

# Professionally Led Curriculum Renewal Processes



The purpose of this document is to describe a provincial curriculum program led by the profession and supported by the Ministry of Education. Integral to the model is the engagement and leadership of professional teachers at all stages of curriculum work.

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and its members are supportive of the Ministry reinvigorating and reinvesting in curriculum renewal efforts and hold a deep professional desire for those efforts to be successful. For Saskatchewan teachers, a curriculum is not simply an informational document that guides teaching and learning in the classroom. Rather, curriculum comes into existence – it is enacted – through the myriad of particular and contextualized educational experiences that students have over time and that teachers create. The Federation envisions and advocates for a central role for teachers and their professional organization in curriculum renewal, development and implementation.

**Saskatchewan teachers should have a leadership role at all levels of curricular decision making and in all phases of curriculum development, implementation and actualization.**

There is a long history in Saskatchewan of collaboration and commitment among its partners in education. Teachers have had a significant role as curriculum developers, implementers, innovators and evaluators. The legislative responsibility for curriculum development lies with the Ministry of Education. Stakeholders who share a commitment to curriculum development include the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, members of First Nations and Métis teachers and organizations, the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan. Leadership from the Ministry, active participation by teachers in leadership roles at all levels of curricular decision making and leadership provided by an enduring, inclusive cross-sector body with appropriate representation of stakeholders will support processes for successful curriculum renewal efforts.

In *Saskatchewan Teachers' Perspective on Curriculum Renewal (2016)*, the Federation articulated a set of 13 principles upon which a successful system of curriculum renewal can be based. These principles are situated within the legislated mandate and the bylaws and policies of the Federation.

# A Provincial Curriculum Program

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The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation proposes a model of curriculum renewal that is co-ordinated and facilitated by the Federation, resourced through a multi-year partnership and funding agreement with the Ministry of Education and the participation of Indigenous, community and education sector stakeholders. This model promotes the professional leadership, learning and engagement of teachers in five phases of curriculum-related activities: needs assessment; development pathway selection; curriculum development and resourcing; piloting, and professional development; implementation; and, evaluation and evergreening. At its centre, the model is based on the Student First understandings of shared responsibility, relationships, learning environment, student and teacher supports, and engagement of the student/learner.

Curriculum renewal is a constant, ongoing professional responsibility of teachers. Saskatchewan teachers want to create, and in the past have consistently created, well-thought-out, well-constructed and well-resourced provincial curricula, curricular foundations and curricular supports as integral parts of robust, culturally relevant learning environments for students. This proposed model presents opportunities for strengthening curriculum renewal by engaging Saskatchewan teachers who are currently supporting curriculum renewal efforts, and who actively participate in professional development through their professional organization, school divisions and the Ministry.

The design and creation of a curriculum program as part of the processes and structures designed to meet the goals of publicly funded public education honours the traditional roles of the partners in education and shapes the sector to strategically meet the goal of delivering the best possible educational opportunities for all students. It contributes to the development of a program that is supportive and responsive and that builds on the strengths of the respective organizations and stakeholders.

As one of the enduring strategies of the Education Sector Strategic Plan, processes for curriculum development and renewal will engage teachers in all of the other enduring strategies – culturally relevant and engaging curriculum, differentiated and high-quality instruction, culturally appropriate and authentic assessment, and professional learning supported through strong partnerships.

**An enduring inclusive cross-sector body with appropriate representation and leadership should be established for reviewing and reaffirming our curricular foundations and for determining signposts, criteria and strategies that will ensure ongoing curriculum renewal efforts are successful.**

Saskatchewan Teachers' Perspective on Curriculum Renewal (2016)

# Professionally Led Curriculum Renewal

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The importance of identifying and efficiently managing the most appropriate resources to develop and deliver responsive, culturally appropriate curricula informed the development of the following proposed model. It provides opportunity for teacher leaders to strengthen the provincial education system – one that places students at the centre of all that we do.

Saskatchewan teachers believe that teaching and learning occurs within many different contexts. Teachers share the responsibility with students, parents, communities and partners in education to provide conditions that are necessary and appropriate for teaching and learning to be holistic, equitable and effective.

The central role of teachers as curriculum planners, implementers and leaders of renewal must be balanced with the legislative responsibility that lies with the Ministry of Education regarding curriculum development. The proposed model builds upon two foundational goals for all curricula in Saskatchewan – rich, high-quality, context-sensitive curricula to support student learning and achievement, and curricula developed, understood and implemented by the profession. The Ministry document entitled *Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher's Handbook for Personal-Professional Growth* (2001) references three curriculum actualization processes that are to be integrated within the ongoing professional work of teachers: curriculum reflection, curriculum inquiry and curriculum networking.

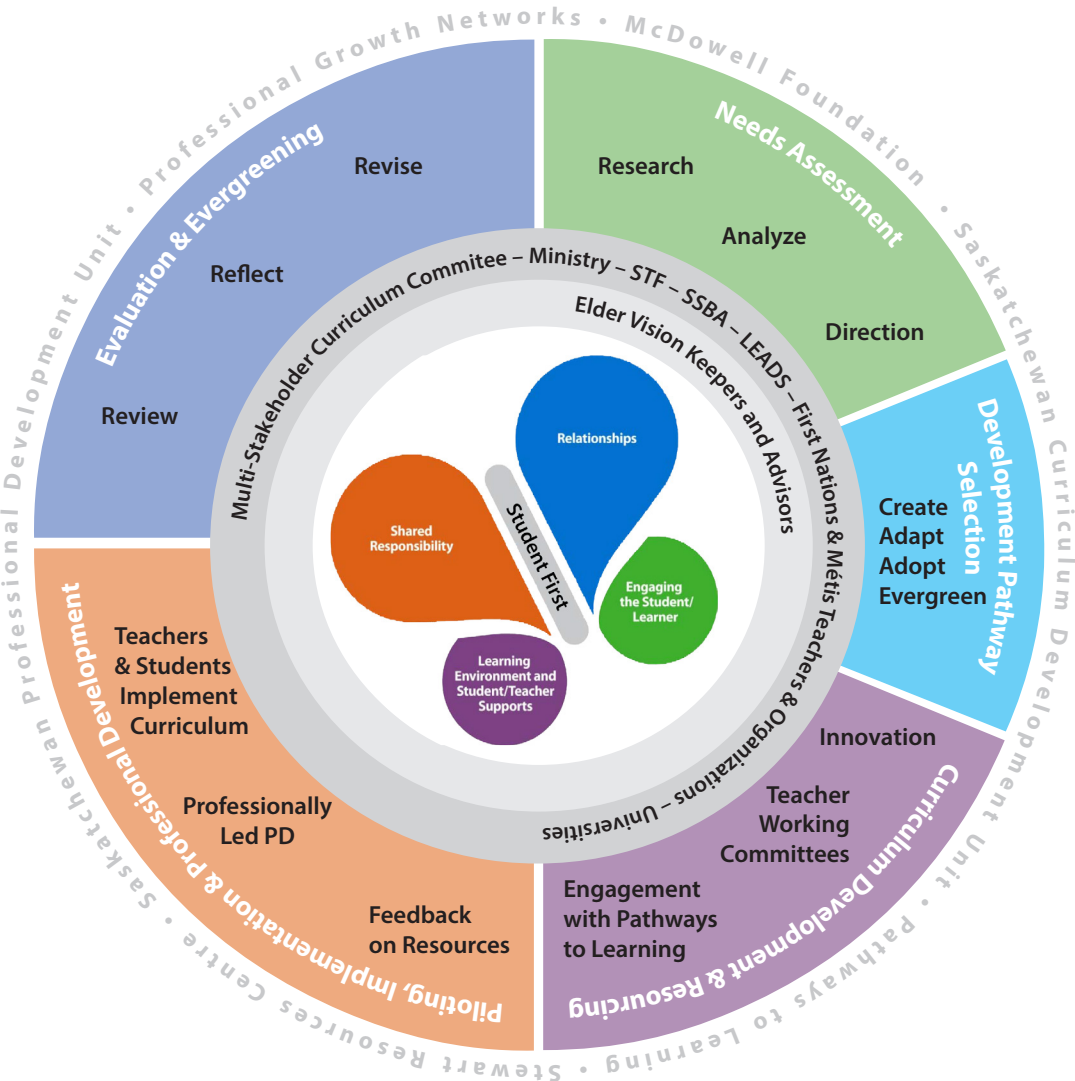
- **Curriculum reflection** is a process that involves individual teachers in thinking about their beliefs, values and abilities and the ways these affect, and are affected by, students, curricula and school/community contexts.
- **Curriculum inquiry** is an active process involving teachers in implementing self-selected aspects of Core Curricula in their classrooms and evaluating the results.
- **Curriculum networking** is made up of groups of teachers who meet regularly to discuss and/or work on areas of mutual interest. Networks involve teachers in a form of professional development that is group directed through democratic processes with each person having equal decision-making authority.

Professional work regarding curriculum must be ongoing and cyclical so that curricula best reflects a rapidly changing context and the needs of students.

Recent curriculum renewal in science engaged teachers in planning, implementing and evaluating of new senior physics, chemistry and biology curricula. During these phases of curriculum renewal, teachers ensured that the content of renewed curricula reflected Indigenous, First Nations and Métis knowledge and worldviews, and contemporary understandings and applications of science. Student voices were integral to the piloting phase as teachers learned alongside their students. All of the teachers engaged in the renewal of senior science courses reported the work as the best professional learning they had experienced and they became teacher-leaders in the process.

Saskatchewan teachers support the government in establishing provincial-level curriculum renewal structures and processes that will allow teachers to meet both their legislated mandate and their professional aspirations.

# A Model of Professionally Led Curriculum Renewal



Central to the proposed model is the learning and achievement of students. Overarching goals regarding curricula that support student learning and achievement are articulated by a multi-stakeholder curriculum committee whose role is to ensure that Saskatchewan curricula continue to support the vision citizens of Saskatchewan hold for their children. Infused through all curriculum renewal processes are the contributions of an Elders Advisory Committee whose role is to be active in all phases of the model.

## Multi-Stakeholder Curriculum Committee

This committee would establish the broad vision for curricula in Saskatchewan by asking the question, “What is an educated citizen in our province?” The committee would be led and funded by the Ministry of Education and comprised of representatives of the Ministry of Education and representatives of the Federation, Saskatchewan School Boards Association, League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, First Nations and Métis teachers and organizations, University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina.

## ■ Elder Vision Keepers and Advisors

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This essential group of First Nations and Métis representatives would provide guidance, advice and assistance to ensure that Indigenous cultures, histories and ways of knowing are fully present in all aspects of Saskatchewan curricula. Their active participation in all phases of the model would be facilitated and supported by the Federation with funding provided by the Ministry through a new partnership and funding agreement.

## Saskatchewan Curriculum Development Program

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The proposed curriculum development program would be led by seconded teachers who design, facilitate and deliver a curriculum development program created in collaboration with active classroom and subject teachers. The program would be facilitated by the Federation and supported through the partnership and funding agreement with the Ministry.

Five phases of curriculum renewal are proposed:

### ■ Needs Assessment

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The Federation is able to engage a variety of existing structures and processes to support needs assessment processes that could inform curriculum renewal. These include: professional growth networks (subject-specific teacher networks); the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit Facilitator Community (classroom teachers, coordinators and consultants from across Saskatchewan focused on professionally led professional learning related to specific curricular and instructional areas). Beyond existing structures, the Federation is able to establish teacher working committees ensuring representation from across the province to support curriculum renewal processes. The Federation also houses the McDowell Foundation, which funds and publishes teacher-led classroom-based research in Saskatchewan schools. These research projects contain a wealth of information regarding the needs of both students and teachers.

### ■ Development Pathway Selection

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The outcome of needs assessment processes would be the selection of a curriculum development path – create, adapt, adopt or evergreen. Regardless of the development path chosen, curriculum destined for Saskatchewan classrooms would need to advance through the processes of development, resourcing, piloting, implementation and evaluation as teachers work to ensure high-quality curricula are available to students.

### ■ Curriculum Development and Resourcing

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3

Curriculum development and writing processes can be deeply supported through participation of Federation members and existing professional support structures. The Federation has structures in place to form teacher working committees that reflect the diversity of Saskatchewan schools to support the development and writing of curricula. Development and writing committee members would have access to Federation supports as they transitioned their work from development and writing to implementation and professional development. The SPDU Facilitator Community is an existing structure that provides training in the development and delivery of high-quality professional learning. The Facilitator Community currently consists of 85 educators from across Saskatchewan from 18 different school divisions. These professionals range from classroom teachers to administrators to consultants.

An integral part of the development of curricula is to consider the resources needed to support curricula early in the process. The Exploring the Many Pathways to Learning program,

in conjunction with the Stewart Resources Centre, has the ability to source, review and house materials to support renewed Saskatchewan curricula in both English and French. Teachers are engaged in processes of recommending high-quality learning resources to respond to the diversity of Saskatchewan students and their learning needs. The Stewart Resources Centre provides access to current research and practical materials for teachers.

#### ■ **Piloting, Implementation and Professional Development**

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Piloting, implementation and professional development are interconnected, iterative processes. Beyond the ability to bring diverse groups of teachers together, the Federation is able to provide structures and supports for teaching professionals to resource, implement and develop professional understandings of renewed curricula. Professional growth networks supported by the Facilitator Community can provide subject specialists the training and professional learning required to develop high-quality implementation and professional development processes in support of renewed curricula. Further professional development opportunities can be encouraged through teacher participation in McDowell Foundation-supported research projects.

#### ■ **Evaluation and Evergreening**

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The Federation can support evaluation processes through the creation of teacher working committees, member surveys, professional growth networks and via sponsorship of action research targeted on specific curricular areas. Evergreening processes would involve similar supports and structures identified in development, writing, resourcing, implementation and professional development.

## **Professional Leadership of Curriculum Renewal**

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The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation is uniquely positioned to ensure that regardless of the curriculum renewal path – create, adapt, adopt, evergreen – there is sustainable, co-ordinated access to a diverse group of teachers, and robust supports and processes allowing for significant depth of professional engagement to ensure that Saskatchewan curricula are actualized.

A Saskatchewan Curriculum Development Program will be able to engage a variety of existing professionally led structures and processes to fully support the many functions of the five phases of this model. The following structures and programs provide access to a provincial teacher population with more diversity and capacity than what can be achieved through a singular school division or regional approach.

### **Exploring the Many Pathways to Learning**

The Pathways project currently engages over 100 teachers in the evaluation and recommendation of learning resources that best support Saskatchewan's curriculum and its diverse learners. This project is administered collaboratively by the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit and Stewart Resources Centre through a contract with the Ministry of Education.

### **Stewart Resources Centre**

The Stewart Resources Centre is the professional library for teachers in Saskatchewan that is funded and operated by the Federation. Its collection is comprised of over 28,000 books and audio-visual resources, including 125 print journals, e-journals, and newspapers, plus a selection of teacher-prepared lesson units to support the implementation of curricula.



### **Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit**

The Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit creates and provides high-quality professional development resources and opportunities for teachers and the broader educational community. SPDU is led by a director and staffed by four associate directors who are all experts in curriculum and pedagogy and are experienced teachers.

The SPDU Facilitator Community assists in the development and delivery of professional growth opportunities. Following a teachers-leading-teachers model, approximately 85 provincial facilitators receive training and participate in ongoing co-planning, co-facilitating, and mentoring activities with core SPDU team members. At present, 25 have been designated lead facilitators who are able to design and deliver high-quality professional growth sessions.

### **Professional Growth Networks**

The Federation currently supports 28 professional growth networks with approximately 3,600 members established in a variety of subject fields, service areas and interdisciplinary groups. These groups provide networking, communication, professionally led professional growth opportunities, and the sharing of promising practices and resources.

### **McDowell Foundation**

The Foundation is an independent charitable organization established by the Federation in 1991 to support research, inquiry and the dissemination of information that focuses on teaching and learning within the publicly funded PreK-12 education system. In 2015-16 more than 50 teachers were engaged in research projects through the Foundation as researchers, collaborators or other contributors. Since its inception, the McDowell Foundation has supported more than 250 research projects conducted by over 1,000 teachers.

## **Curriculum Program Commitments**

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Curriculum renewal structures and processes must have a provincial-level focus. At the October 2016 Ministry of Education curriculum consultation meetings, participants identified four requirements as necessary for provincewide curriculum renewal processes to be sound and to have long-term success:

- (1) Renewal of curriculum requires a solid plan for implementation over a period of years or it will falter.
- (2) Facilitation and leadership by teachers is necessary.
- (3) Engagement with students and parents during pilot phases is necessary.
- (4) Funds need to be designated for curriculum development as well as for professional learning and growth.

The proposed multi-year partnership and funding agreement between the Ministry and Federation will ensure that sufficient time and resources are dedicated to supporting teachers in developing and delivering a successful model of professionally led curriculum renewal.



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