

---

# A Concise Analysis on School Responses of Canadian Prairie Provinces and the Philippines During the COVID-19 Phase 2021-2022

**Ferdinand Dionisio Caballero**

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5497-0488>

Assistant Principal, Immaculate Conception School for Boys, City of Malolos, Philippines

Assistant Principal, Immaculate Conception School of Malolos- Senior High School, City of Malolos, Philippines

Secretariate, Malolos Diocese Catholic Schools Association (MADICSA), Philippines

[caballero\\_ferdinand@icsbicsm.edu.ph](mailto:caballero_ferdinand@icsbicsm.edu.ph)

**DOI: 10.47760/cognizance.2023.v03i12.018**

---

**Abstract**— *This concise analysis of educational system policies on responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic from the three Prairie Provinces of Canada: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the responses from the Basic Education Policy in the Philippines, which puts into perspective the differences in efficiency and effectivity of responses of contingencies in times of crises.*

**Keywords**— *contingency plans, Canadian Prairies, Alberta Education, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, Manitoba Education*

---

## INTRODUCTION

As a multicultural nation, Canada has become one of the main destinations of migration in the Global North. One of the reasons for its popularity is due its solid educational policy, which is decentralized in structure and execution. This is the case because the Canadian educational system is governed and monitored by each province or territory. The soundness of the Canadian Provinces and territories were put to tests during the COVID-19 Pandemic— which has drastically changed the landscape of academia.

For a more focused comparative discussion and analysis, I chose the ‘Prairie Provinces’, which is composed of the Provinces of Alberta (AB), Saskatchewan (SK), and Manitoba (MB) based on Socio-cultural reasons, as it is becoming a popular destination among migrants and workers of Filipino descent. In addition, there are also less literature in comparative education in this part of Canada.

This paper intends to analyze the similarities and differences of policies of each province in terms of the following: ‘Academic Continuity’, ‘Organization and Governance’, And ‘Policy Transparency and Stakeholders Communication’. Moreover, the policies of Canadian Prairie Provinces will be analytically compared to the policies implemented by the

Department of Education in the last two years of transitions brought about by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The Prairie Provinces in the middle of the country contained the three landlocked provinces: Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, all of which responded to the immediate needs of their provincial ministries in planning, communicating, and organizing their contingency plans to resolve the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 Pandemic to the educational system (Whitley et al., 2021; People for education, 2022).

### A. ALBERTA: The Wild Rose County

The Province of Alberta being one the richest provinces in the country due to its oil and natural gas reserve enables its planning and execution to be very fast and efficient due to the support of the Provincial and City/local government. Specifically, the Alberta Ministry of Education has released its 2021-22 School Year Plan based on the data from the local data scientists and researchers, who gathered data from the field (Alberta Ministry of Education, 2021; Leslie et al., 2020).

According to the Alberta Ministry of Education (2021), the Alberta Early Childhood Services to Grade 12 (ECS-12) Educational System highlighted the following in their 2021-22 School Year Plan:

1. The safety of children, students, and staff comes first
2. Child and student learning will continue
3. Provincial funding is still flowing to schools
4. School authorities are flexible to do what is best for their community

The four foci of Alberta encapsulate the holistic and long-term priorities of the province in terms of educational policy. In addition, even if it is specifically for the School Year 2021-22, the idea is of each goal is a continuation of their educational contingency plans at the beginning of the pandemic to the present, which will then become their point-of-reference to their plans in the future.

## A.1 Academic Continuity

In terms of Academic Continuity, the AB Ministry of Education (2001) made sure that every Alberta student regardless of their geographic location, socioeconomic status, classifications of schools being attended will continue their education. This task required a field report from data and social scientists to understand the contexts of every student in the province so that the government can provide for their unique needs (Whitley et al., 2021). For instance, specific solutions were provided for remote learning in urban, rural, francophone, and aboriginal students in the whole province.

When the data from the field/ground were consolidated, analyzed, and reported the AB Provincial Government thought the Ministry of Education placed an up-to-date Contingency Plan in case there are resurgences of COVID-19 Variants in the future. The following contingency plans were put into practice (Alberta Ministry of Education, 2021):

1. Short-term operation shifts to ‘at home/online learning’
  - Efficient vice-versa shifts depending on the situation:
    - Contingency Scenario 1: in-school classes
    - Contingency Scenario 2: at-home learning
2. Modified transportation services for students and members of the school communities
3. Children and students who require specialized supports and services will be provided
4. Teacher preparation program for student practicums

The contingency plan based on the data collected from the field has become the basis of the short-term solution of AB, which in turn will become the basis of future academic continuity because of its holistic scope, practicality, efficiency (highly localized), and flexibility (Alberta Ministry of Education, 2021; Leslie et al., 2020; Whitley et al., 2021).

## A.2 Organization & Governance

Based on the data collected from various localities, The AB Provincial government sets the general standards and policies in agreement with the Federal Government and other partnerships. It is beneficial to highlight; however, that school districts are given autonomy and flexibility to determine their budget needs for disbursements locally based on the needs of specific local communities (Alberta Ministry of Education, 2021).

This organization and governance in terms of education is within the jurisdictions of each province or territory in Canada, which exhibits a decentralized structure, which empowers the city/local government (Leslie et al., 2020; People for education, 2022).

### **A.3 Policy Transparency & Stakeholder Communication**

The approach of the AB Government is holistic in dealing with the effects of the pandemic. From the start of the disruption of in-school classes in 2020— all school district boards were equipped with public communication billboards in multiple platforms to make sure that important announcements and messages were provided to all stakeholders and members of the local school communities. Furthermore, one of most important contents of the communication in the province is the availability of universal support to all Albertans such as health resources, training, social services, and other individual support that cover unique needs (Alberta Ministry of Education, 2021). This is to say that all plans and projects are available to all Albertans, which shows transparency as it benefits everyone within the province.

## **B. SASKATCHEWAN: The Land of The Living Skies**

The province of Saskatchewan (2020) presented a long-term vision in the next decade 2020-2030 that aims for a recovery due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. These three encompassing visions aim for SK to be “[the] best place in Canada- to live, to work, to start a business, to get an education, to raise a family, and to build a life [...]” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2020). Specifically, three goals are:

1. A strong economy
2. Strong communities
3. Strong families

These long-term visions place education as the blueprint of its realizations in the next decade. Like other Prairie Provinces, SK’s Pre-K-12 educational system was put into tests during when the pandemic started to affect the local population. This is to say that to cohere with the visions of the province, the SK Ministry of Education mobilized its city and local government units to address the continuity of the education program in the province (People for education, 2022).

---

## B.1 Academic Continuity

As a response to the educational challenges brought about by COVID-19 Pandemic, the Province of SK heavily invested in online education to all city and local government units. Specifically, each school division and First Nations (Aboriginal) education—promoted, supported, and expanded the software earning resources and online education platform as prescribed by the Provincial Government (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2020).

Furthermore, the SK government developed a multi-year phased implementation for First Nations and Independent Schools and online English as an additional language to assess the students learning remotely. In a sense, the Provincial Government intended to encompass all students in the province regardless of background, as they cater to aid regular, newcomers, and the Aboriginal populations in the province (Whitley et al., 2021).

## B.2 Organization & Governance

SK highlights the intertwining connections of all the ministries in the province. In particular, the SK Ministry of Education is strongly connected to the prescriptions and guidelines of the Ministry of Health. The provincial government also collaborated with the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada to designate learning institutions for International Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2020). This shows that the province emphasizes the importance of the Provincial-Territorial relationship with the Federal Government of Canada to further the projects of SK Ministry of Education.

## B.3 Policy Transparency & Stakeholder Communication

The Provincial Government of SK worked with eight school divisions that funded various learning camps, libraries, etc. to address the needs of local stakeholders during the Pandemic. This is to say that research and regular consultations with stakeholders are continuously being done through innovative effective planning models to support the inclusion of SK students' needs. Moreover, to further monitor the project of the provincial government, regular review of operational policies in education's sectors to ensure its strategic, relevance,

---

effectiveness, and efficiency in the delivery of plans and contingencies (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2020).

### **C. MANITOBA: The Friendly Province**

Perhaps the most vulnerable amongst the Prairie Provinces, MB has its border beside East Coast, particularly the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec, which also borders New York, where the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic were much more severe. Due to this reason, the MB Government, set four priorities prior to the opening of schools in September 2021 (Manitoba Education, 2021):

1. Following health and safety measures as per public health guidance
2. Promoting mental and well-being
3. Assessing and addressing learning impacts in schools
4. Vaccinating Manitobans through outreach and promotions

These four priorities are interconnected, which makes the MB contingency plan holistic. This is to say that even if education falls under priority number three— it is not mutually exclusive, but directly linked and must be practiced with the rest of the priorities. Like the other Prairie Provinces discussed, the relations of ministries and other agencies were highlighted. For instance, the importance of policy in public health and education were emphatic in the priorities set by the Province of MB.

#### **C.1 Academic Continuity**

The priorities set by the Provincial Government of MB (2021) is student-centered, this was because students were prioritized when the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic started to be felt as early as the first quarter of 2020. As an immediate response to the shift in the modality of teaching students were given access to remote learning, as MB launched the Learning Support Center to K-8, while the upper grade level students 9-12 were given access and engagement to rich learning experiences in multiple platforms and modalities in all learning subjects. In addition, regular meeting with students at different levels were done by school board to assess their learning process for the transitions from remote learning back to in-class learning, and vice-versa (People for education, 2022; Manitoba Education, 2021).

---

Furthermore, there was an emphasis on holistic health that includes mental health and students with immunocompromised status that require a full remote learning modality (Whitley et al., 2021). Teachers were also given training to ensure transitions from temporary learning by supporting the development and provision at-home learning packages and remote learning for students who are isolated (Manitoba Education, 2021).

## C.2 Organization & Governance

Parallel to the structure of other Prairie Provinces, MB set contingency plans based on alert levels, which automatically change the delivery of learning throughout the province. This is to say that the Provincial Government of MB prescribes the alert level to city and town government units. Implementation of each alert level is based on the local data submitted by the respective local governments. This set-up is monitored by both the local school board and the representatives of the Provincial Government (Manitoba Education, 2021).

## C.3 Policy Transparency & Stakeholder Communication

One of the most immediate responses of the Province of MB in the COVID-19 Pandemic crisis is the launched of its real-time COVID-19 Dashboard: School-Aged and School Staff Cases in all schools in Manitoba. It contains the cumulative information of COVID-19 Cases associated in all Manitoban Schools (People for education, 2022). This has become one of the ways where policies are being communicated to the stakeholders.

Moreover, the MB Education Stakeholders worked closely with all city government and local government units to further develop and implement appropriate provincial responses for the enhancement of the K-12 education system. Accessibility to the provincial government education contingency projects such as school communities' mental health, well-being, and learning within the contexts of safe and healthy schools are being assessed and audited regularly for holistic transparency and further improvements (Manitoba Education, 2021).

## D. Canadian Prairies & The Philippines: Strengths and Weaknesses

The Philippines responded to the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic based on the prescriptions of national agencies cascading towards provincial and local government agencies. Specifically, the Department of Education issued guidelines in forms of memoranda, press releases, and districts as the main prescriptions to all regional, provincial, and district offices (D.O.s) (Department of Education, 2022). This is to say that prescriptions in school contingencies during in the COVID-19 is centralized and disseminated to local D.O.s.

### D.1 Academic Continuity

Canadian Prairie Provinces (AB, SK, and MB)	Philippines (Department of Education)
<p>The responses of the Provincial Governments of AB, SK, and MB to the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic were efficient and specific to the local populations. This is to say that the academic continuity of each school is given priorities anchored from the data from the field. Moreover, the policy makers included all students regardless of school types, economic class, psychological, and socio-cultural backgrounds. This means that the methods used by the governments of the Canadian Prairie Provinces highly value contextualization but at the same time also inclusive and holistic (Manitoba Education, 2021; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2020; Alberta Ministry of Education, 2021).</p>	<p>The Department of Education spearheads the decision when it comes to academic continuity. When the COVID-19 reached the country in the first quarter of 2020, just like the rest of the world, education was halted. The guidelines of academic continuity were prepared and disseminated for the next academic year, but the inclusivity of the contingency plans was leaning towards DepEd Schools and other school types such as HEIs and Private Schools were not given prescriptions but rather suggestions on how to proceed with the academic continuity. To date, the Philippines is one of the last countries to implement the face-to-face classes (Department of Education, 2022).</p>
<p><b>Analysis</b></p> <p>In terms of ‘Academic Continuity’ the Canadian Prairie Provinces proved that proper planning and data-driven policy is effective because it values the importance of contextualization of contingencies that fits the needs of the local population. The strength of the Prairie Provinces is its efficiency and innovative ways in delivering education. Perhaps, its potential weakness is geography—because of its vast size, which makes it harder to reach specially during the harsh winter months. Furthermore, the location of the Prairies is in central to eastern landlocks,</p>	

which is exposes to the borders where the effects of the COVID-19 were more severe, which can potentially halt ‘Academic Continuities’.

The Department of Education in the Philippines faced many hurdles in ‘Academic Continuity’ due to slow responses from the local D.O.s, --specially the hard-to-reach rural areas. In addition, even if the aim of the policy concerning the ‘Academic Continuity’ was supposed to be inclusive, the structure and appearance of memoranda concerning it, lacked the contextualization, which will then fall to the lower offices of the department, which resulted to more delays. The potential strength; however, lies in the aim of standardized response from the government due to its centralized structure.

## D.2 Organization & Governance

Canadian Prairie Provinces (AB, SK, and MB)	Philippines (Department of Education)
The organization and governance of the Canadian Prairie Provinces is decentralized and flexible (Manitoba Education, 2021; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2020; Alberta Ministry of Education, 2021).	The organization and governance of the Philippines is centralized and flexible (Department of Education, 2022).
<p><b>Analysis</b></p> <p>The strength of the Prairie Provinces in terms of Organization &amp; Governance is anchored from the jurisdictions of the Canadian Government, where provinces and territories were given independence to assess and decide to write policies appropriate to their local populations, which resulted to efficiency and flexibility in decision-making. In addition, the independence of each province or territory is due to abundant funding. The potential weakness of the decentralized structure in ‘Organization and Governance’ is the very diverse decisions, as it is often difficult to consolidate due to the fast-paced changes in the localities.</p> <p>The Philippines on other hand, aimed to standardize the decision-making that is emphatic its centralized structure in terms of Organization and Governance, which will then be contextualized as the policy cascades to regional, provincial, and local D.O.s for dissemination and applications.</p>	

### D.3 Policy Transparency & Stakeholder Communication

Canadian Prairie Provinces (AB, SK, and MB)	Philippines (Department of Education)
The Canadian Prairie Provinces practice decentralization and localization in terms of Policy Transparency & Stakeholder Communication (Manitoba Education, 2021; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2020; Alberta Ministry of Education, 2021).	The Philippines practices both centralization and decentralization in terms of Policy Transparency & Stakeholder Communication (Department of Education, 2022).
<p><b>Analysis</b></p> <p>The strength of the Canadian Prairie Provinces in terms of “Policy Transparency and Stakeholder Communication is its highly contextualized and indigenized approach in assessing, analyzing, and communicating the policies from the ground up, which makes it more flexible and efficient. The potential weakness of this structure is in many variations due to particularities, which is a challenge to consolidate.</p> <p>In the Philippines, the standardize communication starts from the top and then it cascades to the localities, which often creates an impasse, specially to students that belong to the minority communities and private institutions. Its strength, however, lies to in its flexibility to be adapted by regional, provincial, and local D.O. s.</p>	

### IMPLICATIONS: Reflexive Conclusion

The policy models and structures of the Canadian Prairie Provinces asserts the importance of contextualization, planning, and indigenization for a more holistic coverage. Furthermore, the decentralized structure allows for a more efficient and flexible application of educational policies. Knowing the localities and being in the field to gather data and practice inductive approach is proven to be more effective in the Provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. This could be applied to the Philippines at certain extent because of the geographic, socio-economic, and socio-cultural differences in the country. In other words, the “one-umbrella fits all” approach and methods does not work most of the time. It is noted, however, that this structure has been the practiced in the Philippines and could not be easily changed. In addition, Canada and its provinces/territories are self-sufficient, while in the

---

Philippines, population in the urban centers most of the time have the accessibility to the policy placed by the National Government. Even if there are so many limitations in the Philippine educational contexts, I suggest that the Department of Education must be innovative and, in a sense, it needs to be practical rather than theoretical. Moreover, the contextualization and indigenization of policies must be addressed and practiced for the Education Policies in the Philippines to be more innovative, efficient, and holistic.

In the contexts of the Private Schools, which is the sector I belong, I intend to intertwine the best practices and educational policy decisions and executions from various contexts (such as the Canadian Prairie Provinces' Policies, among others that will aid innovation, efficiency, and creativity in the 'changing normal' phase in education. This means that proper preparation, contingency plans, and contextualization based on data from the ground are the keystone strategies in sustaining the private school system—after all, the Department of Education can only suggest the private schools, which allows us to be much more affirmative but at the same time without discharging the guidelines of the government agencies in our policy and decision-making –without sacrificing the welfare of the students, teachers, and other stakeholders that composes the holism of school communities.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

My warmest gratitude to the administrators, faculty members, and personnel of the ICSB-ICSM School System. In addition, I am also thankful for the support of the Malolos Diocese Catholic School Association (MADICSA) Secretariate. Most importantly, my heartfelt thanks to my family and friends for their unconditional love and support.

Sanctitas in Sapientia!

---

## REFERENCES

1. Alberta Ministry of Education. (2021, February 3). *2021-2022 school year plan - Open Government*. Open.alberta.ca. <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/2021-2022-school-year-plan>
2. Department of Education. (2022, January 7). *COVID-19 – Memoranda | Department of Education*. <https://www.deped.gov.ph/covid-19/covid19-memoranda/>
3. Leslie, M., Fadaak, R., Davies, J., Blaak, J., Forest, P. G., Green, L., & Conly, J. (2020). Integrating the social sciences into the COVID-19 response in Alberta, Canada. *BMJ Global Health*, 5(7), e002672. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-002672>
4. Manitoba Education. (2021). *Focusing on Safety: Maintaining Safe Schools during COVID-19 | Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning*. Wwww.edu.gov.mb.ca. <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/>
5. People for education. (2022). *Comparing School COVID-19 Policies Across Canada*. People for Education. <https://peopleforeducation.ca/our-work/comparing-school-covid-19-policies-across-canada/>
6. Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2020). *Saskatchewan School Plan 2021- 2022*. Windows.net. <https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/126402/EducationPlan2021-22.pdf>
7. Whitley, J., Beauchamp, M. H., & Brown, C. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on the learning and achievement of vulnerable Canadian children and youth. *FACETS*, 6, 1693–1713. <https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2021-0096>