

Aurora Academic Charter School

FINAL Report

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background

The Aurora Academic Charter School (Aurora) charter was first granted on May 16, 1996 and the school opened its doors on September 9, 1996 to 280 Kindergarten to Grade 8 students. In September 1997, the school extended educational services through Grade 9. The school, whose legal name is Aurora School Ltd, has successfully renewed its charter on three occasions - in 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016. The present charter expires on August 31, 2021.

Between 1996 and 2007, the school operated in the former nurses' residence of Edmonton's Misericordia Hospital. Aurora moved to its present location, 12245 - 131 Street in Edmonton, Alberta in September 2007. The school facility is owned by Edmonton Public Schools.

The student enrolment in the 2018/19 school year was 835 FTE students in grades Kindergarten to Grade 9. The current enrolment cap for Aurora is 900 students. The Aurora Board of Directors and administration is planning a high school expansion.

The school employs approximately 46 FTE certificated teaching staff including a principal and assistant principals for each of the elementary and middle schools. The board also employs a part-time superintendent, full-time deputy superintendent and 11 non-certificated office and support staff. The school facility consists of 47 instructional spaces; a learning commons area, one science lab, one art room, two fitness areas and three gymnasiums.

Enrolment per instructional group as of February 8, 2019 was as follows:

School year	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
2018-2019	81	80	80	81	88	89	88	96	96	96	875
FNMI (self-declared)	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	4

Aurora Academic Charter School Foundational Statements

The vision, mission, purpose, goals and philosophy of the organization guide the essential elements of education as articulated in the Aurora Charter.

Vision

Aurora Academic Charter School is the best choice for traditional public education in Alberta.

Mission

To provide an orderly and structured environment, with properly sequenced teacher-directed instruction and strong home/school partnerships, where average children can excel in an academically oriented program.

PURPOSE

The purposes of Aurora School are:

1. To assist and encourage students of average ability and beyond to develop the highest level of academic and creative prowess possible
2. To help develop in students a lifelong love of learning and a pursuit of physical and mental well-being
3. To produce responsible citizens who recognize the value of hard work and enterprise
4. To develop in students a desire to be productive, law-abiding and loyal employers and employees
5. To develop in student's effective communication skills
6. To ensure that students are prepared upon graduation to enter the global economy

GOALS

The primary goals of Aurora School are:

1. To have an enhanced language arts program
2. To have an enhanced mathematics program

The primary student learning outcomes of Aurora School are:

1. That students, on average, are reading above grade level in language arts
2. That students, on average, are achieving above grade level in mathematics

PHILOSOPHY

It is the philosophy of Aurora Academic School that average children, when presented with an orderly and structured environment, and in the presence of properly sequenced teacher-directed classroom instruction, can excel in an academically oriented program.

The acquisition of skills in reading and writing from the earliest age is considered to be the foundation of the Aurora philosophy. Children learn the rules of the English language to a degree that renders them excellent spellers and excellent writers who read well above their respective grade levels. The Aurora program also stresses the importance of neat, high-quality work in their notebooks. Students are taught to be systematic in how they approach all subject areas.

The teachers who are committed to such an approach have seen in their own classrooms the advantage of phonics, proper spelling, good reading and writing skills, and math abilities.

Aurora Academic School offers a highly structured, teacher-directed course delivery system with high expectations in language development that are achievable with traditional methods. This emphasis on language and mathematics produces improved learning opportunities, especially given the highly disciplined, respectful environment that is in place.

A unique feature of Aurora is the degree to which parents and teachers share the same philosophical views of education. This blend of parent and teacher energies not only enhances the educational possibilities, but it also provides double the support for children in the program to be encouraged and ultimately to develop their potential. One of the significant strengths of the school is the strong level of parental support. Parents agree to support their children who are assigned homework regularly.

Teachers, who sincerely believe in what they do and who are committed to quality education, creatively enhance their courses to teach beyond the Alberta Program of Studies. This is the setting for a system that unites parents and teachers in an educational institution with the power of a traditional methodology. Its outcomes show what average children can accomplish in a highly academic, orderly, and creative environment. It is these outcomes that Aurora relies on to demonstrate the effectiveness of this program.

TERM OF CHARTER

The term of the current charter is from September 1, 2016 until August 31, 2021.

Terms of Reference

The *Charter Schools Regulation* requires that all charter schools in the province be evaluated at least once in the term of their charter. There are a number of purposes for the evaluation of a charter school:

- To provide evidence to the Minister and the board that the charter school is in compliance with provincial requirements and the requirements of the Charter, inclusive of charter amendments, approved by the Minister.
- To report to staff, parents and the community on the success of the charter school and to identify areas of strength and areas that may require additional attention.
- To focus the attention of the board and staff on the goals and objectives of the Charter and the need to establish and confirm measurable outcomes and measures.
- To facilitate continuous improvement in the charter school consistent with the assurance requirements of the Ministry and with the local direction established by the charter school community and authorized by the board of directors.

The criteria by which the charter school is evaluated are as follows:

1. The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.
2. The school operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.

3. The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful.
4. The school is financially viable and responsible.
5. Student Success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order (#001/2013)
6. Student achievement at the charter school is consistently strong or improving.
7. The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.
8. The charter school shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community.
9. The charter school reaches out beyond its walls to demonstrate broad and sustained community engagement.
10. The charter school is governed effectively.
11. The school is administered effectively.
12. The charter is committed to engaging students, teachers, parents and community members in a model of continuous improvement.

Previous Evaluation and Ministerial Expectations

The *Alberta Education Aurora School Evaluation Report* of 2014 identified a number of commendations, twenty-two recommendations for consideration and six required changes. In the 2016 charter renewal letter from the Minister of Education, the school was encouraged to clarify board, superintendent and administrative roles; understanding and application of the MO on Student Learning; development of a school wide model for understanding of TQS and supervision/evaluation; increased opportunity for stakeholder voice and develop a focus on research to inform innovative practices.

Evaluation Processes

The findings of the evaluation were established using the following processes and activities:

1. The charter school was asked to develop and submit to Alberta Education a self-evaluation report based on the 12 criteria named above.
2. Alberta Education identified a team of five individuals to review the self-evaluation report submitted by the school and to determine appropriate school site evaluation processes. The team identified areas of focus for the evaluation based on the previous evaluation, the self-evaluation and the ongoing meetings with the charter school and Alberta Education. Four members of the evaluation team were on onsite for the evaluation.
3. Interviews and focus group sessions were held to provide opportunities for the board, superintendent, deputy superintendent, principals, teachers, support staff, students, and parents to share insights about the school's successes and ideas about how the charter school might become even more effective.

- Individual interviews were conducted with the superintendent, deputy superintendent, principals, board chair and a board member, school council chair and council member and the secretary-treasurer.
- Two focus groups of eight teachers were conducted.
- Two focus groups of eight parents were conducted.
- Two focus groups of eight students were conducted.

Evaluation team members participated in classroom observations of grades K-9 to observe instruction, the design of student learning activities and student engagement. While debriefing these classroom observations, many individual impromptu conversations were held with teachers.

II. EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS, COMMENDATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REQUIRED CHANGES:

1. The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.

Aurora Academic Charter School has met the terms and conditions of its charter. Aurora has undergone a thorough review of the mission, vision and values of the charter, the policy manual review, and an updating of the Articles of Association since the last evaluation. This is a continuous process that needs to be done to ensure there is a coherence of understanding and practice throughout the charter in both the elementary and middle school.

Aurora's use of the Direct Instruction model is reflective of the school's vision. Through the use of teacher-led classroom instruction the teacher directly demonstrates, informs, models or gives examples of the end product of the lesson. Guided practice and teacher feedback are used to support student learning.

As indicated through a number of different performance measures that there is clear evidence of success. The Provincial Achievement Test results have been consistently very high in both the Acceptable Standard and the Standard of Excellence in all four core subject areas. The CTBS in reading and math scores continue to demonstrate that students are performing at or above grade level.

Key aspects of the relationship between students, staff and parents are teamwork, communication and most importantly the focus by all on the success of the whole child. Aurora's journey to focusing on student centeredness with in a teacher led instructional environment is at the beginning stages, and more work is to be done. It is important to recognize how Aurora has defined success through the lens of students, staff, parents, board and the community. Focusing on literacy, numeracy, the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning*, competencies, social connectedness, wellness, well-rounded educational opportunities and community involvement will further ground the charter school with the student at the center.

Commendations

There is a shared understanding of the Aurora Academic Charter School's charter with board members, administration, teachers and support staff. The mission and vision and the Direct Instruction Model are posted in the classrooms and hallways.

Aurora consistently scores very high and significantly above provincial averages in all Provincial Achievement Test results.

Required Change

Undertake a charter revisioning process that includes an articulation of the student centered approach within the direct instruction model.

Recommended Change

The school needs to continue their efforts for greater coherence within the school authority through all grade levels with a focus on student-centered instruction practice that includes assessment.

2. The school operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.

Based on the findings of this evaluation and as evidenced through yearly accountability and assurance processes, Aurora Academic Charter School meets the provincial requirements of the *Charter Schools Regulation* (Alberta Regulation 212/2002) and the *School Act*. The school follows the Alberta Programs of Study and provides the required amount of instructional time. Regular monitoring of the school by Alberta Education staff confirms its coherence with Ministry expectations. The school complies with Alberta Education planning, reporting and funding requirements in providing complete and timely information.

Commendations

Aurora willingly works with Alberta Education staff to comply with all legislative requirements.

The school invites Alberta Education staff on a regular basis, which facilitates opportunities for the exchange of ideas.

The school uses a coordinated approach to understanding First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives, culture and histories.

The school uses inclusive language in an intentional manner and models sensitivity to gender issues, as illustrated with offering gender-neutral school uniform choice.

3. The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful.

Students, parents and staff see Aurora Academic Charter School as being effective and successful. Over 99 per cent of students achieve the Acceptable Standard on Provincial Achievement Tests, and over double the provincial average attain Excellence on the tests. Survey results, by all stakeholders reveal a “Very High” satisfaction rate for the Standard of Education Quality, Work Preparation, Citizenship and Parental Involvement on the October 2018 Accountability Pillar Overall Summary for the school authority. School administration engages with all stakeholders to use their feedback to maintain or improve the satisfaction levels as measured by the provincial survey tools.

Parents, school council and staff attribute some of the strong provincial results and high stakeholder satisfaction to parent engagement in supporting the school’s commitment to high achievement. At the beginning of each year, parents sign a covenant promising to support their child with their studies and homework.

Stakeholders list routine, structure and teacher care as three strengths of the program. Though the model of direct instruction places a priority on sequential instruction and classroom routines, stakeholders spoke to the importance of student-centeredness within that model. Within the well-defined structures can be found examples of flexibility to accommodate for student needs. Instruction and assessment has evolved beyond the chalkboard, worksheets and pop quizzes to incorporate project-based learning, technology-based supports, rubrics and formative assessments. A parent related an anecdote where a teacher administered a spelling test via Skype for a family who was away for a period of time.

Students appreciated that teachers work hard to make “learning fun”. Students understand the importance of academics and they work hard to achieve the Honour Roll, but they spoke about teacher support when they encountered struggles. They appreciated that teachers in general are positive and encouraging. Students identified the varied opportunities provided by the school to use their talents through citizenship and leadership clubs, student council, drama and sports clubs and science activities. Older students have the opportunity to benefit from unique experiences offered by school trips.

Parents appreciate that teaching and support staff care deeply for all students at Aurora, even when the child is not under that person’s direct care. Many stakeholders used the term “community” or “family” to describe the school environment at Aurora. School staff are approachable and communicate effectively with parents through student agendas, email, newsletters and by phone. The board and administration communicate to parents through newsletters, email, the student information system, social media, the website and bulletin boards near the school entrance.

Staff spoke highly of the collaborative environment that allows for greater alignment between classes of the same grade and vertically with classes of different grades with respect to scope and sequence as well as assessment practices. The practice of naming curriculum leads has helped staff reflect on promising teaching and assessment practices. Staff have observed growth in the last few years as the school engages students in socializing skills, citizenship, goal setting and leadership skills.

Commendations

Students, parents and staff see Aurora as successful. This includes academic achievement, along side with developing citizenship, life skills, work ethic and personal responsibilities.

Teachers are incorporating research-based innovations into their teaching and assessment practices to support student learning.

The school provides a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment for students, families and staff.

The academic counselling to support the students in career choices is evident at an early age.

Recommendations

Aurora explore enhancing student supports, such as increased accessibility to counselling supports.

4. The school is financially viable and responsible.

In the past three school years, Aurora School Ltd. has budgeted enrolment numbers which were close to their actuals. Typically, 699 students enter and exit their school throughout a year and the budgeted numbers have been around 676. In 2018, 92 per cent (\$7.9 million) of the school's revenue was from Alberta Education.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Actual Expenses	\$7,020,460.	\$7,719,207.	\$8,516,954.
Budgeted Expenses	\$7,370,000.	\$7,656,900.	\$8,328,200.
Adjusted Accumulated Surplus (Deficit) from Operations	\$4,890,764.	\$3,938,635.	\$3,214,580.

Enrolment Data:

Year	Funded Students	FNMI Declared	Severely Disabled
2015/16	676	6	–
2016/17	676	6	–
2017/18	746	5	–

Aurora School Ltd.'s Adjusted Accumulated Surplus from Operations (ASO) declined by 19 per cent in 2016/17 school year and by 18 per cent in 2017/18 school year. The purpose of an ASO is to sustain operations during economic downturns and in emergent situations and the Aurora School Ltd.'s ASO represents that they have enough financial resources to cover their

financial liabilities if such a situation arises. Also, the financial viability of Aurora School Ltd. is very sensitive to changes in enrolment numbers. The enrolment in 2017/18 was 746 students which was an increase from the previous year by 70 students. The school administration has predicted an increase of 46 students in the 2018/19 school year. The student enrolment count for September 30, 2018 was 875 students. The school's expenses have been increasing in the past three years which is consistent with their enrolment growth. Overall, Aurora School Ltd. is financially healthy with an adequate level of ASO balance.

Aurora has had an enrolment growth in the current academic year that has helped their ASO and as a result it is financially healthy; we have no concerns regarding their operations.

5. Student Success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order (#001/2013)

The school authority has made a concerted effort to bring teaching staff together to review the competencies within the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning* (MO). Staff are cognizant of the '3 Es' and can articulate strategies that they use to develop engaged thinkers, ethical citizens and an entrepreneurial spirit. Students can identify examples where they have demonstrated their engagement as thinkers and ethical citizens, and have shown an entrepreneurial spirit, especially in project based activities such as the Science Fair, Student Leadership, WE Leadership, hot lunches and charity activities.

Commendations

Aurora is to be commended for the concerted effort they have put into collaboration amongst teachers and other stakeholders to raise awareness of the MO.

Clear efforts have been made to integrate technology in the teaching and learning process and all classrooms are equipped with interactive technology (e.g., smartboards).

Recommendation

In revising Aurora's Charter, ensure revised language is reflective of a student-centred approach within a teacher-led model of delivery.

Ensure the revised Charter also reflects an acknowledgment of the importance of developing cross-curricular competencies outlined in the MO.

6. Student achievement at the charter school is consistently strong or improving.

Aurora student achievement continues to be within the top 95+ percentile compared to other students in Alberta. The 2017/18 Combined Accountability Pillar results show Very High Achievement results in 7 of 9 measures: Education Quality; Drop-Out Rate; PAT – Acceptable; PAT – Excellence; Work Preparation; Citizenship and Parental Involvement.

Teachers use various assessments regularly to measure student performance and retention of information. They regularly communicate student performance and achievement with parents. The school's main areas of focus are literacy and numeracy skill development. Students are assessed yearly through the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and a high proportion of students are achieving above grade level. Students are motivated to achieve

honour roll status which is publicly recognized through an Honour Roll assembly at the end of each term.

Commendations

PAT mathematics achievement rates are significantly higher than provincial averages and showing a positive improvement trend from Grade 6 to Grade 9 (contrary to the provincial trend of declining mathematics PAT achievement).

Recommendation

Explore opportunities to incorporate more student-centered assessment practices that will enhance student ownership of their learning.

Explore ways of diversifying assessment to include competencies and higher order thinking skills.

Explore opportunities to develop greater coherence of assessment practices across grade levels.

7. The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.

In response to the Charter School Evaluation report in 2014, Aurora Academic Charter School established a professional learning community to develop a research program. Seven Aurora teachers committed to doing action research projects in the first year, under the guidance of Dr. Jim Parsons (professor from the University of Alberta). This cohort met for a full day, about every 6 weeks from the spring of 2015 through to the spring of 2016. Each meeting day, teachers received instruction on one of nine steps of action research, with time provided to work on their projects, with coaching provided. Action research projects covered a wide range of topics such as: effect of daily e-reading on reading comprehension for Grade 2 students, improving literacy and engagement in junior high language arts through student collaboration, the effects of community service projects on Grade 4 students, trying different strategies to support students in writing stories. Learnings were shared through a report with papers from each of the research projects.

Action research was continued for a second year with some new projects, and others continuing with more cycles of inquiry. Second year projects included studies on energy knowledge and misconceptions in Grade 8 students, assessment in mathematics, considering First Nations perspectives in music pedagogy, and continued inquiry into supports for students and parents around success on provincial assessments alongside wellbeing. The Aurora Community of Practice also invited staff participation from other charter schools in the supported research process.

In addition to meeting the research criteria for charter schools, many other benefits were realized: teachers became more reflective in their practice, staff made efforts to advance school-wide priorities like student engagement and the implementation of technology, and a culture of collaboration and professionalism was strengthened. In addition to the learnings from individual projects, the process supported the view that teachers' work will improve as they share and discuss their own practices. Rather than improving practice by bringing in

outside experts to share best practices, Aurora saw the power of embedding inquiry, reflection, and collegial support to change practice and improve student learning, and enhance the capacity of the whole community.

Of late, Aurora has been successful in applying to Alberta Education to investigate social connectedness in a multi-cultural setting in collaboration with Edmonton Public schools, the University of Alberta, and Simon Fraser University. Applications are in process for two other research grants: “Improving Inter-School Learner Transition and Well-Being: Using design-based research to enhance Support Networks for transitioning Alberta Elementary and Middle school students”, with the University of Calgary, Edmonton Public Schools and the Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools; and Building Opportunities and Enrichment for Junior High Girls to Facilitate an Increase in STEM projects in the Areas of Engineering, Innovation and Renewable Energy with Grant McEwan University.

Commendations

Aurora has been successful in implementing a research agenda that enlists teachers and administrators in inquiring into their practice to enhance teacher effectiveness. Research studies have led to changed practice in the school, such as the implementation of parent information meetings for parents new to the school and to share strategies to enhance well-being and success around Provincial Achievement Tests, and building leadership capacity in Grade 4 students through community service projects.

Teachers have used action research to advance school priorities such as, student engagement and well-being, academic success and technology integration.

Aurora has engaged in partnerships with various post secondary institutions to further investigate theory and practice to improve student learning.

Aurora has engaged expertise to support action-based research. Many staff have used Action Research to guide innovative practices and assess their efficacy. Results of research continue to inform practice at school.

Recommendations

While the two years of action research were supported with funds to enlist expert support, and release time, there is still value in embracing the research mindset more fully with all staff. Encouraging teachers to address problems of practice through reviewing the literature, collaborative dialogue, strategic action, and collecting data to measure impact can be done within current collaborative PD time, with support from those teachers who have completed full action research projects.

Undertake research projects which examine effects of more assessment for learning and formative approaches to responding to student learning.

Aurora should continue to encourage and support teacher driven action research.

8. The charter school shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community.

Aurora has shared the results of their research in many ways:

- Collaborative dialogue amongst colleagues to share problems of practice, and personal research;
- Refereed scholarly annual journal of innovative action research projects;
- Redesigned website that has a tab for research, featuring the action research publications, as well as the research and innovation podcasts;
- Active partnerships with multiple school authorities and universities; and
- Presenting research findings to other educators through GETCA, CASS, TAAPCS, and at the Alberta Education Research Network meeting.

Commendations

Establishing a strong community of practice focused on action research has shifted the professional learning culture, so that collaboration is highly valued and embedded into the schedule, ensuring that all Aurora teachers are working together to provide high quality learning opportunities for their students, based on evidence from research in their own context.

Aurora has sought out partners in conducting research, that also creates a broader network in which to share their research findings and improved teacher practice.

Aurora has actively sought opportunities to share research findings in various conferences, in writing, and through their website. The publication of the Action Research projects, presentations to CASS, Alberta Research Network, TAAPCS, GETCA demonstrates a sharing of practices and learning with others in the learning community.

The overall finding of many of the research projects is the power of collaborative practice to improve student learning across the school.

The research of the community of practice has shifted the culture so collaborative practice is embedded as an important component in professional learning.

9. The charter school reaches out beyond its walls to demonstrate broad and sustained levels of community engagement.

Stakeholders spoke of growth in opportunities for engagement for students and families over the last few years. Staff spoke highly of the collaborative environment at Aurora where their input is valued.

Students select activities that interest them. Older students have a voice in a student council which organizes activities for the entire student body. Younger students in Grade 4 can join clubs to develop leadership skills. Both student organizations coordinate fundraising activities that benefit the greater community.

Parents are welcome to attend public meetings of the board and all parents are de-facto members of one or both of the two school councils. The school organizes other engagement

sessions to inform its planning process, and it schedules different meeting times and alternate meeting locations throughout the city in order to reduce barriers to attendance. The school hired professional facilitators for certain consultation events to ensure that parent input is fully incorporated into the school's planning process.

Certificated teaching staff and support staff appreciate increased opportunities to provide input into the school authority's planning. All staff have access to professional development funds to support their own professional growth. Staff are encouraged to present at charter school conferences and events, as well as similar gatherings in the greater educational community.

The school also engages externally. The school collaborates with Sherbrooke Community League whereby each facilitates access to their respective facilities and services. The school has expanded its networking with local and city-wide community services. Student fundraising projects and citizenship activities have benefitted many organizations in the city. The school engages in conversations with post-secondary institutions, which has led to discussions about potential partnerships with mutual benefits.

Commendations

Partnerships with other agencies, services and individuals have sometimes facilitated through RCSD resulted in supports for students.

A partnership with amiskwaciy Academy has strengthened understanding of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories and culture.

Aurora has accessed various consultants to facilitate engagement processes with parents, students and staff.

Efforts have been made to enhance communication through the website, newsletters, posters in the schools, evening sessions, and willingness to adjust the times and location of stakeholder meetings throughout the city was appreciated by the parent community.

Engagement of the Sherbrooke community through service projects, fund raising, and community consultations has been successful.

Recommendation

The board should develop and implement a communication plan to support broad and sustained levels of stakeholder engagement.

10. The charter school is governed effectively.

Aurora Academic Charter School was required to address the separation of the governance of the board from the operations of the school. The board hired an external consultant to lead them in a review and update of the Board Policies and Articles of Association, to reflect a clear and coherent separation in the roles and responsibilities of governance and administration. This was done through community consultation and extensive committee work. There is more work that needs to be done with Board Policies to ensure that all policies are updated, and there is a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of the board and administration.

There is a clear understanding of the distinct role between the board, administration, staff and community as demonstrated through the day-to-day operation of the school. In their governance role, the Board has delegated operational control to the Superintendent, and seeks to clearly maintain an appropriate relationship with staff and parents in regard to communication with the Board. Staff are clear on the lines of communication and this is reflected in the operations of the school.

Commendations

The Board has spent considerable effort to review and revise board policies, administration procedures, and Articles of Association to separate governance from operation.

A clear delineation of roles and responsibilities is understood by the board, the superintendent, the school administration and the staff.

Staff have a clear understanding of the lines of communication.

Recommendation

Continue to review and update policies to ensure the clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of the board and administration.

11. The school is administered effectively.

Aurora Academic Charter School operates with an administrative team for each of its two schools who occupy two wings of the same building. They collaborate effectively with each other to provide guidance and mentorship to all school staff. The administrative teams continue to explore opportunities for alignment between the two schools. Administration bring all staff together for certain professional development days to encourage conversations about the school charter, and to achieve a common understanding about the role of direct instruction within the context of an inclusive learning environment, and the role of innovation with respect to the authority's teaching and assessment practices. Staff and parents appreciate the administration's promotion of action research with a focus on continuous improvement.

Parents and staff commented on the improvement in communication over the last few years, and they appreciate the multiple communication channels used by administration: newsletters, principal reports at school council meetings, school website, social media, bulletin board in the parent gathering area. The administration has used technology to create effective tools for sharing of information, which allow for a collaborative environment. Stakeholders articulated that concerns are best dealt with at the classroom level before bringing those concerns to the attention of administration. Administration are approachable and effective in dealing with issues that come to their attention. Over the last few years, there is a greater awareness of which issues are governance matters that need to go to the superintendent and the board.

Commendations

Parents and students expressed appreciation for the support they receive from school administration, teachers and support staff.

Clear and timely communication from the school administrators are greatly appreciated.

12. The charter school is committed to engaging students, teachers, parents and community members in a model of continuous improvement.

From the most recent Aurora Evaluation report (2014) there were six required changes that Aurora needed to address.

Required changes:

**Aurora must take steps to enhance stakeholder understanding of the Ministerial Order (#001/2013) on Student Learning.*

There is strong evidence that the Aurora learning community has a strong understanding in both policy and practice of the MO on Student Learning. Students set personal goals through the lens of the MO on Student Learning. These goals are discussed and assessed at the beginning and at the end of the year. No greater evidence was presented than the students being able to speak to how their work demonstrates being engaged thinkers, ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit. The students spoke of their goal setting using the 3E's, their charity work, community partnerships, project work, and their work in coding, robotics and post secondary opportunities.

**Aurora's administrative team should develop a school wide model for understanding of the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) and determine evaluation and feedback mechanisms to foster professional growth by all teachers.*

Aurora has developed and are using the Teacher Professional Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Handbook. The Aurora Aspiring Leadership Program staff presented the new TQS to colleagues fostering professional growth for everyone.

**The focus on the use of research by teachers and administrators to inform innovative practice and achieve enhanced outcomes must be given a higher priority. The board, administration and professional staff must work together to develop a research plan for the school.*

Aurora has grown their use of research on teaching and assessment to improve student learning. Aurora's action research community of practice has produce two volumes of action research projects. These reports serve to share insights about practice with others, demonstrate evidence of collaboration to improve teaching practice, and to drive improvement in the school and throughout the Alberta education environment.

Aurora has partnered with various post secondary institutions, such as University of Calgary, University of Alberta, University of Lethbridge, Simon Fraser University, and Grant McEwan University to engage in research that informs Aurora and the greater educational community.

**The Board must take significant and timely action, through policy and increased stakeholder dialogue, to clarify the various roles of the board, superintendent and school based administrators.*

The Aurora board and administrative team have extensively reviewed and updated the board policies, administrative regulations and the Articles of Association to assure clarity in

governance operations and operational functions. Through discussions with the board, senior leadership, administration, and staff, there is a clear understanding of practice of the roles and responsibilities of the board and the clear separation of the operational functions of the charter school. More work needs to be done to review and update all policies to ensure the clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of the board and administration. Please see Governance for the recommended change.

**Many students, parents and teachers at Aurora aspire to increased opportunity for ‘voice’ in decision-making. The board must develop and clarify the structures it will use to communicate openly with stakeholders. The board must build on its initial efforts to build alliances and create regular opportunities for dialogue with the key stakeholders at the school.*

The board hosted numerous stakeholder engagements with staff and parents over the past three years, ten in the last year. Through the review of the Articles of Association, the board had community engagement sessions with staff and parents. The board meeting highlights and board minutes are posted on the website. There have been four updates to the website in the past year to improve communication with the Aurora community. The board provides trimester updates to all stakeholders. Parents are appreciative on the information provided on the website. The email system has some parents struggling in receiving the information. Even with the increase in opportunity for ‘voice’ and an increase in communication it is good to see that the board is developing and implementing a communication plan.

**To ensure more effective communication between school staff, administration and parents, the superintendent and school leadership team members must take steps to establish a more cohesive, team-centred relationship.*

From discussions with administration and staff the common focus of ‘What is best for students?’ was evident. The student-centred model with teacher-led instruction has supported a more cohesive relationship of administration, staff and parents. More work is needed to develop greater coherence within the school authority with a focus on student-centered instruction practice that includes assessment. Please see ‘1. The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success’ for the recommended change.’

Commendations

Aurora Academic Charter School is commended for its efforts made in creating a culture of continuous improvement.

CONCLUSION

As a result of our evaluation processes, the team is satisfied that Aurora Academic Charter School is meeting the requirements of legislation and regulations for charter schools. There is some variance in the degree to which the evaluation criteria are met. This variance is reflected in the commendations, recommendations and required changes identified in the body of this report. As Aurora Charter School moves forward in its endeavour to provide the very best possible education for students, it is encouraged to celebrate its many successes, while implementing the recommendations and directions provided by Alberta Education Evaluation team.

The Alberta Education Evaluation Team extends its sincere thanks to the board, administration, staff, students, and parents.



**Aurora Academic Charter School
Aurora School Ltd.**

Self-Evaluation Report

**Submission to Alberta Education in Compliance with
Charter School Evaluation Strategy 2018/19**

January, 2019

Self-Evaluation Accountability Statement:

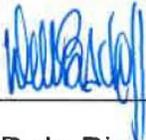
The Aurora Academic Charter School self-evaluation was completed under the advisement and direction of the Aurora School Ltd. Board of Directors in accordance with its directives within the Alberta School Act and the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This report was generated in the consideration and context of the provincial government's current business and fiscal plans.

The Aurora School Ltd. Board of Directors, in consultation with the Superintendent of Schools and multiple educational stakeholders, used past and current sources of school data to inform and compose this self-evaluation including the Aurora Combined Three Year Plan and Annual Education Results Reports, Aurora Charter Evaluation Report November 17, 2014 (Alberta Education), Aurora School Council input, Student Achievement Analysis including formative and summative assessment results (longitudinal), multiple stakeholder input along with a generative process to assure accurate and coherent input in this process and resultant self-evaluation report.

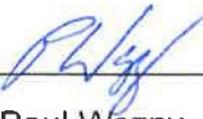
This report was completed on: January 31, 2019 .



Mrs. Arlene Huhn, Chair
Aurora School Ltd. Board of Directors



Dr. Dale Bischoff
Chief Superintendent



Dr. Paul Wozny
Deputy Superintendent

1. Charter Conditions: The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success

Aurora currently meets the terms and conditions of its Charter and has exemplary performance measures and results that show clear evidence of success.

Aurora Academic Charter Schools is guided by our shared vision, mission and organizational goals These include:

- A. **Vision:** Aurora Charter School is the best choice for traditional public education in Alberta
- B. **Mission:** To provide an orderly and structured environment, with properly sequenced teacher-directed instruction and strong home/school partnerships, where average children can excel in an academically oriented program.
- C. **Goals:**
 - a. To have an enhanced English Language Arts program;
 - b. To have an enhanced Mathematics program.

Our Aurora Academic Charter School teaching and learning team continue to forge an exemplary record of high student achievement results. Although we are a school situated in a modest social-economic area of the City of Edmonton, our students continued to score **very high and significantly above provincial averages in all subjects as indicated by our Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) results. Our Aurora students' PAT pass rate was 99.8%** compared to the provincial average of 73.6% and our Aurora students' **PAT excellence rate (80% or higher) was 47.8%** compared to the provincial average of 19.9% for 2018. These exceptional results, year-after-year longitudinally, provide testament to the dedication and efficacy of our student-focused, teacher-directed pedagogical systemic approach that optimizes a highly defined instructional and learning structure coupled with a strong work ethic and focus on enhancement of numeracy and literacy knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies across Alberta Education curriculum outcomes. Our exceptional results speak to the strong sense of engagement and community among the students, parents, teachers, school administration team, School Council and Board of Directors at Aurora.

The University of Alberta Faculty of Education Vice Dean, Dr. Lynn McGarvey, is currently engaged with our Aurora Academic Charter School team in an Alberta Education sponsored provincial research project investigating longitudinal students' achievement in mathematics learning outcomes as students progress through grades 3, 6, and 9. This research tracks the Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) success rates in each mathematics curriculum learner outcome along with trajectories in achievement as students progress through elementary and junior high school. School Authorities across Alberta are participating in this longitudinal analysis of student achievement in mathematics in Provincial Achievement Tests along with trajectory analysis and associated dynamics with curricular outcomes and progressions. The three student cohorts under this Alberta PAT mathematics trajectories analysis include:

- 1) 2002/2005/2008
- 2) 2003/2006/2009
- 3) 2011/2014/2017

The evidence gathered from this curriculum focused analysis will inform provincial trends in mathematics/numeracy success rates in specific curriculum outcomes as students progress from grades 3 to 9 in Alberta. The results from this analysis will also assist curriculum redesign teams in Alberta addressing the refresh of mathematics curriculum, which includes learner outcomes, concepts, competencies, instructional resources and new and novel assessment processes and protocols. Our Aurora students' PAT achievement continue to improve from Grade 6 to 9 longitudinally and counters the falling achievement evidenced by provincial averages and division-by-division comparison of student achievement. In fact, Aurora's PAT results are so much higher than provincial averages, we were invited to share our systemic numeracy teaching and learning pedagogical strategies with the Alberta Research Network and multiple Alberta stakeholders, practitioners, researchers, and leaders at the Federal Building

in Edmonton, during the spring of 2018. Deeper analysis and trajectory outcome-related trends will provide much needed timely support to our education community in strategies to optimize students' mathematics sophistication and ability to utilize and generalize numeracy knowledge, concepts, skills, and competencies now and into their future.

Aurora Academic Public Charter Schools

Mathematics Trajectories - Research, Evidence, and Innovation to Improve Student Learning and Achievement

Findings:

Aurora Students' PAT longitudinal achievement results and trends support research that consistency of pedagogy, targeted supports, and minimization of disruptions for each student's learning context positively affect student performance:

- o Aurora students remain from K to 9 in same location/pedagogical context; both elementary and middle schools share the same building and collaborative/specialized mathematics instructional teams. Our instructional year contains shorter summer break period which may affect retention and reinforcement of learner outcomes and associated competencies;
- o Aurora PAT student achievement Grade 3,6,9 across all three cohorts is significantly above provincial averages (both pass rates and excellence rates) even though our socio-economic averages are below regional averages.

Aurora	2001/02 Gr. 3 Acceptable 91.1 Excellence 33.3	2002/03 Gr. 3 Acceptable 97.7 Excellence 48.8	2004/05 Gr. 6 Acceptable 97.8 Excellence 40.0	2005/06 Gr. 6 Acceptable 97.6 Excellence 31.7	2007/08 Gr. 9 Acceptable 93.8 Excellence 50.0	2008/09 Gr. 9 Acceptable 95.1 Excellence 58.5	2010/11 Gr. 3 Acceptable 98.0 Excellence 56.9	2013/14 Gr. 6 Acceptable 100 Excellence 47.7	2016/17 Gr. 9 Acceptable 100.0 Excellence 68.8
Alberta	Acceptable 88.5 Excellence 29.2	Acceptable 89.2 Excellence 32.3	Acceptable 85.7 Excellence 19.9	Acceptable 82.7 Excellence 17.0	Acceptable 73.8 Excellence 20.4	Acceptable 73.9 Excellence 20.2	Acceptable 84.4 Excellence 28.3	Acceptable 80.7 Excellence 17.0	Acceptable 74.8 Excellence 21.1



Our Research team acknowledges that we are located on Treaty Six Territory, and respect the history, languages, ceremonies and culture of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit and all Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

Aurora Academic Public Charter Schools

Mathematics Trajectories - Supporting Research to Improve Numeracy Teaching, Learning, Assessment, and Student Achievement

Aurora Mathematics Teaching and Learning Team Reflections on PAT Results Longitudinally:

- Students' confidence and performance in basic facts is assured through consistent repetition and practice with targeted feedback and support. Clear, consistent, and coherent expectations for mastery of specific learner outcomes at each stage of learning.
- Employment of spiral and cumulative pedagogical approach that actively links previous learned outcomes with current learning outcomes. This targeted cumulative approach is not only within grades, but throughout all grades in both the elementary and middle school contexts.
- Highly engaged parents with regular communication between teacher/parent/student coupled with daily curriculum aligned and inter-disciplinary numeracy enhanced homework component reinforces the importance of mathematics and related competencies across all subjects and assures multiple exposures and supports for each curricular outcome.
- Mathematics teaching and learning team work collaboratively; a number of staff are currently engaged in mathematics action research/graduate study.
- Targeted remediation offered to student's struggling with particular curricular outcomes. This process integrates a highly responsive network of timely formative assessment protocols to assure learning and understanding. Assessments include both traditional pencil and paper assessments along with competency-based/performance assessments.



Our Research team acknowledges that we are located on Treaty Six Territory, and respect the history, languages, ceremonies and culture of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit and all Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

Aurora’s Charter mandate includes enhanced mathematics and literacy instruction and assessment. The following CTBS standardized test results clearly demonstrate both short term and longitudinal success exemplified by our Aurora students in concert with the exemplary pedagogy imbued in our teaching and learning systems:

Charter Outcome 1: Aurora students are reading above grade level in Language Arts

Performance Measures	Results (in percentages)					Target*	Targets		
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2018	2019	2020	2021
Percentage of students reading above grade level in English Language Arts according to CTBS assessments.	86	81	85	83	84	84	85	86	86

Assessment of Results

Our Aurora teaching and learning team is focused on enhancing our students’ English Language Arts knowledge, skills, and competencies. We continued to have ESL pull-out support teachers, and we believe that this project has positively impacted our students.

Strategies Employed:

- Curriculum leads/coaches established among teaching staff to assist teacher collaboration and reflection/input on pedagogy and student achievement;
- Increased PD opportunities for staff including literary focus, teacher talk, and technology in writing sessions;
- Continue with our successful Riggs phonics/spelling program and our phonics pull-out reading support in the Elementary School and Middle School;
- Provide more teacher collaboration time for curriculum alignment across grades to reduce barriers for students;
- Examine assessment practices among grade groups and review reporting structures to accurately communicate student learning;
- Provide parents with various opportunities to build their own skill-set so that they can assist their children at home through information evenings such as a Phonics Information Evening, Kindergarten Discovery Day, PAT information night, study skills and stress management night, new student orientation, etc.
- Continue to provide ESL support for students and ESL instruction professional development through school based funding. ESL pull-out time has been expanded from the Elementary to our Middle School students;
- Integrate enhanced technology into classrooms to further engage students and enhance instruction;
- Enhance Learning Commons utilization by bringing in various authors/illustrators to actively engage students;
- New teachers are provided mentoring support for the Riggs Phonics/spelling and direct instruction model, both of which are important to our ongoing success;
- As the school staff adds new members, curriculum meetings are becoming more necessary. Teachers are increasingly considering issues of curriculum and assessment alignment and pedagogical mapping;
- We are enhancing student access to the Learning Commons (LC) and have added staff to the LC with both MLS and Library Technology designations;

- Middle School professional development has included a reading comprehension specialist for all staff, not only ELA staff;
- Middle School has designated a teacher to attend assessment professional development to enhance teaching and learning practices in ELA.
- Elementary staff are aligning instruction around the Empowering Writers model through all grades to improve students' achievement across all facets of English Language Arts.

Charter Outcome 2: Aurora students are achieving above grade level in Mathematics.

Performance Measures	Results (in percentages)					Targets		
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Percentage of students achieving above grade level in Math according to CTBS assessments.	86	80	80	84	90	86	87	88

Assessment of Results:

Our student achievement results both in CTBS assessments and provincial achievement exams are among the very best in Alberta and significantly above provincial averages. We are pleased to see the increase in Aurora students that are achieving above grade level in mathematics from 84% in 2017 to 90% in 2018.

Strategies:

- Establishment of curriculum lead/coach teachers to work with staff teams to collaborate and support optimal pedagogy and student achievement;
- Enhance/increase teacher collaboration time and analysis of curriculum outcome learning and achievement at all grade levels;
- Continue to provide ESL support for students through school-based funding;
- Provide parents with various opportunities to build their own skill-set so that they can assist their children at home through access to various instructional resources such as on-line lessons;
- Integrate enhanced technology into classrooms to further engage students and enhance numeracy instruction;
- Math instruction at the elementary level is critically and regularly reviewed by teachers working in teams;
- Initiated an extracurricular Mathematics club for grade 6;
- Math assistance is available during lunch hours and during study period for all students in Middle School;
- The Elementary teaching and learning team completed an Action Research Project into the use of formative targeted feedback in mathematics lessons to better reach struggling students;
- The Elementary completed a pilot project into expanding the Saxon Math program from grade one to four to allow for vertical pedagogical and curricular outcomes alignment throughout the Elementary. Early results were promising so the program has been expanded to include all classes. This will allow a better transition between grades and into the Middle School, which uses a similar process;
- Middle School has designated a teacher to attend assessment professional development to enhance teaching and learning practices in mathematics;

- Middle School completed an Action Research project to incorporate a Growth Mindset into Mathematical learning processes.

2. Provincial Requirements: The school operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements

Aurora Academic Charter School and core goals are premised on the “Goals and Standards applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta” as articulated in the Alberta Education “Guide to Education.” Aurora expands and enhances these core goals in the domains of mathematics and literacy. Our enhanced goals are clearly stated in our Charter, lived in the daily experiences of our students, staff, parents and stakeholders, and quantifiable in our provincial and standardized assessment protocols. A summary of the Aurora Charter, goals, Annual Education Results Report and Three Year Plan are accessible online on our newly redesigned Aurora website: <https://www.auroraschool.ca/documents>

3. Successful: The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful

Aurora stakeholders share positive feedback on the success of our teaching and learning programs. In particular our Elementary School had extremely positive feedback (2018 Accountability Pillar Surveys) and a significant overall improvement in stakeholder survey feedback on the success of our school program, 85.7% in 2018 compared to 79.1% in previous 3 year average. Both our Elementary and Middle school teams are working extensively with our stakeholders to analyze yearly feedback and collaborate as a part of our systemic approach to ongoing improvement coupled with inspiring and accountable teaching and learning. Although stakeholder accountability pillar results pointed to a significant increase in stakeholders’ positive perceptions on the school continuous improvement for our Elementary School, this was not the case for our Middle School. Our middle school dropped from a previous three year average of 77.6% to 70.4% for 2018. Our Middle School administration team is currently in deep engagement with staff, parents, students and stakeholders along with our Elementary team to address this feedback and implement strategies to improve stakeholder perceptions on middle school continuous improvement. Strategies include: detailed analysis of accountability pillar results and analysis by each cohort; regular dialogue and generative discussion with senior admin team and all Aurora administration to compare and contrast strategies employed by Elementary and Middle Schools targeting and communicating continuous improvement strategies and evidence to inform school policy and practice. This process included a school stakeholder engagement session moderated by Alberta Government facilitator/moderator Marci Scharle. The feedback shared by our parents, staff, students and community members provided powerful and authentic generative input to inform our future strategic planning and related pedagogical processes.

Accountability Pillar Overall Summary
Annual Education Results Reports - Oct 2018
School: 6006 Aurora School



Measure Category	Measure	Aurora Elementary School			Alberta			Measure Evaluation		
		Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 Year Average	Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 Year Average	Achievement	Improvement	Overall
Safe and Caring Schools	Safe and Caring	90.3	91.6	87.6	89.0	89.5	89.4	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Student Learning Opportunities	Program of Studies	82.3	85.7	76.7	81.8	81.9	81.7	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
	Education Quality	96.3	96.6	94.6	90.0	90.1	89.9	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
	Drop Out Rate	n/a	0.0	0.0	2.3	3.0	3.3	n/a	n/a	n/a
	High School Completion Rate (3 yr)	n/a	n/a	n/a	78.0	78.0	77.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PAT: Acceptable	n/a	n/a	98.4	73.6	73.4	73.3	n/a	n/a	n/a
Student Learning Achievement (Grades K-9)	PAT: Excellence	n/a	n/a	45.5	19.9	19.5	19.2	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Diploma: Acceptable	n/a	n/a	n/a	83.7	83.0	83.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Student Learning Achievement (Grades 10-12)	Diploma: Excellence	n/a	n/a	n/a	24.2	22.2	21.7	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Diploma Exam Participation Rate (4+ Exams)	n/a	n/a	n/a	55.7	54.9	54.7	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Rutherford Scholarship Eligibility Rate	n/a	n/a	n/a	63.4	62.3	61.5	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Transition Rate (5 yr)	n/a	n/a	n/a	58.7	57.9	59.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Preparation for Lifelong Learning, World of Work, Citizenship	Work Preparation	87.8	95.7	87.0	82.4	82.7	82.4	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
	Citizenship	90.5	86.1	82.7	83.0	83.7	83.7	Very High	Improved	Excellent
Parental Involvement	Parental Involvement	87.4	88.7	83.3	81.2	81.2	81.0	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Continuous Improvement	School Improvement	85.7	79.8	79.1	80.3	81.4	80.7	Very High	Improved	Excellent

Accountability Pillar Overall Summary
Annual Education Results Reports - Oct 2018
School: 1939 Aurora School



Measure Category	Measure	Aurora Middle School			Alberta			Measure Evaluation		
		Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 Year Average	Current Result	Prev Year Result	Prev 3 Year Average	Achievement	Improvement	Overall
Safe and Caring Schools	Safe and Caring	87.6	88.1	87.8	89.0	89.5	89.4	High	Maintained	Good
Student Learning Opportunities	Program of Studies	73.2	76.6	74.1	81.8	81.9	81.7	Intermediate	Maintained	Acceptable
	Education Quality	91.3	92.6	93.0	90.0	90.1	89.9	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
	Drop Out Rate	0.0	n/a	n/a	2.3	3.0	3.3	Very High	n/a	n/a
	High School Completion Rate (3 yr)	n/a	n/a	n/a	78.0	78.0	77.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PAT: Acceptable	99.8	98.7	99.0	73.6	73.4	73.3	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Student Learning Achievement (Grades K-9)	PAT: Excellence	47.8	55.5	51.7	19.9	19.5	19.2	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
	Diploma: Acceptable	n/a	n/a	n/a	83.7	83.0	83.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Student Learning Achievement (Grades 10-12)	Diploma: Excellence	n/a	n/a	n/a	24.2	22.2	21.7	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Diploma Exam Participation Rate (4+ Exams)	n/a	n/a	n/a	55.7	54.9	54.7	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Rutherford Scholarship Eligibility Rate	n/a	n/a	n/a	63.4	62.3	61.5	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Transition Rate (5 yr)	n/a	n/a	n/a	58.7	57.9	59.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Preparation for Lifelong Learning, World of Work, Citizenship	Work Preparation	91.1	92.9	93.4	82.4	82.7	82.4	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
	Citizenship	81.4	82.7	82.9	83.0	83.7	83.7	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Parental Involvement	Parental Involvement	84.4	77.4	79.5	81.2	81.2	81.0	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Continuous Improvement	School Improvement	70.4	79.8	77.6	80.3	81.4	80.7	Low	Declined Significantly	Concern

4. Financially Viable: The school is financially viable and responsible

Aurora is financially viable, responsible and prosperous. We continue to invest in improving our programs and facilities including a recently completed (June, 2018) elevator and wrap-around inclusive learning support flex centre. Aurora upgraded our two main gymnasiums and enhanced our cardiovascular and strength wellness training centres. Aurora is currently engaged in the design and tender process for a major renovation to our Elementary entrance area that will include an enhanced parent/student engagement area and flexible administration/staff meeting area. These enhancements to our facility will be funded within our existing Aurora budget.

Summary of Financial Results for Aurora School 2017-18			
<i>(in thousands of dollars)</i>			
	2017-18	2016-17	Change (%)
Revenue Summary by Source			
Government of Alberta	\$ 7,979	\$ 7,639	4.5%
Instructional Fees	215	180	19.4%
Transportation Fees	267	236	13.1%
Other	183	145	26.2%
	\$ 8,644	\$ 8,200	5.4%
Program Expenditures			
Instruction Grades K - 9	\$ 6,089	\$ 5,651	7.8%
Plant Operations and Maintenance	1,282	1,096	17.0%
Transportation	689	570	20.9%
Board & System Administration	457	402	13.7%
	\$ 8,517	\$ 7,719	10.3%
Surplus (Deficit)	\$ 127	\$ 481	
Accumulated Operating Surplus			
<i>(as at August 31)</i>			
Unrestricted net assets	\$ 74	\$ (202)	
Operating reserves	3,141	4,141	
Total	\$ 3,215	\$ 3,939	
Revenue Summary by Source (%)			
2017-18			
Government of Alberta (93.16%)	\$ 7,979		
Instructional Fees (2.20%)	215		
Transportation Fees (2.88%)	267		
Other (1.76%)	183		
	\$ 8,644		
Expenditures by Program (%)			
Instruction Grades K - 9 (73.21%)	\$ 6,089		
Plant Operations and Maintenance (14.20%)	1,282		
Transportation (7.38%)	689		
Board & System Administration (5.21%)	457		
	\$ 8,517		

5. Student Success: Student success is determined in accordance with Ministerial Order #001/2013

Our Aurora teaching and learning team has strategically focused during the last two years on the expectations and recommendations of Alberta Education's external evaluation team (2014 Aurora School Ltd. Charter Evaluation) to optimize student, staff, parent and stakeholder success and alignment with the current Alberta Education Ministerial Order on Student Learning. In particular, we have focused on ensuring that all stakeholders are well aware in both policy and practice, the three Es - ***Engaged Thinker and Ethical Citizen with an Entrepreneurial Spirit.***

Key strategies generated and employed by our Aurora teaching and learning team include:

1. Review and overhaul of the Aurora Board of Directors Policy Manual and Aurora Articles of Association to build clarity, communication, and coherence for all stakeholders. This process includes:
 - a. Extensive analysis and refinement of Board Policies in alignment with the Alberta Education Ministerial Order on Student Learning along with current applicable Alberta Education legislation and policy;
 - b. Review and update of Administrative Regulations to clearly define administrative operational procedures and to build clarity and consistency in the roles of governance and administration.
 - c. Refinement and renewal of our Aurora Articles of Association to provide **clear separation and clarity** in roles of **governance and administration** along with **compliance with current Alberta Education legislation and regulations.**

2. Our Aurora teaching and learning team completed our 2nd Volume of school-based action research and community of practice. Our Aurora team's Action Research completed projects are accessible online on our newly updated Aurora website located at: <https://www.auroraschool.ca/> under the Research Header. The research project titles/themes include:
 - a. Assessment in Mathematics;
 - b. Energy Knowledge and Misconceptions in Grade 8 students;
 - c. Fostering Effective Vertical and Horizontal Collaboration within Single School and Multi-School Settings Simultaneously and Independently;
 - d. Google Chromebook Implementation at Aurora Academic Charter School;
 - e. Creating Opportunities for the Growth of Student Success;
 - f. Exploring the Efficacy of Flipped Classrooms Compared to Traditional Lecture Classrooms;
 - g. Indigenous arts, music and culture.

3. One of our Aurora collaborative action research projects was accepted for publication in the highly esteemed ***Canadian Journal of Teacher Research***:
 - Dang P. and Tran V. Energy Knowledge and Misconceptions in Grade 8 Students. May 31, 2017.

4. Our Aurora School students and staff continue their exemplary creative and entrepreneurial inter-disciplinary efforts and winning achievements at the Edmonton Regional Science Fair and the Canada Wide Science Fair (2018). Our students continue to distinguish our teaching and learning team with strong efforts and high participation rates (representing Alberta in National Science Fair events) that reflect our collaborative efforts building entrepreneurial spirit and creativity in our students' lived experiences with our Aurora team. We have built upon the success of our Middle School Science Fair program by expanding it into the Elementary School to provide authentic, project-based learning experiences that support student success.

5. Our Aurora teaching and learning team continue to develop and integrate leading-edge instructional technologies to complement our direct-instructional student-focused approach. Our Director of

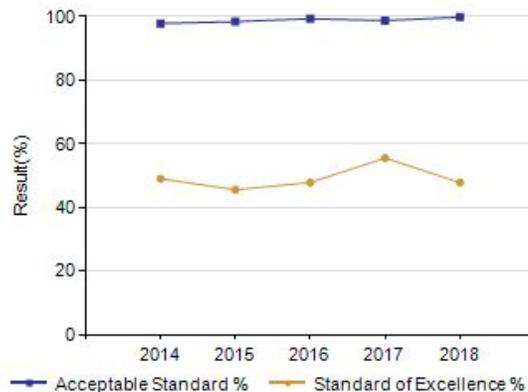
Technology and staff are actively engaged in professional development employing a coaching model to build our capacity to employ freely available applications such as Google Docs and similar programs to enhance the learning experience for every student. Moreover, we are extending the envelope of access to teaching and learning resources toward a 24/7 accessible model that optimizes access and use by all stakeholders. Our inaugural Technology Week (2018) celebrating a variety of innovative teaching and learning opportunities for our students from robots to computer coding was attended by our Alberta Minister of Education Honourable David Eggen, along with a large number of students, parents, and community stakeholders.

6. On October 27, 2017, Aurora Academic Charter School hosted the Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools (TAAPCS) biennial conference that included participation and inspiring dialogue by our Honourable Minister of Education and fellow teacher, David Eggen. Our guest speaker Edmonton Councilor Aaron Paquette shared an inspiring view into First Nations, Métis and Inuit experiences along with celebration of our rich Indigenous history. We appreciated the opportunity to network with our public charter school peers, Alberta Education, Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and university research and innovation partners across Alberta. More than 400 educators, administrators, and research-practitioners participated in our sessions that covered a multiple of topics from innovation in pedagogy, to research to inform policy and practice. The feedback from this conference was very positive and actively engaged our Alberta Public Charter Schools in collegial and generative discussion and sharing in our lived experience as public schools of choice distinguished by pedagogical innovation, research and dissemination with our peers from local to international.
7. Our Deputy Superintendent attended the Alberta Métis Nation of Alberta Gala Celebration and Dinner held at the Edmonton Kingsway Inn and Conference Centre on Friday November 16, 2018 during Alberta Métis Week. This event included celebration of our rich indigenous culture and scholarships for upcoming Indigenous scholars and achievers. Our school is proud to celebrate Métis week and we encourage all students and families to attend events through our newsletter and resources available in the Learning Commons. Orange Shirt Day is one of our highlight events of the year as we come together in a spirit of reconciliation. Our Aurora teachers have participated in blanket ceremonies to build our understanding of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous histories and viewpoints, and we continually seek out new professional development opportunities and resources to continue to infuse First Nations knowledge and viewpoints into the curriculum and our pedagogical culture..
8. Successful development and inclusion of numerous systemic wellness initiatives including:
 - a. Implementation of students' Leadership and Social Justice Clubs;
 - b. Expansion of physical activities for students to include cross-country running, volleyball, basketball, soccer, skating, yoga, dance, track and field, intramurals and participation in a number of Edmonton area athletic events;
 - c. Engagement of community partners to enhance curricular programs through special presenters for dance and in-line skating, as well as an active partnership with the Sherbrooke Community League in shared use of basketball courts, skating rink, and community hall for phys. ed. and extracurricular activities while giving back to the community by hosting fundraisers and community clean-up initiatives in partnership with our schools;
 - d. Enhancement of our student/staff wellness centres that include both cardiovascular and strength training resources and equipment, as well as a weekly free yoga program for staff;
 - e. Active engagement of psychologists and counselors to improve teacher/stakeholder knowledge and efficacy to meet the needs of all students and provide optimal supports for successful learning and wellness for our entire Aurora team of stakeholders as well as targeted and timely student/parent/staff learning and wellness supports;
 - f. Teacher Action Research projects focused on improving systemic wellness.

9. Our Action Research Community of Practice has grown to include multiple school/division partners as well as sponsored projects in collaboration with the University of Alberta, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, Aurora Academic Charter Schools, and Edmonton Public Schools. We were the successful recipient in an Alberta Education call for research proposals that resulted in **\$50,000.00 in grants** to explore parents' perspectives in parent-teacher interview processes with a lens to improve social connectedness. As shared earlier, our Aurora research team is also engaged in a provincial Mathematics trajectories achievement analysis with Principal Investigator and Vice Dean of Education Faculty, Dr. Lynn McGarvey. We are honoured to continue our innovation and research partnerships with Alberta Education, The Association of Alberta Charter Schools, and multiple school authorities, and Universities across Canada. We are currently growing our research partnership with Edmonton Public School Division Research Department to extend our collaborative research efforts, capabilities, knowledge translation and projects.

6. Student Achievement: Student achievement at the charter school is consistently strong or improving

Graph of Overall Provincial Achievement Test Results



Aurora student achievement continues to thrive and be at the very top 95+ percentile in Alberta. As shared earlier in this report, Alberta Education and the University of Alberta continue deep research analysis of our exemplary longitudinal PAT mathematics pass and excellence rates for student achievement that are significantly higher than provincial averages and among the very highest in Alberta. Moreover, the provincial trend of declining mathematics PAT achievement from grade 6 to 9 is countered by our Aurora continued improvement in both pass rates and excellence rates of achievement. Our teaching and learning team at Aurora pride ourselves on the value of hard work coupled with inspiring and highly structured teaching and learning strategies dedicated to high rates of student success and achievement. Our Aurora staff-based curriculum team-leads/coaches imbue a systemic pedagogical culture of collaboration and deep analysis of student learning processes and achievement across curricular outcomes and generalizability to inter-disciplinary contexts from cognitive to conceptual and psychomotor.

7. Research Informed: The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning

Our Aurora teaching and learning team is actively engaged in research-informed policy and practice to continuously improve our innovative, inspiring and motivational teaching and learning dynamics for every student. Our highly structured and accountable pedagogical framework includes the implementation of learning strategies validated by multiple national and international educational researchers including Dr. Madeline Hunter, Dr. Siegfried Engelmann, Dr. Barak Rosenshine and Dr. Lynne Erickson to name a small sample of the many research-informed and evidence-based policies and practices Aurora employs. Our Aurora teaching and learning team actively utilize and adapt a highly structured direct instructional framework that includes: anticipatory set; targeted review and support; enhanced clarity and coherence of learner objectives/outcomes; motivational cues and teacher/student demonstrations; scaffolding coupled with regular formative assessment checks for understanding; opportunities for student practice and transference of conceptual knowledge to new and novel situations and interdisciplinary contexts; lesson closure reinforcing specific learner outcomes and related outcome-specific homework to further engage students, parents, staff and stakeholders. Our staff employ a composite of formative and summative assessment protocols from traditional to computer-based, competency-based and performance assessments. During the last two years our Aurora team has also integrated a number of high-tech research-informed robotics, computer software coding, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) interdisciplinary activities to enhance student learning and deepen understanding of learner outcomes coupled with increased capacity to generalize procedural and conceptual knowledge, skills, and competencies to new and novel situations and contexts. In addition, 11 collaborative research projects were undertaken by Aurora staff and administrators since 2015, as well as our leadership role in a “Community of Practice” project with multiple school and jurisdiction partners.

Our Aurora team was honoured to have Alberta Education Honourable Minister David Eggen attend our Inaugural Technology Learning Week parent/student engagement function and celebration held on March 22, 2018. This event showcased the many engaging project-based and interdisciplinary learning activities our students actively engage in, both individually and in student-teams. The very high participation rate with our students and staff coupled with the proud smiles of our parents and stakeholders made this motivating event a highlight for our entire team and government senior administrative stakeholders.

Our Aurora teaching team was successful with our Alberta Education research grant proposal investigating social connectedness in multi-cultural school settings in collaboration with Edmonton Public Schools (Dr. Owen Livermore, Co-investigator), University of Alberta (Dr. Paul Veugelers, Co-investigator), Aurora (Dr. Paul Wozny, Co-investigator and research team key contact), Simon Fraser University (Dr. Malcolm Steinberg, Principal Investigator), and Alberta Education Research Unit. We continue to grow our multi-school authority and multi-university research partnerships dedicated to the use of research and evidence to inform policy and practice.

Two additional research grant proposals were submitted to the Alberta Education research for application on the 2019 RPP competition. One proposal “Improving Inter-School Learner Transition and Well-being: Using Design Based research to Enhance Support Networks for Transitioning Alberta Elementary and Middle School Students” includes research partners University of Calgary, Werklund School of Education/University of Calgary, Aurora, Edmonton Public Schools, and The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools. This research team includes Dr. Eugene Kowch (PI, Chair, Education Leadership, Policy & Governance, University of Calgary, Dr. Paul Wozny (Aurora), Dr. Owen Livermore (EPSB), Ms. Jacquie Harman (Aurora), Mr. Peter Dang (Aurora), Dr. Jac Andrews (Chair, School & Applied Psychology, University of Calgary), Dr. Meadow Schroeder (University of Calgary) and Mr. Kurtis Leinweber (FFCA, TAAPCS Research Network Liaison). A second research proposal “Building Opportunities and Enrichment for Junior High Girls to Facilitate an Increase in STEM Projects in the Areas of Engineering, Innovation, and Renewable Energy” involves the research team of Dr. Michele Moscicki (PI, Grant MacEwan University) and Mrs. Amanda Joblinski (Aurora). Aurora also created an

extensive research knowledge mobilization addition to our divisional website to encourage, support, and disseminate educational research with stakeholders from local to international.

8. Sharing Practices: The charter school shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community

During the last two years, Aurora engaged in an extensive rebuild of our divisional website and research protocols to now include a dedicated research and knowledge dissemination section that includes:

a) refereed scholarly annual journal of Aurora innovative projects and research, b) research and innovation podcast, c) research incubator to support research from local to international, d) active partnership with multiple school authorities in regular communication and research partnerships sharing best practices and pedagogical supports. We are excited about our growing collaborations with Edmonton Public Schools, The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools, University of Alberta - 2 collaborative research and innovation projects currently in progress, Mathematics PAT Trajectories, Addressing Social Connectedness in Schools, University of Calgary -1 collaborative research and innovation project in grant submission "Improving Inter-School Learner Transition and Well-Being", Grant MacEwan University - 1 collaborative research and innovation project in grant submission "Building Opportunities and Enrichment for Junior High Girls to Facilitate an Increase in STEM Projects in the Areas of Engineering, Innovation, and Renewable Energy."

An interesting development with our Aurora increased sharing of innovative practices, student achievement analysis and multi-stakeholder research projects and presentations includes a much higher degree of dialogue and regular interaction with multiple public school authorities and universities from local to national. Our Deputy Superintendent, with the support of multiple Aurora staff, provided a number of research presentations focused on innovative research-informed practices and student achievements to CASS, Alberta Education, and TAAPCS in the last 1.5 years. This includes presentations at Government House with the Alberta Research Network and multiple education stakeholders and administrators from provincial to international in 2018.

Aurora not only hosted the TAAPCS Conference in 2017, but teachers were also actively engaged as presenters for a wide-range of sessions. Aurora teachers also presented conference sessions at the Greater Edmonton Teachers' Conference (GETCA) that were very well received by teachers from the Edmonton Public, Edmonton Catholic, and Fort McMurray Teacher Association Locals, as well as teachers from various Charter and out-of-district schools.

9. Community Engagement: The charter school reaches out beyond its walls to demonstrate broad and sustained levels of community engagement

Aurora is extensively involved with multiple partners (Edmonton Public Schools, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Simon Fraser University, NAIT, The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools, Grant MacEwan University, Sherbrooke Community League, Alberta Research Network (to name but a few of the many Aurora learning and research partners). Aurora has undergone an extensive strategic direction change to increase and improve our communication and active engagement with stakeholders from local to global. In 2017, Aurora hosted the TAAPCS Biennial Conference that included more than 40 professional development sessions with guest speakers and researchers across Alberta's education and research landscape. A number of our Aurora staff have provided presentations at many professional development conferences including the Council of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), Alberta Teachers Association, TAAPCS, University of Alberta, Alberta Research Network, GETCA, Sherbrooke Community League, Alberta Education and many more stakeholder organizations.

At Aurora, we are proud of our teaching and learning team as Alberta Education legislated and empowered partners in public education innovation and research coupled with a visionary public charter school mandate to share with education jurisdictions and partners across Alberta along with national/international stakeholders. This process is evidenced in our everyday interactions with multiple school jurisdictions and post-secondary research and learning institutions in Canada. In 2017, our

Aurora senior administrative team proactively invited and brainstormed with the Edmonton Public Schools Research Unit resulting in exemplary and innovative educational research collaborative projects. Moreover, in 2019, we have forged further innovative learning and research partnerships across the breadth of Alberta and continued to nurture a systemic and coherent approach to research-informed and evidence-based teaching, learning, policy development, and professional practice with all stakeholders.

10. Governance: The charter school is governed effectively

The last three years at Aurora have seen a significant transformation in Aurora Governance policy and practice. Our Board of Directors, in partnership with our Superintendent team, have extensively reviewed and updated the Aurora Articles of Association and Board Policies to reflect a clear and coherent separation in the roles and responsibilities of governance and administration. This process involved substantial committee work to assure clarity and reduce ambiguity in governance operations as compared and contrasted to administrative functions. An expert external facilitator/expert was enlisted to work with our Aurora Board and Administrative team to assure clarity in the specific roles and responsibilities and update policy and practice to reflect this important separation. The Aurora Board of Directors continues to work with Aurora senior administration and stakeholders with high level policy development in alignment with provincial legislation and policy. The Aurora Board roles include clearly defined:

- a) Fiduciary - assurance of all legal responsibilities;
- b) Strategic Planning - high level organizational governance, strategic planning, policy development and accountability;
- c) Generative - collective public and stakeholder confidence and public assurance through effective community/stakeholder engagement, transparency, communication, and accountability.

Our Aurora updated Articles of Association are accessible online at <https://www.auraschool.ca/documents>

The real evidence in our Aurora organizational transformation that includes a much clearer separation of Governance and Administration is seen in our day-to-day operations that demonstrate greater autonomy of jurisdictional senior administration and school administration to operate efficiently and effectively with appropriate support and governance, but without past challenges where governance functions were bleeding into daily jurisdictional and school administrative roles and responsibilities. This is a significant change for Aurora organizationally that now is reflected not only in our policies and practices, but also in our organizational culture.

11. Administration: The school is administered effectively

The Aurora administration is a highly effective and generative team that is thriving and seeing increased effectiveness and autonomy in concert with our Governance team, students, parents, staff and community stakeholders. Our administration team has also dealt with the dynamics of three administrative team members being either seconded or hired by Alberta Education in the last 1.4 years (one principal and two assistant principals). These superb leaders will continue their leadership development and contributions to Alberta's exemplary education system. In order to support professional development of our Aurora staff and leadership knowledge, skills, and competencies, we created a new Aurora Aspiring Leadership Program (AALP) as of August, 2018. The AALP includes targeted support of the new Teaching Quality Standards, Leadership Quality Standards and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standards. Moreover, our AALP team is actively engaged in the use of research and evidence to further develop leadership competencies and imbue a systemic growth mindset and greater distribution of leadership capacity. Our AALP agendas, learning materials and group activities are shared with all Aurora staff in a google doc shared team drive to allow all staff to benefit from this collaborative program. Staff involvement in the AALP is very high and sessions have seen a substantial portion of staff participate in this voluntary and generative leadership development process. The future is very exciting for Aurora and many superb leaders, both now and into the future. We will continue our legacy of

exemplary student-focused and highly structured and accountable teaching and learning coupled with an inspiring student content distinguished by high achievement, wellness, hope and success.

12. Continuous Improvement: The charter school is committed to engaging students, teachers, parents, and community members in a model of continuous improvement

The high success and exemplary academic achievements of our Aurora students is deeply entrenched in our systemic generative and growth mindset that is adaptive, research-informed and evidence-based with all our stakeholders deeply imbued in a model of continuous improvement and effective communication. For the 2018 school year our Aurora schools created curriculum team leads and special project program team leads to support and empower teachers in a model of continuous improvement through a ground-up, generative and distributed leadership model. Furthermore, all staff are deeply engaged in our school culture through generative administrative practices to co-create professional development goals/plans as well as school improvement foci.

Aurora is fully committed to supporting students, staff, parents and community stakeholders with a teaching and learning culture that actively imbues First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Indigenous culture and context to advance the social goal of Reconciliation and cultural understanding by all people who make up our Aurora multicultural school community. Active processes include:

- The Aurora Elementary and Middle Schools continue to infuse First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Indigenous perspectives and content into multiple facets of the curriculum;
- Aurora Elementary and Middle School staff have attended numerous PD sessions on the Indigenous perspective, Reconciliation, and specific lessons and units honouring our FNMI partnership in learning;
- Aurora Elementary invited an Elder to read 2 Indigenous stories to our students in grade four during Read-In Week. This process included an Elder sharing personal stories and a song;
- Our annual Elementary Winter Fun Day has been changed to a Winter Heritage Day theme that celebrates the First Nations, Métis, Inuit and French Canadian experience in Canada. Students learn about FNMI symbols and history through crafts, traditional games, cooking, and presentations from the students at amiskwacyi Academy, an active partner with our Aurora team.
- An Indigenous Learning Day at Aurora actively engaged students and staff in the recognition and celebration of indigenous perspectives and appreciation of cultural diversity;
- Our Learning Commons has a central area highlighting First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Indigenous content, authors, and resources;
- Aurora Elementary and Middle School staff continue to attend professional development to support the students in developing and applying Indigenous foundational knowledge in our teaching and learning culture with all stakeholders in our school community.

Improvement in our Aurora communication processes with all stakeholders includes targeted strategies to build systemic clarity and coherence including:

- Significantly improved user-friendly website that includes monthly school newsletters, monthly Board of Directors Highlights, user-friendly research and knowledge mobilization section, and inclusion of a Family Zone section for all parents/guardians to improve access, clarity, and efficiency of interactions/communication 24/7;
- Highly engaged and dedicated Aurora School Council and Board of Directors working closely with our administration, staff, parents, students and community stakeholders;
- Multiple Parent Information even sessions to actively engage our key stakeholders in our Aurora targeted literacy supports from phonics to reading. This process includes supports for our many English second language (ESL) and English language learners (ELL) parents and families;
- Our Aurora administrative and staff team have participating in a number of our Sherbrooke Community League functions, meetings and activities to further enhance our collaborations and efforts of active engagement with our broader community;

- Novel student, parent, and staff surveys and engagement sessions over the last two years continue to increase effective communication and dialogue with our stakeholders along with both short term and long term strategic planning and systemic generative growth mindset;
- The construction and completion of our Learning Commons Centre, Enhanced Wellness Centre, Elevator, Flex Student/Staff wrap-around inclusionary support services program, and highly integrated advanced technology digital supports (Smartboards, Laptop/Notebook stations/carts, Robotics, Coding, 3D design and prototyping, Solar Cell array with hands-on student/staff analytics, and post-secondary learning and research partnerships) continue to forge an exemplary teaching and learning culture truly dedicated to the inspiration and learning hope and success for our students, stakeholders and future.