

## Implementing a Continuum of Supports and Services – Visionary Leadership in Action

May 17, 2023

Buffalo Trail Public Schools  
 Medicine Hat Board of Education  
 Wolf Creek Public Schools

The intent of a CASS Learning Guide is to apply research, deepen understanding and enhance professional practice within the Alberta context. With a focus on optimum learning for all students, a Learning Guide provides an opportunity to grow system leader knowledge, resulting in quality school leadership and quality teaching throughout Alberta.

### Summary

Through a grant provided by Alberta Education, CASS established an Inclusive Education Action Committee made up of members from Alberta School Divisions. The role of this committee was to collaboratively identify effective supports and practices that result in an education system that is more inclusive. The committee utilized the recent Alberta Education publication *“Implementing a Continuum of Supports and Services: A Resource guide for school and school authority leaders” (July 2022)* as the framework for their work and the basis of this webinar.

Alberta Professional Practice standards (TQS, LQS and SLQS), through quality teaching and leadership, all have the intended result of optimum learning for ALL students. In addition to the Practice Standards current legislation and policy are shifting our education system to one that is more inclusive. A robust Continuum of Supports and Services is required by all schools and school authorities to ensure each learner has access to the required supports and services. *“A Continuum of Supports and Services: An intentionally designed set of actions, strategies, supports, and services designed to maximize the academic success, well-being, and sense of belonging of each learner. A continuum is responsive and flexible to learner needs. (pg. 11)”*

The framework presented in *Implementing a Continuum of Supports and Services: A Resource Guide for School and School Authority Leaders (2022)*, is intended to assist educational leaders in ensuring they consider the necessary conditions and principles as they design their continuum. It also shares an approach that addresses the challenges sometimes encountered when ensuring our systems are more inclusive. The holistic approach of “Being, Knowing

and Doing,” supports change and growth through our values and beliefs, as well as our knowledge and actions. As the classrooms in Alberta become more diverse, each school leader is challenged with understanding their unique context and the needs of their learning communities. This resource emphasizes the importance of developing a range of supports from strong universal ones to targeted and more intensive individualized supports and services. These supports are multidirectional and are available to any learner that may require them. We are changing the question for learners to focus on “What do you need?”



Supporting Implementation of Optimum Learning for All Students  
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These three districts shared their “Stories of Practice” and how they used the approach of “Being, Knowing and Doing” to support their district in moving to a system that was more inclusive with supports and services for all learners.

#### Acknowledgements

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**Story of Practice #1**  
Buffalo Trail Public Schools  
“Focus on Being”  
(Recording 34:20-48:11)

Rhae-Ann Holoien, Chief Superintendent of Buffalo Trail Public Schools, shared her personal journey to “Being,” and how her experiences growing up, as well as a lifelong educator shaped her values and belief in high quality education for all children.

She believes strongly is leading through a heart, hands, and mind approach, ensuring that everyone in her learning community feels like they belong and there is a place for them. Rhae- Ann acknowledged that reflecting on her “being” and really trying to focus on her leadership through this lens was not easy. In doing so looked for evidence that she was visible in her messaging and relationships, how she “showed up every day.”

Rhae-Ann believes relationships are key and it is important to listen to diverse voices, experiences, and stories from her learning community. Empowering students and staff to tell their stories and highlighting them for the division helps to build common understanding about the divisions’ vision for learning for all. Through these collective stories and relationships people feel valued and heard. The district website highlights many of these stories, through the district podcasts. Check out their BTPS [Learning on the Trail Podcasts](#) for the variety of stories.

Building relationships with community was also key in building a robust continuum of supports which add to the supports and services they can provide to students. She shared her experiences of engaging local First Nations leadership in discussions of the needs of Indigenous students. The district has also put a focus on discussing issues of gender including supporting women in leadership. Rhae- Ann strives to ensure that her daily communication and interactions reflect and model for her staff her belief of leading by heart (being) as well as mind (knowing) and hand (doing). Effective visionary leadership involves knowing who we are, leading by example, empowering others, building relationships, and providing opportunities for other people to share their stories.

Rhae-Ann shared Maya Angelou’s quote to illustrate what Visionary Leadership through “Being” means to her, I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”



**Story of Practice #2**  
Medicine Hat Catholic Board of Education  
“Focus on Knowing”  
(Recording 49:32-58:15)

Associate Superintendent Learning Services, Hugh Lehr and Dr. Monica Braat, Inclusive Education Consultant, shared the work that Medicine Hat Catholic is doing to reflect on their systems of support. The process aims to develop a common understanding of

what a Continuum of Supports and Services is and opportunities to reflect on design principles and essential element indicators. As a team, they used the Implementing a Continuum of Supports and Services resource, and the “Knowing” section as a foundational tool to help build a common understanding of the design principles among school leadership. They began by digging into the necessary design principles by working together to determine current supports at the classroom, school, and division level and evaluating if they reflected the principles.

They are currently in a process of bringing school and district leaders together to explore their current successes and challenges within each of the elements. After initial sessions to determine practices currently in place that align with each element and introduce design elements, they evaluated what was the capacity and understanding that they needed to build to develop systems of supports and services across the division and within schools. They determined that starting with a focus on the elements of “collaborative practices” and “approaches and supports” was important. They co-created with school leadership a practice profile tool that highlighted the key ideas from the Continuum document as well as current research in these areas. Moving forward, staff will use this tool to reflect and build on practices that support each of these elements at both the school and district level.

Through the next few years, they will continue this process with each of the elements. Hugh and Monica expressed that this is ongoing work as the process of reflection on how supports are provided at the universal, targeted, and individualized level requires ongoing adaptation and capacity building due to an always changing context. They shared, “We’re going to be working with our division leadership team to really dig down into this practice profile and then go back to their schools and find evidence of where they are on each of the continuums. From there, we can start to think about how division and school leadership can work

together and with their respective staffs to continue to move the work forward.”

As the division moves forward together in this work, they are hoping to build common understanding and approaches across schools as well as ensure that each school is able to respond to their unique context. The aim is to create a space for administrators and learning services staff to build on and disseminate their knowledge and experiences resulting in supporting and sharing best practices across all levels of the continuum.



**Story of Practice #3** Wolf Creek Public Schools “Focus on Doing”  
(Recording 1:05 -1:15)

Danica Martin, Assistant Superintendent for Wolf Creek Public Schools shared that her division has a vision for change that is identified through three priority areas: supporting all students, quality teaching and collective responsibility. Over the past couple of

years, Wolf Creek Public Schools has had a focus on inclusion, and they have been looking systematically at what structures and processes they need to have in place to successfully move this work forward.

This spring they brought their administrative teams together for a two-day working session with the Continuum of Supports and Services document. During this time together, administrators were invited to work through a template that outlined the seven essential elements of their continuum.

and reflect on and then record their perspectives of what universal, targeted, and individualized supports and resources were currently available within their schools. This information was shared and discussed among the participants.

Next, the administrators were introduced to the iterative cycle of explore, develop, take action, and evaluate (Doing), that is explained with the Continuum of Supports and Services document and provided a placemat activity that had school leaders to consider some key questions. They each completed their own placement to capture what they identified as their future work in each of these areas.

The central office teams are committed to using this information to support administrators with the alignment of the ideas they brought forward on the placement, their education plans, and the overall strategic plan of the division. Danica shared that this process and these tools will be extremely helpful in identifying areas of strength and gaps in their process of moving this work forward and fully implementing the CSS document to support inclusive practices.

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### Research to Practice

#### Questions for reflection and dialogue within your context.

1. Consider your division’s vision for optimum learning for all students. How are you utilizing the Professional Practice Standards (TQS, LQS and SLQS) to achieve your vision? What is your evidence?
2. How does your leadership demonstrate universal acceptance and belonging for all?
3. Reflecting your current supports and service, what are your current successes and challenges? Which of the seven elements would you focus on? Why?
4. What evidence and assurance do you have that demonstrates your continuum of support and services is meeting the needs of all learners in your district?

### Additional Supports for System Leadership Capacity

- [Watch Full Recording Here](#)
- [Presentation Slides](#)
- [Implementing A Continuum of Supports and Services: A Resource guide for School and School Authority Leaders \(July 2022\)](#)
- [Alberta Professional Practice Standards](#)
- [CASS Resource Library](#)

