



Leveraging the Role of Educational Assistants

Shared Practices Across
Alberta School Authorities



CASS

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Purpose

This study examined how Alberta school authorities are leveraging the role of Educational Assistants (EAs) to support inclusive education and improve student outcomes. The research explored current practices, challenges, and opportunities to strengthen the effectiveness of EAs within Alberta schools.

**14**

Alberta School
Authorities Participated

THROUGH



Provincial
Survey



Focus group
discussions



Review
of school
authority
practices

Why This Study Matters



Educational Assistants represent one of the largest employee groups supporting students in Alberta schools.



Increasing student complexity has expanded the demands placed on EAs.



School authorities are seeking effective ways to maximize EA impact while promoting student independence and inclusion.



Limited Alberta-specific research existed regarding system-level EA practices.

RESEARCH QUESTION ?

How can Alberta school authorities leverage the role of Educational Assistants to better support student success, inclusion, and well-being?

KEY FINDING ✓

School authorities are increasingly moving from viewing EAs as individual student supports toward viewing them as collaborative members of instructional teams who contribute to inclusive learning environments, student independence, and classroom success.



What School Authorities Are Doing

1 Establishing Clear Role Clarity

Participants in this study clearly defined:

- ✓ Responsibilities of teachers
- ✓ Responsibilities of Educational Assistants
- ✓ Expectations for collaboration
- ✓ Lines of supervision and accountability



Impact



When roles are clearly defined:

- ✓ Collaboration improves
- ✓ Duplication is reduced
- ✓ Teacher leadership is strengthened
- ✓ Student supports become more coordinated

2 Prioritizing Student Independence

Participants in this study identified prioritizing student independence to:

- ✓ Build student self-regulation
- ✓ Encourage problem-solving
- ✓ Reduce unnecessary adult dependence
- ✓ Promote peer interactions



Impact



The focus shifts from "doing for students" to "supporting students to do for themselves."

3 Strengthening Collaborative Teaming

Participants in this study identified the importance of positioning EAs as members of a multidisciplinary team that includes:

- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ School leaders
- ✓ Inclusive education staff
- ✓ Specialists
- ✓ Families



Impact



Collaboration creates greater consistency and improves responsiveness to student needs.

Conditions That Enable Success

1 Comprehensive Professional Learning

Comprehensive professional learning is designed to strengthen:

- ✓ Inclusive education practices
- ✓ Communication strategies
- ✓ Specialized student needs
- ✓ Behaviour supports
- ✓ Student well-being



Key Insight



Professional learning is most effective when it is continuous, practical, and connected directly to classroom practice.

2 Strong School Leadership

School leaders play a critical role by:

- ✓ Clarifying expectations
- ✓ Allocating resources strategically
- ✓ Supporting collaboration
- ✓ Creating inclusive school cultures



Key Insight



Leadership decisions significantly influence how effectively EAs are utilized within schools.

3 Effective Communication Structures

Effective communication structures create opportunities to:

- ✓ Teacher-EA planning
- ✓ Shared problem solving
- ✓ Team meetings
- ✓ Information sharing



Key Insight



Communication is one of the strongest predictors of successful EA deployment and student support.

4 System-Wide Consistency

System-wide consistency is strengthened through:

- ✓ Consistent expectations
- ✓ Common training approaches
- ✓ Shared language
- ✓ Unified support structures



Key Insight



System coherence reduces variability and strengthens support for students across schools.

Key Challenges Identified

1 Increasing Student Complexity

Participants in the study reported growing needs related to:

- ✓ Behavioural complexity
- ✓ Medical needs
- ✓ Mental health concerns
- ✓ Diverse learning profiles



Implication



EA responsibilities continue to expand as student needs become more complex.

2 Recruitment & Retention

Participants in the study identified challenges with:

- ✓ Hiring qualified staff
- ✓ Competition for employees
- ✓ Staff shortages
- ✓ Retaining experienced EAs



Implication



Workforce sustainability is becoming a significant system issue.

3 Balancing Support & Independence

A recurring tension emerged:

- ✓ How do schools provide necessary support for students while avoiding overdependence on adult assistance?



Implication



School authorities must continually examine whether supports are fostering or limiting student independence.

4 Role Ambiguity

In some settings, uncertainty remains regarding:

- ✓ Teacher responsibilities
- ✓ Decision-making authority
- ✓ EA responsibilities
- ✓ Instructional versus support functions



Implication



Role ambiguity can reduce effectiveness and create inefficiencies within schools.

Five Provincial Considerations



CONSIDERATION

Strengthen Role Clarity

1

Develop consistent provincial and local expectations regarding:

- ✓ Teacher responsibilities
- ✓ EA responsibilities
- ✓ Collaborative practices



CONSIDERATION

Invest in Professional Learning

2

Expand opportunities for:

- ✓ Initial training
- ✓ Ongoing development
- ✓ Specialized skill development
- ✓ Collaborative learning



CONSIDERATION

Promote Student Independence

3

Ensure support models:

- ✓ Build capacity
- ✓ Foster self-determination
- ✓ Encourage peer connections
- ✓ Reduce unnecessary adult dependence



CONSIDERATION

Strengthen Collaborative Practice

4

Create structures that support:

- ✓ Teacher-EA planning
- ✓ Shared problem solving
- ✓ Inclusive instructional teams
- ✓ School-wide coordination



CONSIDERATION

Support Sustainable Workforce Development

5

Focus on:

- ✓ Recruitment
- ✓ Retention
- ✓ Career development
- ✓ Workforce sustainability



FINAL TAKEAWAY

Educational Assistants are essential contributors to inclusive education in Alberta.

The most effective strategies are to intentionally position EAs as collaborative members of instructional teams, invest in their professional growth, clarify expectations, and focus their work on promoting student independence, belonging, well-being, and success.

By leveraging these shared practices, school authorities can strengthen inclusive learning environments and improve outcomes for all students.

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Additional Resources

For more detailed information and references,
[please click here to view the full report](#)

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CASS | 780-540-9205 | admin@cass.ab.ca