

DATE: January 23, 2024

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Update on the Educational Assistant Internship Pilot

ORIGINATOR: Kathy Muhlethaler, Assistant Superintendent, Instructional and Strategic Division Supports

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ISSUE

The Educational Assistant (EA) Internship Pilot is the second phase of an innovative provincially funded program launched in the spring of 2023. It is designed to accommodate recruitment and retention of EAs in school divisions throughout Alberta.

The program entails on-the-job EA training and coaching. Interns learn through online modules, interactions with an experienced EA Coach and shadowing existing educational teams in inclusive or complex needs classrooms.

Edmonton Public Schools is coordinating the pilot for Alberta Education. The design of the Educational Assistant Internship Pilot provides ample opportunities for divisions to tailor specific portions of the program to meet their unique context.

BACKGROUND

The goals of the program are to:

- Increase the number of EAs available throughout the province
- Remove financial and geographic barriers to training for individuals interested in working as EAs
- Support the success of EA Interns through coaching along with theoretical and practical experiences
- The program is designed to accommodate adaptations to suit divisional needs
- Build capacity and retain EAs

Specifications:

- Internships may be offered to employees currently working as an EA or to potential EA candidates
- Placement of interns in schools will be determined through an application/matching process to be determined by each participating school board
- The EA Internship Pilot is designed as a full-time, 16-week program running from February 12, 2024 to May 31, 2024

Pilot Design consists of:

- Communities of Practice (CoPs)
- Coaching
- Online modules
- School experiences

Pilot Format:

- The pilot will offer two streams for divisions to choose from:
 - Stream one - prospective EA employees with no prior EA experience
 - Stream two - employees currently working as EAs but with no formal training or a mix of current EA and prospective EA employees
- The pilot includes an EA Coach who will liaise with schools as well as guide and assist interns.
- Divisions will be solely responsible for determining school placements for interns.
- Each participating school division will designate an EA Coach to work with their interns and schools.
- EA Coaches from each participating division will liaise with the Edmonton Public School EA Internship Lead Coach, who will provide program support and assistance.
- Interns will complete online training modules
- School divisions will determine appropriate schedules/compensation for interns (schedules and pay will be adapted by divisions to reflect whether the interns are already working as EAs or are potential new hires)
- Community of Practice will be provided for the interns
- Week one will be an orientation for EA interns. Edmonton Public Schools will provide orientation materials to support each participating Division to orient their own interns within the context of their communities
- Weeks 2 - 16, interns will be in a school placement
- During the 16-week period, there will be two or three specific days dedicated to professional development, which may include time working on the online modules and/or collaboration with the other interns. These days will be determined by each division.
- The pilot is designed to provide 300+ hours of classroom experience along with time dedicated to online module completion, additional professional learning, and engaging with the EA coach in a Community of Practice. The flexibility in the program design will be determined by each participating school division.

Online Modules:

All of the online modules have been created by Edmonton Public School's Instructional Supports and Specialized Learning Supports.

There are four essential modules all interns will complete:

- Supporting Diverse Learners (orientation module)
- Supporting Students with Complex Behavioural Needs
- Supporting Students in Mathematics
- Supporting Students in Literacy

There are three supplemental modules (divisions will choose which, if any, supplemental modules interns will complete):

- Supporting Students Experiencing Anxiety
- Supporting Students Learning English as an Additional Language
- Supporting Students on the Autism Spectrum

CURRENT SITUATION

For the 2023-2024 school year, the Educational Assistant Internship Pilot will be available to 14 School divisions. Information about the program was shared through the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), and three information sessions were held in December. Interested school divisions were asked to complete an application form by December 18, 2023.

The selection of school divisions for participation in the pilot was based on the following criteria:

- Commitment to the full 18 weeks of divisional involvement including all aspects of the program (16 weeks of intern training and an additional two weeks for divisional coaching staff)
- Divisional support for the use of Google as the delivery/monitoring platform
- Consideration for regional/zone representation in the program

Participating school divisions needed to commit to:

- The pilot program timeframe (February 5 – June 7, 2024)
- Divisional support for the use of Google as the delivery platform
- Meeting all requests for research data
- Identifying an EA coach from their staff
- Organizing opportunities for EA interns to participate in a Community of Practice
- Ensuring their interns have the means and time to access the online modules

The 14 participating school divisions include:

Division Participating in EAI Pilot 2024	Zone
EPSB (EAI LEAD)	Zone 2 & 3 – North Central
High Prairie School Division	Zone 1 – North
Black Gold School Division	Zone 2 & 3 – North Central
Elk Island Public Schools	Zone 2 & 3 – North Central
Holden Rural Academy	Zone 2 & 3 – North Central
St. Albert School Division	Zone 2 & 3 – North Central
St. Paul School Division	Zone 2 & 3 – North Central
Northern Lights Public Schools	Zone 2 & 3 – North Central
St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Schools	Zone 2 & 3 – North Central

Division Participating in EAI Pilot 2024	Zone
Northern Gateway Public Schools	Zone 2 & 3 – North Central
Wolf Creek Public Schools	Zone 4 – Central
Prairie Land Public School District	Zone 5 – South Central
Canadian Rockies School Division	Zone 5 – South Central
Prairie Rose Public Schools	Zone 6 – South

KEY POINTS

- The role of an EA is to support children and youth who have a wide range of abilities and exceptionalities including autism, significant emotional and behavioral challenges, mental health issues, learning difficulties and physical health concerns. EAs support learning communities where every student has the opportunity to belong, be included and experience success. They support teachers and students to reach their goals in diverse, equitable and inclusive classroom settings that value lived experiences.
- In the spring of 2023, Edmonton Public Schools led the development and delivery of the Educational Assistant Internship prototype. To assist with this, the Division applied for and received provincial funding of \$506K. Funds were used for: Teacher Consultant \$131K, Practicum Consultants \$131K, Digital Production Staff \$96K, Researcher \$65K, Project Coordinator \$48K, and Technology \$35K.
- On November 24, 2023, the Division submitted a grant application for provincial funding of \$733K to support the spring 2024 Educational Assistant Internship pilot. This budget includes: Module Development \$244K, Central Leaders \$158K, Project Coach Lead \$115K, Technology \$113K, Researcher \$75K, HR \$21K and Communications \$7K.
- The increase compared to prior year is a result of it being a prototype in the first year with a reduced planning timeline.
- The anticipated costs that EPSB will be incurring for 2023-2024 include:
 - \$81,500 for 2 EA coaches
 - \$743,820 for compensation for the EA interns participating in the program (16 weeks at 35 hours/week)
- Participating school divisions are required to provide EA Interns with a mid-point and final assessment of their in-school experience.
- A comprehensive research report will be submitted to Alberta Education at the conclusion of the pilot.

KM:dr