

# Standards for Time-out in Alberta Schools

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**APPENDIX “B”**

**MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)**

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# Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Foreword</b> .....                          | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>The Learning Team</b> .....                 | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Fostering Effective Relationships</b> ..... | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Positive Behaviour Supports</b> .....       | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>An Individualized Approach</b> .....        | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>A Function-based Approach</b> .....         | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Time-Out</b> .....                          | <b>8</b>  |
| What is Time-out? .....                        | 8         |
| What is not Time-out? .....                    | 9         |
| Types of Time-out .....                        | 9         |
| Expectations on the use of Time-out .....      | 10        |
| <b>Bibliography</b> .....                      | <b>16</b> |
| <b>Resources</b> .....                         | <b>18</b> |
| <b>References</b> .....                        | <b>19</b> |
| <b>Additional Resources</b> .....              | <b>20</b> |

## Foreword

Alberta Education is committed to ensuring welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments for all children/students and staff. School authorities, school staff, parents/guardians and children/students all have a role to play in creating these learning environments.

Schools that have a positive school-wide culture promote positive behaviour in children/students, which can reduce occurrences of challenging behaviours that negatively affect teaching and learning.

There are a variety of strategies and approaches to promote and encourage positive and respectful behaviour in children/students. It is important that teachers, school/school authority leaders and parents/guardians have a common and shared understanding of these strategies and approaches, and work together collaboratively to contribute to safe and caring learning environments.

This document aims to provide clarity on the use of time-out in schools by outlining expectations for their use, in order to minimize the inappropriate use of these procedures while ensuring that the safety, security and well-being of all members of the school community are maintained. It intends to clarify the meaning of these procedures within a school context and provide a common set of expectations on when and how they are to be used, in addition to evidence-informed practices.

This document also provides guidance for school authorities in developing or revising their policy and/or procedures on the prevention and use of time-out in schools. The goal of providing such guidance is to help ensure welcoming, caring, respectful, inclusive and safe learning environments for all children/students and staff.

This document is to be used in conjunction with other information provided by Alberta Education to enable welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments such as Positive Behaviour Supports, Social-Emotional learning, Restorative Practices, Mental Health, Trauma-Informed Practices and The Learning Team. Resources for additional information on these topics are included at the end of this document.

Within the context of a number of possible behaviour interventions, it is important for school authorities to have a well-defined approach for the use of time-out in schools. This will help prevent misuse and ensure that the well-being, safety and dignity of children and students are preserved.

## The Learning Team

There are at least three core partners on any child’s/student’s learning team: the child/student, the parent/guardian and the teacher. A parent/guardian may include the primary caregivers of a child such as parents, legal guardians, foster parents, grandparents, elders and other applicable family members or relatives.

In consultation with the principal, this core team consults on and shares information relevant to the child’s/student’s education and works together to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate programming, supports and services.

Parents/guardians and teachers are important members of a child’s/student’s learning team. In accordance with the *Education Act*, parents have a responsibility to take an active role in their child’s educational success. Parents/guardians are key partners in their child’s education and members of their child’s learning team.

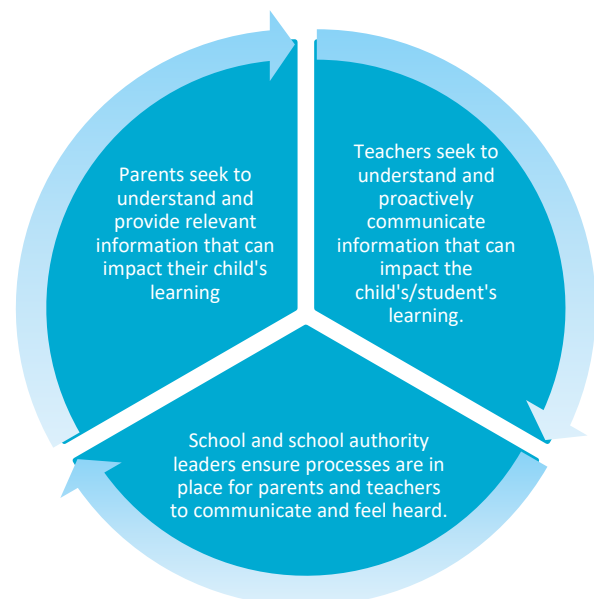
In addition to parents/guardians and teachers, members of the learning team include the child/student, where appropriate, and other school authority staff who understand the child’s/student’s strengths and needs. When required, the learning team may also include specialized professionals, including but not limited to mental health and social service professionals, community agencies and service providers, cultural resource people, liaison workers and elders that work collaboratively to meet the child’s/student’s learning needs.

All members of a school community have a role to play in supporting a child’s/student’s learning and in creating safe and caring learning environments.

## Fostering Effective Relationships

Positive relationships are critical to an effective learning team. Parents/guardians and school staff need to invest time and energy into building and maintaining these relationships.

Engaging all members of the learning team is important for building strong home-school partnerships and in ensuring positive learning outcomes. Meaningfully involving partners takes time, and requires trust and action that conveys an understanding that parents/guardians are



## APPENDIX “B”

### MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)

partners in their child’s education. Strong, positive relationships help foster an atmosphere of openness and partnership within the learning team and allows for transparent sharing of information and perspectives that affect a child’s/student’s learning.

Fostering effective relationships also calls for an awareness of other community agencies, service providers or non-educational systems that the child/student may be involved with, for example, the justice and health systems, or Family Supports for Children with Disabilities (FSCD). School authorities are expected to continue working collaboratively with community and provincial organizations or agencies to support children/students in their schools. Working together intentionally and collaboratively across systems as much as possible can be useful in building positive relationships, problem solving and providing the necessary supports and interventions.

## Positive Behaviour Supports

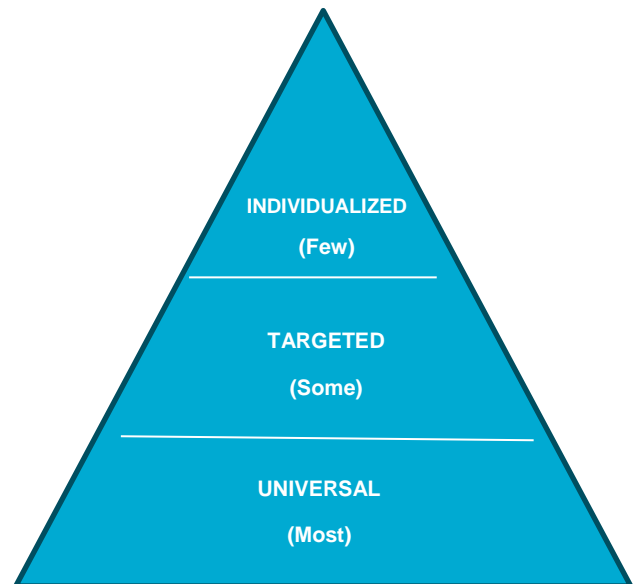
Positive behaviour supports is a school-wide collaborative effort to design and implement strategies, practices and interventions for promoting positive social and communication skills. It is also useful for teaching, coaching and reinforcing skills required for academic and social success. It involves universal, targeted and intensive or individualized behaviour supports.

All children/students benefit from universal supports, which are sufficient to maintain positive behaviour for most children/students.

Some children/students will benefit from additional targeted supports to help maintain positive behaviour.

A smaller number of children/students who may not respond to universal and targeted supports will benefit from intensive individualized supports.

Additional information, including specific strategies for implementing positive behaviour supports at the universal, targeted and individual levels are included in the Resources section of this document.



## An Individualized Approach

Each child/student is unique and therefore requires an individualized approach to managing challenging behaviour. Time-out is a behavioural intervention that requires an individualized approach within the context of a positive school-wide and classroom environment.

Key elements of an individualized approach to supporting positive behaviour in schools include:

- strong collaboration between the home and school;
- professional supports and expertise;
- appropriate staff training;
- an understanding of individual child's/student's behaviour;
- a problem-solving approach; and
- data-informed/evidence-based decision-making.

School staff are expected to employ positive and proactive means of engaging a child/student before the use of time-out. An individual behaviour support plan is useful for taking an individualized approach to supporting a child's/student's positive behaviour.

An individual behaviour support plan is essential for a child/student with complex behavioural needs that may result in or have resulted in the need for crisis or safety management procedures in school. The focus of the individual behaviour support plan is mostly on preventive and proactive strategies, but responsive strategies can also be included in the plan. Preventative and proactive strategies, supports and services are designed to increase and maintain behaviour that is appropriate to the learning environment, while responsive strategies include crisis management strategies that may be utilized in the event of the occurrence of behaviour that has the potential to put the safety of the child/student or others at risk.

Additional information on using individual behaviour support plans is included in the Resources section of this document.

## A Function-based Approach

A variety of environmental factors can predict, cause, prevent and/or maintain appropriate and challenging behaviours in school. To effectively support children/students who display challenging behaviour and help them develop new and more positive behaviour, it is necessary to understand why a particular child/student behaves in the manner they do and how other factors (e.g., social, community, family, etc.) can affect the child's/student's behaviour.

## APPENDIX “B”

### MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)

Behaviour interventions and crisis or safety management procedures are to be implemented in a culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate manner.

An effective way of understanding a child’s/student’s problem behaviour is by recognizing that behaviour has an underlying reason. A functional behavioural assessment (FBA) is an effective process for identifying environmental conditions that predict and maintain problem behaviour<sup>1</sup>. It provides information that is useful for selecting appropriate interventions to address problem behaviour and teaching appropriate replacement behaviour or skills. Specialized expertise and/or additional training is required to properly conduct and implement an FBA. Resources on using a function-based approach to problem behaviour and functional behavioural assessments are included at the end of this document.

## Time-Out

### What is Time-out?

The term “time-out” is a shortened form of a behavioural management strategy known as time-out from positive reinforcement. It is a behavioural intervention that involves reducing or limiting the amount of reinforcement that is available to an individual for a brief period of time in order to decrease or stop a predefined challenging behaviour.

The primary purpose of time-out is to reduce or stop the future frequency of problem behaviours by changing the amount of reinforcement that is available to an individual. Positive reinforcement is an event that follows a behaviour and increases the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated.

The appropriate use of time-out as a behavioural intervention can be an effective method of reducing problem behaviours that negatively impact children/student learning and the classroom environment. However, time-out is not a go-to intervention for all challenging behaviour. Inappropriately used, time-out can be harmful and ineffective at reducing the problem that one is attempting to address.

It is important for school authorities to have a well-defined and evidence-based approach on the use of time-out in schools. This will help prevent misuse and ensure that the well-being, safety and dignity of children/students are preserved.

The learning environment must be a welcoming, safe and caring one where children/students benefit from a variety of positive reinforcements and instructional strategies. Positive reinforcement strategies include, but are not limited to praise, encouragement, reward for

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<sup>1</sup> Filter, K. J., & Alvarez, M. (2012). Functional behavioural assessment: A three-tiered prevention model.



## APPENDIX “B”

### MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)

positive behaviour, etc. For time-out to be effective, the child/student must perceive the learning environment they are regularly part of as more reinforcing than when they are in time-out.

Before the use of any form of time-out in a learning environment, it is important to employ and assess the effectiveness of every possible positive and proactive means of engaging the child/student in learning and in appropriately interacting with others.

## What is not Time-out?

Time-out is not a universal intervention for challenging behaviour; rather, strategies are to be employed based on the child’s/students’ individual needs. Time-out may not be appropriate or effective for all children/students; it is only one of many behavioural management strategies to manage the frequency, severity and intensity of problem behaviours. Each child/student is unique and may require alternative strategies to assist them in managing challenging behaviour.

The term “time-out” is often used inaccurately to refer to strategies or spaces intended for other purposes, such as calming a child/student or in situations where a child/student is located in a physical space separate from their peers. However, the primary purpose of time-out is to reduce or stop the future frequency of problem behaviour by changing the amount of reinforcement that is available to an individual. There are a variety of other reasons that a child/student may be located in a separate space from their peers for periods of time, such as:

- when a child/student requests to be in a separate location for a brief period of time to help them self-regulate their behaviour (e.g., using a sensory room);
- when independent work in a quiet space is occurring, when periods of individualized one-on-one instruction are taking place; or
- when a distraction-free environment is necessary for short periods of time for specific purposes.

These situations are not considered time-out from positive reinforcement.

Time-out is not the same as seclusion or physical restraint. Whereas time-out is considered a behaviour reduction strategy for the purposes of reducing or stopping future instances of problem behaviour, seclusion and physical restraint are considered to be emergency or safety procedures aimed at stopping behaviour that may result in immediate harm to an individual or others. Further information is found in the *Seclusion and Physical Restraint in Schools: Crisis or Safety Management Procedures* document.

## Types of Time-out

Based on the degree of separation of a child/student from the learning environment, there are two main types of time out: non-exclusion time-out and exclusion time-out.

## APPENDIX “B”

### MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)

#### **Non-exclusion Time-out (time-out within the classroom or other instructional setting)**

This type of time-out is also referred to as inclusion time-out or inclusionary time-out. It does not involve the removal of the child/student from the learning environment or instructional setting. When the problem behaviour occurs, access to positive reinforcement is removed for a period of time within the instructional or learning environment. Non-exclusion time-out is considered a less restrictive form of time-out.

#### **Exclusion Time-out (time-out in a separate space outside of the classroom or instructional setting)**

This type of time-out is also referred to as exclusionary time-out. It involves removing the child/student from the reinforcing activity to another fully or partially enclosed part of the immediate instructional setting or to another supervised location within the school (for example, the library, the principal’s office, counsellor’s office, another classroom or a dedicated time-out room), provided other sources of reinforcement are not available in these other locations. The child/student is not allowed to participate in or observe the reinforcing activity.

For the purposes of this document, exclusion time-out is a more restrictive procedure than non-exclusion time-out and may only be used after other supports have been utilized.

## Expectations on the use of Time-out

Time-out is a behavioural intervention that needs to be strategically planned, implemented and linked to positive behavioural management. If positive approaches are unsuccessful, and/or the use of time-out from positive reinforcement is being considered, the following is expected:

- **School Authority Policies and Procedures**
  - School authorities are to develop and implement written policies and/or procedures for the use of time-out within their schools. These policies and/or procedures are to be in alignment with provincial guidance on the use of time-out and clearly communicated to parents/guardians and school staff.
- **Positive and Proactive Strategies**
  - Positive and proactive behaviour management strategies are to be employed before the use of time-out in learning environments. See the resources included at the end of this document for additional information on positive behaviour supports and strategies.
  - Time-out interventions are to be accompanied by positive behaviour approaches to reinforce and increase appropriate behaviour.
- **Knowledgeable and Skilled Staff**
  - School staff are to be provided with access to related professional learning in implementing positive behaviour interventions and supports, as well as in function-based

**APPENDIX “B”**

**MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)**

approaches to understand the reasons for challenging behaviour, in order to manage problem behaviour on a regular basis.

- Staff involved in the use of time-out procedures are required to have an understanding of behaviour-change principles; have the necessary training and experience; give careful consideration to the range of potential interventions available; and be aware of potential risks for their use. This will help ensure the appropriate use and effectiveness of these procedures.
- The appropriate level of professional and/or specialized expertise (e.g., qualified professionals trained in function-based approaches to managing problem behaviour) is to be sought in planning and implementing time-out procedures.

**Responsibilities for specific school authority staff on establishing schools with staff who are knowledgeable and skilled in the use of time-out procedures include, but are not limited to:**

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| <b>Superintendent or school authority leader</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Allocate resources to enable access to specialized expertise and related professional learning for schools.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Principal</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create opportunities and support school staff in accessing professional learning opportunities in positive behaviour interventions and supports, and function-based approaches to problem behaviour.</li> <li>– Ensure that school staff who implement time-out procedures have completed the relevant training prior to implementing these procedures.</li> <li>– Facilitate access to the appropriate specialized expertise to support school staff in managing problem behaviour.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Teacher</b>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Participate in training on implementing positive behaviour supports and function-based approaches to problem behaviour.</li> <li>– Complete training on the use of time-out procedures prior to implementing time-out procedures.</li> <li>– Consult with the appropriate level of professional and/or specialized expertise to support managing problem behaviours.</li> </ul>   |

• **Setting Expectations**

- Behaviour expectations are to be clearly and appropriately outlined and communicated to children/students and parents/guardians.
- Appropriate social skills are to be taught and modelled to children and students.
- Challenging behaviour(s) that may result in the use of time-out are to be clearly outlined and communicated to school staff, children/students and parents/guardians.

## APPENDIX “B”

### MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)

- **Understanding Individual Child/Student Behaviour**

- Decisions on the use and type of time-out used require an individualized approach that considers:
  - the individual learning needs of the child/student;
  - why a child/student acts in a certain way or what is behind the challenging behaviour (understanding the function/purpose of the behaviour), and whether the use of time-out will appropriately address the underlying reasons for the behaviour;
  - the child's/student's developmental age
  - environmental and other external factors at play;
  - relevant information provided by other members of the child's/student's learning team; and
  - input from parents/guardians.
- When a child/student displays challenging behaviour that negatively affects their learning or the learning of others on an ongoing or recurrent basis:
  - it is essential to involve parents/guardians in planning to address the ongoing behaviour and meet the child's/student's educational needs;
  - a functional behaviour assessment (FBA) is to be conducted as early as possible, with the support of an appropriately trained and certified professional (e.g., qualified professionals trained in function-based approaches to managing problem behaviour), as required;
  - educational assessments, including specialized assessments, are to be conducted, as required, and used to inform educational planning for the child/student. Parental/guardian consent is required for specialized assessments. With parental/guardian consent obtained, information from such assessments is to be communicated to parents/guardians and used to guide decisions regarding educational programming and behaviour interventions;
  - an individualized support plan (ISP) including the child's/student's learning outcomes, behaviour plan and required learning supports and services may need to be developed with parental/guardian involvement; and
  - the appropriate level of professional or specialized expertise (e.g., qualified professionals trained in function-based approaches to managing problem behaviour) and/or training is to be sought, as needed.

## APPENDIX “B”

### MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)

- **Appropriate use**
  - Time-out is to be used in a reasonable manner, in accordance with the expectations articulated in this document and be appropriate for the child’s/student’s age and/or other characteristics.
  - When utilized, time-out interventions are to use the least restrictive but most effective forms first, before more restrictive forms.
- **Implementing Time-out**
  - Consider the desired outcomes, potential benefits and risks of implementing time-out and impacts on the learning environment prior to implementation.
  - Prior to the implementation of time-out, rules, expectations and how the time-out process is to occur are to be explained to the child/student in a way that they will understand.
  - Staff considering the use of time-out are to ask the following questions prior to implementing a time-out procedure:
    - Does the child/student understand the reason for the time-out?
    - Does the child/student have the ability and opportunity to stop the challenging behaviour and demonstrate appropriate behaviour?
    - Does the child/student understand expectations for a successful return to activities with the classroom or common learning environment?
    - How will the decision to use time-out be communicated to the parents/guardians?
  - If exclusion time-out in a separate dedicated space is to be used as a behaviour reduction strategy for a child/student who displays challenging behaviour that negatively affects their learning or the learning of others on an ongoing or recurrent basis, it is expected that prior to its use:
    - parents/guardians, and where appropriate, children/students, are provided with opportunities for meaningful involvement in discussions and decision-making regarding the use of such time-out intervention;
    - informed written parental/guardian consent is obtained and documented in the child’s/student’s individualized support plan (ISP). If parents/guardians do not support the use of exclusion time-out in a separate dedicated space, involve them in determining if alternative options are possible and include these in the child’s/student’s ISP;
    - a behaviour plan is developed and included in the child’s/student’s ISP;
    - a documented plan is in place should the child/student refuse to go to the designated space;

## APPENDIX “B”

### MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)

- a plan and/or process is outlined for moving the child/student to the space should physical guidance or physical transporting/relocating the child/student be necessary;
  - prior approval of the school and school authority leader is obtained for use of the space;
  - safety features and specifications of the space are detailed; and
  - the space to be used meets building codes and fire codes.
- Separate, dedicated spaces or time-out rooms are only to be used when less intrusive interventions have been unsuccessful in managing the targeted behaviour. Multi-use spaces within the school, such as a library, principal’s office, etc., are better utilized instead of dedicated time-out rooms, provided other sources of reinforcement are not available in these spaces. If a separate, dedicated space is used for exclusion time-out, it is expected that:
- the safety and security of the child/student is paramount;
  - the child/student is visible and supervised at all times while in the space;
  - there is strict adherence to the child’s/student’s privacy and safety rights;
  - the space is large enough for an average adult to freely move around, stand upright, and lie on the floor fully extended, without touching the walls;
  - the space is well-lit, well-ventilated and adequately heated;
  - the space allows for exit should there be an emergency;
  - the space is not overly stimulating;
  - the space is unlocked and does not have a passive locking mechanism;
  - the space does not contain items that may be harmful to children/students; and
  - should the child/student need to be physically transported to the space, appropriately trained staff are present and required to carry out the transportation of the child/student.
- **Documentation**
    - When a separate, dedicated space is used for exclusion time-out, it is expected that:
      - use of the space is documented each time and continually evaluated to determine effectiveness and appropriateness of the time-out intervention for the child/student;
      - detailed information associated with the use of time-out in the space is documented and regularly reviewed as part of determining the appropriateness of the intervention;
      - documented information includes but is not limited to:

## APPENDIX “B”

### MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)

- positive and proactive or alternative strategies attempted prior to the use of time-out in the space;
- behaviour resulting in the use of time-out;
- duration of time-out;
- frequency of time-outs; and
- objectively reported behaviour observed while in time-out.
- documented information regarding the use of the space is transparently disclosed with the learning team in accordance with applicable privacy legislation (e.g., *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP)*, *Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA)*);
- documented information associated with the use of the space for exclusion time-out is to be reported to the principal as well as a central administration or equivalent within the school authority for the purpose of reviewing frequency of use, planning and oversight; and
- documentation is required for the purposes of reviewing the frequency of use, planning, oversight and identifying issues and/or practices that require further attention.
- **De-briefing**
  - School staff should periodically review the use of time-out with individual children/students to inform any necessary changes to the school use of time-out and to update individual behaviour support plans.
- **Resolving Differences**
  - School authorities are expected to make every reasonable effort to resolve concerns collaboratively with parents/guardians.
  - Processes for resolving differences, filing complaints or making appeals are expected to be in place and communicated to parents/guardians and, where applicable, children/students.

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APPENDIX “B”

MINISTERIAL ORDER (#039/2019)

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## Resources

The following resources are helpful for building a positive school-wide culture while reducing and preventing problem behaviours and provide additional relevant information:

Alberta Education: Behaviour and Social Participation,  
<http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ieptlibrary/lib05.html>

Alberta Education: Comprehensive School Health, <https://education.alberta.ca/comprehensive-school-health/what-is-comprehensive-school-health/>

Alberta Education: Inclusive Education <https://www.alberta.ca/inclusive-education.aspx>

Alberta Education: Inclusive Education Library, Behaviour and Social Participation,  
<http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ieptlibrary/lib05.html>

Alberta Education: Mentoring, <https://www.alberta.ca/student-mentoring.aspx>

Alberta Education: Response to Intervention, <https://www.alberta.ca/response-to-intervention.aspx>

Alberta Education: Restorative Practices, <https://www.alberta.ca/restorative-practices.aspx>

Alberta Education: Positive Behaviour Supports, <https://www.alberta.ca/positive-behaviour-supports.aspx>

Alberta Education: Social-Emotional Learning, <https://www.alberta.ca/social-emotional-learning.aspx>

Alberta Education: Social Participation, <https://www.alberta.ca/diverse-learning-needs.aspx>

Alberta Education: The Learning Team, <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3531893/learning-team-handbook-for-parents.pdf>

Alberta Education: Trauma Informed Practice, <https://www.alberta.ca/trauma-informed-practice.aspx>

Alberta Education: Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments,  
<https://www.alberta.ca/safe-and-caring-schools.aspx>

Alberta Education: Using Individual Behaviour Support Plans  
[http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ieptlibrary/documents/en/bs/using\\_indiv\\_beh\\_supp\\_plan.pdf](http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ieptlibrary/documents/en/bs/using_indiv_beh_supp_plan.pdf)

## References

The following Alberta Education documents serve as references and provide additional information:

Alberta Education: Leadership Quality Standard

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739621/standardsdoc-lqs- fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf>

Alberta Education: Ministerial Order on Student Learning

<https://www.alberta.ca/k-12-education-policies-and-standards.aspx>

Alberta Education: Teaching Quality Standard

[https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626523/english-tqs-card-2013\\_3.pdf](https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626523/english-tqs-card-2013_3.pdf)

Alberta Education: Revised Teaching Quality Standard

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739620/standardsdoc-tqs- fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf>

Alberta Education: Standards for Special Education,

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626539/standardsforspecialeducation.pdf>

Alberta Education: Standards for the Provision of Early Childhood Special Education

[https://education.alberta.ca/media/3227597/2016-06-08\\_ ecs\\_specialedstds2006.pdf](https://education.alberta.ca/media/3227597/2016-06-08_ ecs_specialedstds2006.pdf)

Alberta Education: Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739621/standardsdoc-lqs- fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf>

## Additional Resources

The following resources are provided for information purposes only:

Positive Behavioural Interventions & Supports, <https://www.pbis.org/>

Loman, S. & Borgmeier C. Practical Functional Behavioural Assessment Training Manual for School-based Personnel,

[https://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/practicalfba\\_trainingmanual.pdf](https://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/practicalfba_trainingmanual.pdf)

Bain, K., Fulton, D., & Sautner, B. (2017). BOATS: Behaviour, Observation, Assessment, Teaching Strategies

[https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/747229\\_d465e00039c34a5f913d39feda329c2f.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/747229_d465e00039c34a5f913d39feda329c2f.pdf)