciation for the worth of all individuals.

While these are formidable goals for the public education system to undertake, it is important to reiterate that the responsibility for addressing these goals is a shared one. Only with the support and active participation of the family and other segments of the community will it be possible for the public education system to fulfill its mandate.
Schools in Society

In order to realize the goals of public education, the school should be a centre of learning that presents a welcoming, caring, and safe environment in the community. Its program should be learner-centred and should reflect the school's understanding of the needs, abilities and interests of the learners. The program should be designed to stimulate, to challenge and to foster creativity. In addition, schools along with other institutions should provide opportunities for adults to take advantage of lifelong learning opportunities.

The quality of the school program must be assured. Although not the only evidence of quality, a key indicator is public and student support. The program should be relevant, with due consideration to goals and objectives, and prepared using an appropriate development process. The education system should also ensure that educators who deliver the program have opportunities to remain current with the best educational knowledge and practice of the time.

In their first contacts with the education system, learners bring their innate curiosity and their desire to explore the environment. In later years, the obligations of learners become more formal. They begin to develop their own beliefs and attitudes and they take on more responsibility for their actions and the direction of their lives.

This increased responsibility requires that students take part in the decision making regarding educational and career goals, actively participate in the process of education, interact positively with fellow learners and educators, and demonstrate a willingness to continue to engage in exploring their environment and the world of ideas. As students progress through the system and beyond, they must be able to demonstrate competence in their subsequent work or studies and exhibit the capability of continuing to learn.

The educator's role is vital in this learning process. Teaching, guiding, encouraging, and challenging students are essential elements in furthering the process. Besides leading the student, the educator should exemplify the principles and goals of the education system and should be familiar with and able to apply current knowledge of effective instruction.

The family must participate in the educational process to help shape and support the goals of the education system and to ensure that children are provided with an environment conducive to meeting their needs. In order to facilitate this, open lines of communication must exist between the school and the family and both must be prepared to take initiatives in the communication process.

The community has the responsibility of making certain that schools and other appropriate, related social institutions exist and are well supported. The community must also provide the family and the school with a supportive environment which provides a wealth of opportunities for learning and development outside the confines of the classroom.

In a rapidly changing society, schools have a particular role to play both in preserving that which we hold important as a society and in preparing individuals to deal with the future and with change. For every generation there are particular issues to be addressed. At present, these issues include language rights, the rights of those with special needs, gender equity, multiculturalism, the environment and the impact of technology.

Issues like these can be addressed, to some degree, in school programs. However, some must also be responded to by adjusting the administrative structure and the operation of the school. Because the school is but one element in society, it is unrealistic to expect that the school on its own can resolve such issues, thus the importance of stressing the shared responsibility for
education among the school, the family, and the community.

In order to reflect the goals of the community that it serves, the school must be sensitive to the needs of the workplace and post-secondary institutions as well as to the needs of social, recreational, and special interest groups. For example, schools depend upon the university to ensure that discipline centred programs reflect the present state of knowledge. Similarly, schools depend upon the business community to ensure that programs related to the workplace are up-to-date.

It is clear that learners, educators, parents, and other members of the community each bear the responsibility of participating in and shaping the public education system for the future. The fulfilment of the complete set of goals outlined in this paper requires cooperation and dedication from all the parties involved.