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the CASS CONNECTION

The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents

Spring 2019

Leading Learning:

Implementation of the Professional Practice Standards





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The College of Alberta School Superintendents

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Message from the President

Kurt Sacher

College of Alberta School Superintendents

In anticipation of new *Professional Practice Standards* for teachers, school and System Leaders, and superintendents coming into play by September 1, 2019, it is clear that the heavy lifting is already underway. Across the province of Alberta, at ATA teachers' conventions and CASS events, we already have a head start on the professional learning required to make that transition as smooth and effective as possible. For the necessary learning that is not complete prior to the end of December 2019, we will rely on additional support from our post-secondary institutions in Alberta.

In this edition of *The CASS Connection* there are a number of articles that tie directly to the spring 2019 theme *Leading Learning: Implementation of the Professional Practice Standards*. For example, from Grande Prairie Public School District we will learn how one district drove system-wide improvement as they implement *Leadership Professional Practice Standards* for teachers, administrators and System Leaders (page 9). Led by Superintendent Sandy McDonald, Grande Prairie Public has been deeply involved in work that

we have found tremendously beneficial here in Chinook's Edge School Division. The core of this work taps into an individual's inner motivation, utilizing a process of generative dialogue and collaborative inquiry.

In Chinook's Edge, we are undergoing a thorough review of our model and this is being facilitated by Dr. Pam Adams from the University of Lethbridge. We have been working with a made in Chinook's Edge Instructional Leadership model for a number of years now and we are convinced that it will set us up for continued success as we transition to the new standards.

Another very intriguing approach to collaborative professional learning for school-based leaders is underway in the Battle River School Division. Jim Brandon (University of Calgary), Rita Marler (Superintendent), and others share their journey (page 11), which outlines how they are meeting the goals expected in the new standards.

For our readers, I also want to draw your attention to a number of the other articles in this edition. Guy Tétrault, who is also involved with C21, discusses some of his groundbreaking work in Saskatchewan (page

15). For anyone dealing with the challenges of small, isolated rural high schools, this information will be very interesting to you.

If this isn't enough, Dr. Richelle Marynowski (University of Lethbridge) and Amber Darroch, Horizon School Division, give us a look inside a very powerful research project that shifted math teacher assessment practice by working closely with a cohort of teachers and involving the University of Lethbridge (page 20). Last, but not least, Neil O'Shea, in conjunction with several others, has written an article outlining the partnership between Aspen View Schools and Concordia University that leverages teacher collective efficacy to move our new standards forward (page 23).

With an election around the corner there are several unknowns that our leaders need answers to. At the same time, we face these unknowns with confidence because System Leaders have their focus firmly on what is best for students and they have an unparalleled expertise to move school divisions forward. Our collective efforts to bring the new standards to life will only serve to augment the amazing work that is already well underway. ■

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Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

Currently in our province, System Leaders are supporting the implementation of a number of initiatives, all of which are important to improving learning environments for students, but all of which take time, focused energy and collaboration between education partner organizations. The implementation of the *Professional Practice Standards*, preparing for the requirement of Leadership and Superintendent Leadership Certification, and the soon to be piloted Kindergarten to Grade 4 curriculum can be viewed either as challenges or as opportunities facing System Leadership teams.

The College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) has been working to support System Leadership teams by developing a better understanding of successful implementation strategies. Director of Leadership Learning Val Olekshy has assisted in incorporating the work of the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) into the supports CASS is developing.

An opening statement on the NIRN web-page states: "Implementation is not an event. Implementation is a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions. These activities occur over time in stages that overlap and that are revisited as necessary dimensions."

The implementation opportunities identified in the opening paragraph have allowed CASS to support school authorities and System Leadership teams in implementation by developing an awareness and understanding of something new. The current circumstances have also made it imperative for CASS to reflect upon its practices for supporting implementation. Moving forward,

it is clear that new learning is based on past and current practices, and that a key to successful implementation of any initiative is a strong plan and a constant self-reminder that changes happen over time.

Over the past two years, CASS has used *A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions* to frame a plan to support the implementation of the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard*. The plan is posted alongside the Comprehensive Professional Learning Plan at <https://cassalberta.ca/planning-for-implementation>.

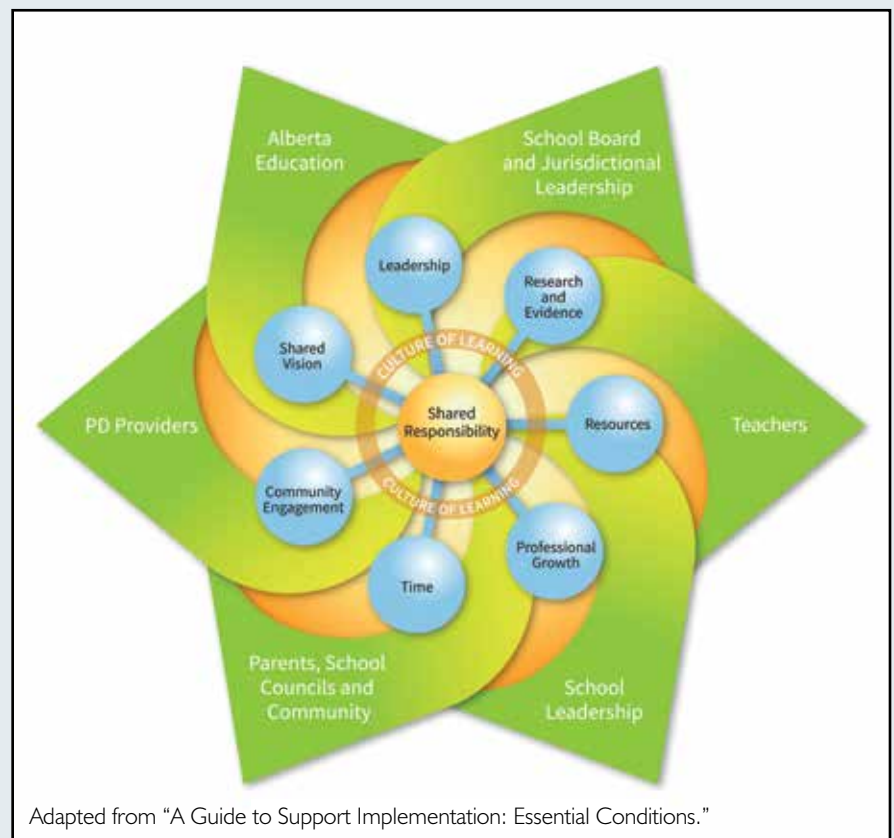
Recent work by CASS using these "made in Alberta" documents has necessitated reflection about CASS' practices undertaken to set the stage for providing services to members. A key reflection has been to ensure that ongoing feedback is captured

from members to ensure that the efforts of CASS are having an impact in addressing Goal 2 of the *CASS Strategic Plan: Leadership Capacity is Built and Supported*.

The stages of change / implementation have been written about by various authors. CASS used two primary sources, shown in the table on the next page, to guide our work.

Clearly this article provides only a high-level overview of the work and commitment required to ensure the implementation of any initiative is successful. CASS will continue to work with its members, seeking ongoing input and feedback, to ensure the implementation of the *Professional Practice Standards* is such that the knowledge and understanding of the standards is institutionalized.

Continued on next page 8



To close, I want to thank all the authors who have shared their respective “stories of practice.” I speak with pride when I suggest that *The CASS Connection* has become one vehicle by which the walls between school authorities

have been knocked down, allowing all of us to learn from and with each other, for the benefit of all students in Alberta.

Finally, on behalf of all CASS members, I extend sincere appreciation to the sponsors

that advertise in *The CASS Connection*. Your support enables us to publish the magazine, which is shared with all education partners in the province as well as all the parallel organizations of System Leaders across Canada. ■

Miles (1986) and Fullan (1991) <i>3 Stages of Change</i> www.tallinn.ee/haridus/3-stages-of-change-process	National Implementation Research Network <i>4 Stages of Implementation</i> https://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/module-4/topic-1-implementation-stages-overview/what-are-stages
<p>The initiation phase is about deciding to embark on innovation, and of developing commitment towards the process. The key activities in the initiation phase are the decision to start and a review of the school's or system's current state with regard to the particular change.</p>	<p>Exploration – Identifying the need for change, learning about possible innovations that may provide solutions, learning about what it takes to implement the innovation effectively, developing a team to support the work as it progresses through the stages, growing stakeholders and champions, assessing and creating readiness for change, developing communication processes to support the work, and deciding to proceed (or not).</p>
<p>Implementation is the phase of the process that has received the most attention. It is the phase of attempted use of the innovation. The key activities occurring during implementation are the carrying out of action plans, the developing and sustaining of commitment, the checking of progress and overcoming problems.</p>	<p>Installation – Securing and developing the support needed to put a new approach or practice into place as intended, developing feedback loops between the practice and leadership level in order to streamline communication, and gathering feedback on how new practices are being implemented.</p> <p>Initial Implementation – The first use of an innovation by practitioners and others who have just learned how to use the innovation.</p> <p>Initial implementation is about trying out those new skills and practices and getting better in implementation. In this stage, we are gathering data to check in on how implementation is going and developing improvement strategies based on the data. Implementation supports are refined based on data. For example, we might find that a new skill an educator is using as part of social and emotional development could be further strengthened by additional coaching from an expert, so we would think about how to embed these strategies into ongoing coaching opportunities, and how we would gather data if the coaching is leading to the improved use of this skills.</p>
<p>Institutionalization is the phase when innovation and change stop being regarded as something new and become part of the school's or system's usual way of doing things.</p> <p>The move from implementation to institutionalization often involves the transformation of a pilot project, to a school-wide or system-wide initiative, often without the advantage of the previously available funding.</p>	<p>Full Implementation – The skillful use of an innovation that is well-integrated into the repertoire of practitioners and routinely and effectively supported by successive program and local administrations.</p>



How Can Simply Asking Questions Drive System-Wide Improvement?

“Frequent and focused conversations about shared goals, guiding questions, strategies and evidence—collaborative inquiry—can lead directly to measurable growth in school improvement” (Townsend & Adams, 2016).

By Sandy McDonald and James Robinson, Grande Prairie Public School District

Curiosity is at the heart of learning and the current learning journey in the Grande Prairie Public School District (GPPSD) began with a simple question in the spring of 2016: *How might the efforts of the district leadership team contribute to a system-wide increase in student achievement and overall student success in the Grande Prairie Public School District?*

As preparations for the 2016-2017 school year began, our curiosity focused on system-wide structures and processes and what actions we might take to bring about consistent growth in student achievement over the next three to five years. Our community, and our district, had experienced significant change in the previous 10 years, including population and enrolment growth along with changes in school and System Leadership. We believed, at that time, that the essential pieces necessary for continued growth existed in our district. These included clear direction and support from our board; capable teachers, leaders and support staff; and excellent facilities. We were curious about how we might combine these elements to effectively support teaching and learning.

Background

Situated in the city of Grande Prairie, one of the fastest growing and youngest cities in Canada, GPPSD grew from a district of 10 schools in 1999 to a district of 18 schools in 2017. The opening of new schools and supporting the professional growth of a large percentage of beginning teachers caused us to look critically at professional learning. At the same time, the government's focus on implementing new *Professional Practice Standards* and carrying forward a commitment to revising the provincial curriculum added to the importance of reevaluating existing structures and processes in our district.

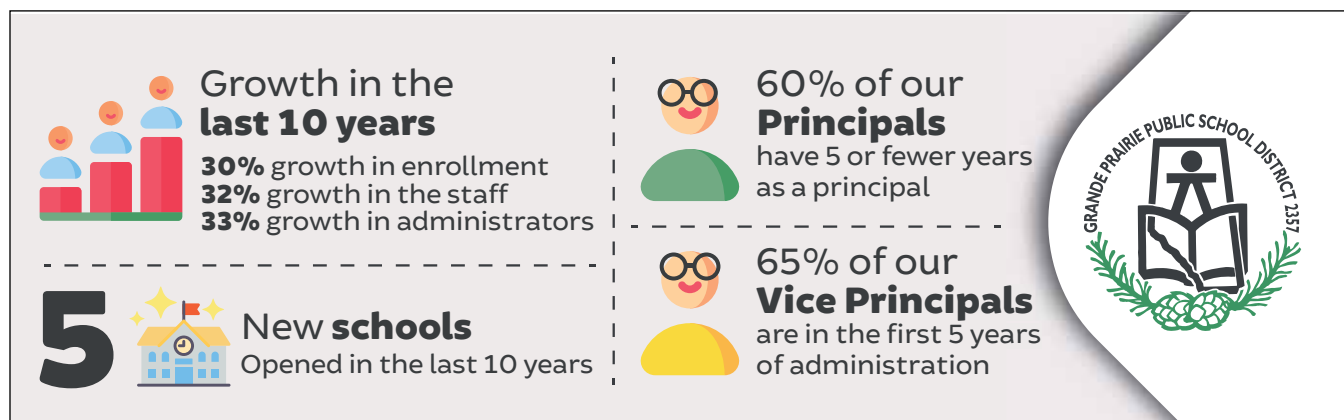
Our direction was established in the spring of 2016 when our Board of Trustees revised Board Policy 1 to clarify their expectations about the importance of establishing high expectations, a culture of success in the district and to more explicitly focus on our continuous improvement. Our reflections at the time were that we needed to align our internal planning to address the changes happening within the Alberta Education system.

At the start of the 2016-2017 school year, the district's strategic plan identified

high-quality instruction and effective leadership as the priority strategies to support our continuous improvement. While there are many factors that impact the achievement students receive and the leadership in the school and district is consistently identified in educational research as the most important factors. Focusing on these two research-based strategies affirmed our belief that strategic improvement had to be built on supporting the professional growth of our teachers and school/district leadership.

Importance of the system

Central to our planning was a 2008 research summary prepared for the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS). Dr. Kenneth Leithwood identified several characteristics of high performing school districts. Included among the common characteristics, Dr. Leithwood identified that high achieving school districts focus on achievement and instruction, the use of evidence to inform decision-making and investing in instructional leadership. Our desire, as System Leaders, was to support our administrators to continue to



develop their capacity to be instructional leaders in their schools who, in turn, could support our teachers to build their sense of efficacy to make a difference. At its simplest, our plan was to provide a structure and culture in our district to support teachers and administrators in refining their focus on the needs of students and on practices for teaching and learning.

Multiple sources of school and district evidence supported initial assurance planning and the identification of priority areas for our school and district three-year plans. At the CASS Fall Conference in November 2016, a session titled *Leadership of Learning: How a Sustained Focus on Leadership Growth Contributes to School & District Improvement*, hosted by Dr. Pamela Adams and Dr. Carmen Mombourquette, both from the University of Lethbridge, was a turning point in our direction.

They shared a structure of generative dialogue and collaborative inquiry as a foundation for professional growth that appeared to be a fit for our district. The focus on achievement could align the efforts of all schools while allowing each of them to focus on their own priorities. Embedded collaborative inquiry could also support the overall professional growth of our teachers and leaders while allowing for individuals to focus their growth on priority areas they were curious about. Most importantly, collaborative inquiry seemed to honour the values identified in GPPSD Board Policy 1 and the strategies in our strategic plan; that our overall success as a school district will primarily be dependent upon the work of our teachers, our school leaders, and the present efforts of our district leadership to base key decisions on evidence related to the teaching and learning.

What are we doing?

After this conference, Alberta Education announced support for innovative research projects with the newly formed Alberta Research Network (ARN). Our conversations with Dr. Adams and Dr. Mombourquette led to a joint proposal to the ARN, along with the Foothills School Division, the Lethbridge Public School District and the University of Lethbridge. Our project focused on preparing school leaders for the implementation of the new *Professional Practice Standards* for teachers and leaders (TQS/LQS) and was approved in early 2017. The ARN research, which became

known as Phase 1 of our multi-year plan to foster professional growth, introduced all district leaders to the new standards through a series of awareness and readiness activities. After reflecting on the LQS and evidence, school and district teams developed professional inquiry questions that centred their professional growth focus for the year.

The current phase of the project is focused individual Professional Growth Planning through a process of collaborative inquiry, supported by generative dialogue between teachers and administrators. Our belief is:

- Professional growth planning, focused on professional standards, is essential to the continued improvement of our teachers and leaders and must be connected to student achievement.
- Commitment to the collaborative inquiry model throughout the school year will provide teachers and administrators focused and regular opportunities to reflect and refine their professional growth.
- Generative dialogue, peer-to-peer coaching, is critical to support the work of individuals and teams in collaborative inquiry.

Teachers, administrators and System Leaders explore a curiosity they have about their practice and develop a guiding question for their inquiry work. Their exploration of their professional curiosity is supported by colleagues through regular opportunities to engage in generative dialogue with each other. The role of administration is to “reduce the amount of time they talk, exchanging it for more intensive listening, more thoughtful questions, and more helpful feedback.” (Townsend & Adams, 2016)

Our goal is to dramatically increase the number of conversations that take place about teaching and learning to support the development of conscious competence in all staff. A key structure to facilitate sustained engagement needed for effective collaborative inquiry is dedicated district-wide monthly professional learning days. During this time, teachers and school-based administrators focus on both whole-school professional learning as well as their individual or team collaborative inquiry questions.

Additionally, every month the school-based leadership teams meet with two colleagues from Central Office and one of the University of Lethbridge research team members to

support the inquiry goal for the school administration team. Each meeting is a dialogue about the progress the school administration team is making towards answering their inquiry question and addresses the following four topics each month:

1. What progress have you made with your commitments since when we last met?
2. What have you learned about yourself as a leader?
3. What evidence do have that impact is occurring?
4. What will you do to further your inquiry before the next meeting?

Conclusion

By developing our teachers' and leaders' abilities to explore their curiosity through collaborative inquiry and engage in generative dialogue we are seeing deeper and more meaningful, pedagogically-focused conversations with and between our teachers. Our belief is that generative dialogue focused on teaching practice supports higher level professional conversations and allows teachers to support each other in an authentic way that impacts individual practice. Inquiry-based professional growth planning, connected to the TQS and student achievement, is the future in GPPSD. We look forward to continuing to refine our practice in this area as the new professional practice standards come into effect in September. ■

Sandy McDonald is Superintendent, and James Robinson Deputy Superintendent, at Grande Prairie Public School District (GPPSD). The authors would like to acknowledge Drs. Pam Adams, Carmen Mombourquette, and Sharon Allan of the University of Lethbridge. Their dedication, mentoring and support of GPPSD leaders has impacted GPPSD in a short time. For more information about our project, contact James Robinson at james.robinson@gppsd.ab.ca.

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Implementing the LQS through Collaborative Professional Learning

By Shan Jorgenson-Adam, Battle River School Division; Rita Marler, Battle River School Division; Dr. Christy Thomas, University of Calgary; and Jim Brandon, University of Calgary

Battle River School Division's partnership with the University of Calgary is supporting the development and exploring the impact of a collaborative professional learning model aimed at helping school and division leaders meet identified goals related to Alberta's new Leadership Quality Standard.

With the implementation of Alberta's new *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS), many school districts are considering how to build leadership capacity in relation to this standard and its nine competencies (Alberta Education, 2018). This article outlines how we are addressing the LQS through the design and implementation of our ongoing, collaborative professional learning and coaching model in Battle River School Division (BRSD).

Our approach is guided by the insights of a number of reputable studies. Harris (2011) argues for collective leadership, a form of distributive leadership, where capacity building

involves collective responsibility and engages individuals in collaborative work to improve their practice. Mendels and Mitgang, (2013) recommend that districts focus on standards, work to improve principal training, and invest in mentorship and professional development.

Providing these ongoing opportunities for leadership capacity building (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Goldring, Preston & Huff, 2012) that are embedded, continuous, and personal (Breakspear, Peterson, Alfadala, & Khair, 2017; Timperley, 2011) is recommended. Investing in leadership development and building collective leadership capacity (Harris, 2011) has

considerable value given that school leaders have a direct impact on teaching practices (Davis et al., 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Louis et al., 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

As an Alberta school division, we are keenly aware that the LQS is key to building our collective leadership capacity.

Collaborative professional learning design

Collaborative professional learning aims to develop leadership capacity in both central office and school-based leaders and helps create a culture of growth and collaborative work across all levels of leadership (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). This purposeful investment in BRSD's leadership is intended to make a difference for students in our schools as research demonstrates a direct link between leadership and students learning at high levels (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson,

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2011). We believe that implementing this professional learning model also reflects BRSD's strong commitment to our leaders in supporting their learning and growth in relation to the LQS.

During the summer of 2018, we designed the collaborative professional learning for our Division Leadership Academy (DLA). These sessions take place once a month between September 2018 and May 2019. An important element of the Division Leadership sessions is that both educational and non-educational leaders from the division participate in these sessions. When developing this model, BRSD looked to current research in the areas of: adult learning, collaborative professional learning, coaching, growth planning, and reflective practice.

DLA sessions were planned for half days. Each session has a participant guide, which are designed using the same format as the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) participant guide modules used for the CASS Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA) summer conference. These participant guides outline the structure for each session, provide a summary of the research that was used in the planning of the session, a description of each of the activities used in the session, and any additional resources required.

Each session also includes a group relationship building activity, a group processing activity, a peer coaching component, and a group learning component. Each session ends with an individual reflection time and a short homework assignment.

Our first DLA session provided division leaders with the opportunity to complete a pre-survey that asked leaders to assess their achievement of LQS competencies and to select a competency to focus on for their professional learning for the year. Leaders were also asked to provide a rationale for their choice and two to three suggested strategies for meeting their goal.

Once participants had identified their focus competency they were split into

smaller groups (no larger than seven). The main foci for the beginning DLA sessions was building relationships and trust amongst competency group members, developing group norms, and creating their individual growth plans. The mix of leaders in each group illustrated the need to ensure there was time in each session for members to build relational trust, especially if they were going to be vulnerable enough to talk about their growth areas and seek advice and support from a peer coach.

Time was also provided for groups to develop norms. Common expectations from their individual group norms were used to form large group norms as well. When participants began to develop their draft growth plans it was surprising to see that almost all of the plans were focused on growing others rather than themselves. For example, plans focused on goals that built leadership skills in their team or developing professional learning for their team. They did not focus on their own individual growth.

It was clear that we had to go “back to the drawing board.” Consequently, leaders were challenged to be “selfish” with their growth plans and to focus on what they needed personally to meet their chosen LQS competency. Coaching protocols have been used to enhance the development of their revised plans. Practicing these protocols will support later work when participants begin to enact the strategies laid out in their plans.

Coaching model

To support the actualization of participant’s goals, leaders used variations of a number of coaching models (Campbell & Nieuwerburg, 2018; Killion & Hirsh, 2013; Knight 2018). In the development of participant’s growth plans, a coaching trio protocol was used. This coaching protocol uses guided questioning to assist participants in looking critically at their growth plans, ensuring that they reflect the professional learning they want to achieve.

In their book, *The Leader’s Guide to Coaching in Schools*, Campbell and Nieuwerburg (2018) define coaching as “a

one-to-one conversation that focuses on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate” (p. 4). All coaching activities planned for DLA sessions are vetted through this definition in support of a participant’s achievement of the goals identified in their professional growth plan.

Next steps

In the coming months, there are four DLA sessions planned. At the final DLA session, we will be distributing a post-survey that will give leaders an opportunity to reassess and reflect on their growth in relation to the LQS this year. We have also partnered with the University of Calgary to explore the impact of our collaborative professional learning and coaching model, and researchers will be analyzing data collected from participant’s during the year. Findings will be shared with BRSD and be used to develop an action plan for next year’s DLA sessions and coaching.

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Conclusion

We recognize that districts are seeking ways to implement the new LQS and build leadership capacity in relation to these new competencies. We suggest that professional learning designs and coaching may be a way to support leaders in their growth in these competencies. The partnership between BRSD and the University of Calgary is aimed at examining the impact of this collaborative professional learning model to find out how effective it is in

helping leaders meet their goals for LQS and to examine the role coaching is playing in assisting leaders in meeting these goals.

Through this research, we hope to learn what the impact of this collaborative professional learning model has had on developing leadership capacity in relation to the LQS and to identify ways to improve the model to better support the leadership learning. These findings will be transferable and useful for other districts who are doing similar work. ■

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Using **SLQS** Competencies to Gauge PeBL Implementation

Alberta Education has developed their new Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard, which takes effect for the 2019-2020 school year. In helping support System Leaders, CASS has developed their System Education Leader Practice Profile. This article provides educational leaders with insights into the competencies and their indicators of this standard.

By Dr. Guy G. Tétrault, Sunwest School Division

The Sun West School Division (SWSD) in Saskatchewan has developed and implemented Personalized electronically Blended Learning (PeBL). Alberta Education has developed the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* (SLQS) based on desired competencies reflected in the role and responsibilities of system education leaders.

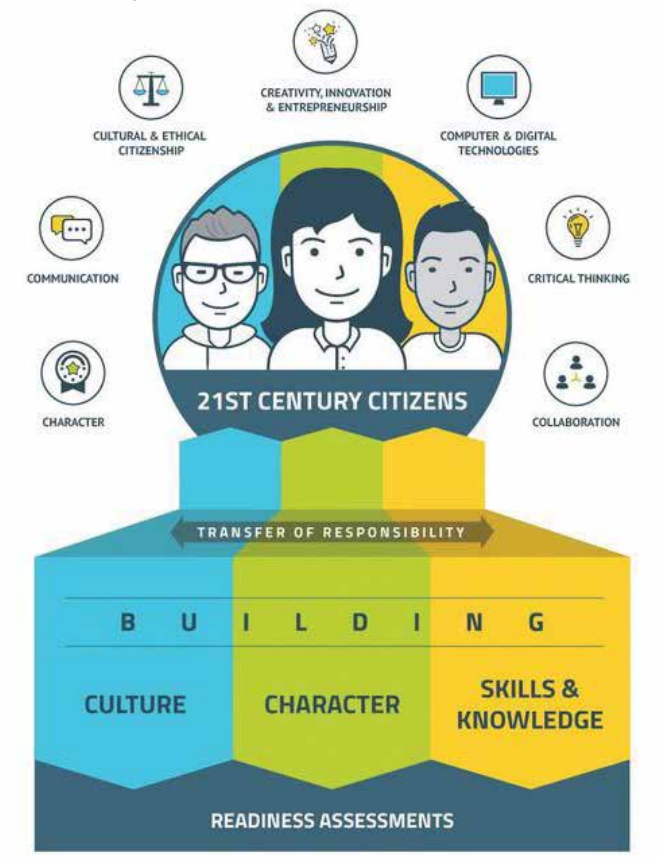
The SLQS is based on several indicators describing each of these “7 Competencies”:

1. Building Effective Relationships;
2. Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning;
3. Visionary Leadership;
4. Leading Learning;
5. Supporting First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education for All Students;
6. Sustaining Effective Instructional Leadership; and
7. School Authority Operations and Resources.

In this article, I'd like to analyze the PeBL journey by identifying the Competency number and its specific indicator as delineated in the CASS System Educator Practice Profile.¹ I won't focus on Competency #1, Building Effective Relationships, as this Competency must be in place before any effective leadership can take place. Instead I will direct the analysis through Competencies #2, #3, #4, #6 and #7 by highlighting at the end of each paragraph referenced Competencies and Indicators described within that paragraph.

The journey towards Sun West's PeBL model began in 2007 when Saskatchewan Education discontinued their Correspondence School. School divisions were left on their own in so far as providing any distance education

The PeBL Implementation Process



programming. The SWSD dedicated three full-time teachers out of their Kenaston School to develop and deliver synchronous broadcasts to schools within the division that did not have specialist teachers in core curriculum areas. Most of the distance programming involved higher level science and math academic programs along with existing correspondence courses that had been developed by the Ministry. (#3b)

I was hired in 2010 as the Director of Education/CEO. The Board of Education gave me a mandate of bringing educational programming equity to all students in the division. I had background experience that included helping develop Canada's first Cyber School (a partnership between Greater St. Albert and Red Deer Catholic schools), which helped move the SWSD online programming to much more of an asynchronous model that phased out synchronous audio-visual delivery.

Red Deer's St. Gabriel Cyber School experimented with various models of development and delivery, eventually settling on implementing a model where full-time online teachers were housed in collaborative open office space we called working pods. This model was adopted by the SWSD, housing full-time online teachers within the same room in their Kenaston School. (#4e, #4b)

The division soon realized that many of the online courses that were being developed could also be used to support home-based students. The division therefore decided to develop online programs to include the entire Kindergarten to Grade12 spectrum of programming. As more SWSD home-based students began taking online programming, word of mouth spread throughout Saskatchewan which significantly



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increased the base enrolment of Sun West's distance learning programs.

This increased enrolment helped create necessary revenue streams to continue with the development of K to 12 programming. Soon all teachers in the SWSD had access to K-12 online programming to support their own teaching resources. (#6a, #6f, #7f, #6i)

The results of experimentation with various models to support online students in Alberta led SWSD to train and place educational assistants (EAs) in each of their schools. These EAs supervised any student taking an online course and provided an important communication link between the online teacher and the online student. This practice significantly improved student course completion rates and encouraged students to take more online programs. Soon, well over half of all SWSD secondary students were taking at least one online course per year. (#2d, #3a)

In 2012, the Board of Education analyzed the Saskatchewan government's *Plan for Growth: Vision 2020*, the Saskatchewan School Board Association's *Vision 2025* and its own five-year *Strategic Plan*. These analyses were matched up against C21 – Canadians for 21st Century Learning and Innovation's research *Shifting Minds 3.0: Redefining the Learning Landscape in Canada*. The SWSD subsequently developed *Policy 18 – 21st Century Competencies*,² which endeavoured to infuse 21st Century learning skills into all curricula and into the development of any and all educational programming. This research and subsequent policy direction spawned many research projects focused on improving student learning in SWSD. (#3d, #3c)

By 2013, the Sun West School Division created the *Sun West Initiative for School Improvement* (SWISI) as a bold approach to improving student learning. It encouraged teachers, parents and the community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative projects that address local needs. It was modeled after the *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* (AISi) and provided over one million dollars for a three-year period to fund innovative projects throughout the division. During the subsequent three-year period many research projects took place examining topics such as project-based learning; Enquiry Based Learning; and Blended Learning. (#6h, #6g, #4d, #2e)

By 2015, the SWSD was studying and implementing ideas from the book *Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools*³ by Horn and Staker. Research showed that using such disruptive innovation would require a lot of effort on behalf of the division in supporting professional development (PD) of teachers in order to change the prevailing pedagogy. Annual PD funds available to each teacher were increased to a maximum of \$1,200 plus covering up to two days of substitute costs.

The SWSD then promoted exploratory tours throughout the United States, which involved visiting systems and schools that had implemented Blended Learning. To maximize culture and relationship building, these tours typically included a mix of roles such as trustees, division level leaders, school administrators and teachers. Various forms of in-school supports—including learning coaches, 21st Century lead teachers and technology coaches—were added to support the implementation of promising practices found on these excursions.



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Their experiences on these trips reinforced the belief that the most effective way to change teacher pedagogy was through exposure to these promising practices where they could see and hear the impacts from their teaching colleagues rather than coming as a “top down” division directive. The relationship building that occurred with the various stakeholders on these trips reinforced the belief that, “*we are all in this together.*” (#2b, #2d, #4b, #2f, #6c, #7e)

During this exploratory phase student enrolment numbers in the SWSD distance learning program continued to rise in all grades

across the province. Soon the increasing number of required teachers and staff outstripped the space capacity of the Kenaston School. Using financial reserves, in 2016 the SWSD built a new state-of-the-art Distance Learning Centre (DLC) in Kenaston that was capable of housing approximately 75 teachers plus a contingency of technology support staff.

By September 2018, the DLC had a base enrolment of just over 900 students and was delivering an additional 4,000 courses (approximately) throughout the province with a staff of 65 (48 of whom were full-time teachers). The

DLC had already developed over 165 online Kindergarten to 12 courses. All of these supports were available to all teachers and students in the SWSD. (#7a, #7b, #6e, #6f)

As more and more students experienced learning through projects and opportunities for independent learning via online programs, they began requesting much more voice and choice. In response, teachers adapted the use of technology; this gave them the flexibility to provide students with opportunities to have voice and choice in their learning over such aspects as time, place, path and/or the pace of their learning journey. From these experiences, the SWSD coined the term “Personalized electronically Blended Learning” (PeBL). The use of adaptive software also shows significant promise to effectively utilize student data in adjusting the learning path for each student. (#6f)

A key component to successfully implementing PeBL was effectively communicating with students, staff, parents and the educational community in general. The division developed a PeBL website (<https://www.sunwestpebl.ca>), conducted stakeholder electronic surveys through the use of *ThoughtExchange*, held numerous public meetings, developed and presented *Continuum of Learning* explanatory videos for teachers (search YouTube for: Sun West School Division Continuum of Learning - Educator version) and also one for parents (search YouTube for Sun West Continuum of Learning Parent Version). In addition, the

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Board utilized its Annual General Meeting time to broadcast these information videos to all SWSD School Community Councils (SCCs).

The division added anywhere from .25 to .50 FTE teacher time into every school in the form of PeBL Mentors. The division also hired a PeBL Supervisor to work directly with all PeBL Mentors which provided them with skill development that would equip them to mentor their teacher colleagues in the implementation of PeBL. (#3c, #3d, #4a, #2a, #2c)

Two key ingredients to successfully implementing PeBL are:

1. Helping students gain the ability to *self-regulate*; and
2. Supporting teachers to change their pedagogy to one of becoming an *activator* of learning.

The SWSD PeBL implementation plan that develops this is highlighted in the accompanying graphic on page 16. In essence, PeBL promotes the deliberate and gradual transfer of responsibility, back and forth, between the teacher and the student as the situation warrants. Quality supports are paramount in achieving this balance. The latest support the SWSD has implemented is an electronic resource bank that is available 24/7 for all stakeholders, including students and their parents, which can be found at <https://resourcebank.ca>. You can also search YouTube for “Sun West Resource Bank Trailer” to access a short introduction to this resource. (#3b, #4b, #4c, #4d, #4e, #4f, #2a, #2b, #6a, #6d, #6f, #6h) ■

Dr. Guy G. Tétrault is a former CASS member and current Life Member. He is currently the Director of Education for Sun West School Division, which is located in west central Saskatchewan. This division is well-known for its system reform. Dr. Tétrault was recognized by MindShareLearning eMagazine as one of the Top 10 Canadian Education Newsmakers of 2015 and 2016.

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Sustained Coaching as a Model of Professional Learning: A Research Study

By Dr. Richelle Marynowski,
University of Lethbridge, and
Amber Darroch, Horizon
School Division

As part of an Alberta Research Network (ARN) grant, Dr. Richelle Marynowski from the University of Lethbridge and Horizon School Division partnered to conduct research with a cohort of rural, middle school math teachers to examine the impact of a sustained instructional coaching model on shifting teacher professional practice in the area of assessment and instructional practice.

Sustained coaching has been shown to increase teacher understanding and capacity in formative assessment (Marynowski, 2013) and increase a leader's ability to support teachers in implementing formative assessment (Marynowski, 2014). Specific characteristics of sustained coaching were drawn from the previous two studies and implemented in a different context to determine if those characteristics were essential in impacting teachers' assessment and instructional practices or if other factors were also at play.

The characteristics were that the professional development:

- Was provided over time;
- Focused on a specific teaching practice;
- Was provided by an external expert;
- Was responsive to teacher needs;
- Included an element of teacher peer observation;
- Was based on current research with respect to assessment and instructional practices; and
- Held teachers accountable to others in the group for both embedding learnings into their practice and for completing the assigned readings.

The significant findings from this study can be used guide System Leaders' design of future professional learning activities.

The study

Ten middle school teachers and one consultant in Horizon School Division



#67 participated in a year-long professional development study on assessment in middle school mathematics. The commitment by the participants was one day a month to either engage in whole group sessions, small group observations of teaching practice, or individual observations of teaching practice. Table 1 outlines the series of professional development activities that were engaged in over the course of the 2017-2018 school year.

Each of the sessions and observations was led by Dr. Marynowski, the coach. The topics for each of the sessions were highlighted in the pre-reading and the activities in each session. As topics came up in the sessions that were of interest to the group, the coach researched those topics and brought information back to the group. For example, one participant's sharing regarding their "commit to try" between sessions brought forth a group interest in learning how to support students transitioning from additive thinking to multiplicative thinking. Several participants in the group agreed that they had also struggled with supporting students to make that move in thinking. As such, the coach researched that topic and brought ideas back to the group in the next session to support their practice. Because one of the tenets of the model of sustained coaching is being responsive to teacher needs, the coach needed to be able to integrate the goals of supporting teachers in their assessment

and instructional practice with the teachers' specific needs.

Important characteristics of the professional development

Analysis of interviews with participants regarding the professional development support revealed five main characteristics that were deemed most important in supporting a change in their practice. Those characteristics are:

1. Having a consistent group of participants;
2. Committing to trying a new practice between sessions;
3. Sharing practical ideas along with theoretical support;
4. Ongoing throughout the year; and
5. Having continued support from principals and school division.

Developing relationships and trust among a consistent cohort of teachers enabled participants to be more forthcoming in sharing their successes and struggles. Without the building of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) with a trust in each other to not judge, but support, the depth of the sharing and learning would not have been as evident.

The committing of trying new ideas pushed every participant out of his/her comfort zone and allowed each of them the opportunity to struggle in a safe environment. When each participant shared the new practice that they tried, the learning of

the whole group increased and others contributed suggestions to adjust the practice to a different topic or grade level, or other refinements. The sharing of practice at the beginning of each whole group session was an impactful learning experience for every participant and fueled the group momentum of moving theory to practice. Additionally, the coach provided background or research that was available to support the practice that teachers were engaging in.

Barriers to change

Teachers in this project experienced barriers to them engaging fully in the professional development and to changing their practice. Four main barriers were identified by the participants. They were:

1. Extended time away from the classroom (particularly if the teacher was also teaching a Grade 12 course);
2. Time to digest and implement new strategies;
3. Availability of substitute teachers; and
4. Readiness of the participant to engage with new ideas.

Though some of these barriers were out of control of the teacher (i.e. availability of substitute teachers), they impacted the engagement of the teachers in the professional development. Though all participants engaged in all sessions, sometimes the stress of not being able to find a substitute teacher impacted the readiness of the teacher to engage with ideas as she/he was concerned about the classes being missed.

Additionally, external personal factors influenced the participants' ability to fully engage in professional development. These were not always known at the time but were often revealed later. A teacher's personal and emotional state does need to be taken into consideration when thinking about professional development and the success of professional development in impacting teacher practice.

At the end of the year, each participant noted that they wish that the sessions could continue or that we could have check-ins with each other throughout the following year to continue to support the growth and learning. Unfortunately, that was not possible on a formal level due to the ending of the grant cycle.

Unexpected consequences

A number of unexpected positive consequences spun off of the professional learning project, including the enthusiasm of participants to extend their collaboration into additional professional learning activities, like teacher self-selected collaborative groups on division-wide learning days, and to extend their new professional practice into subject disciplines above and beyond mathematics.

Commensurate with participants' self-reflection on the degree of growth they each experienced in the course of the project was

the confidence a number of them developed in taking on formal and informal leadership roles in and between their schools. From participating more actively in various jurisdiction teacher engagement activities to leading and facilitating professional development activities for colleagues, the sustained instructional coaching model impacted teacher practice beyond the cohort itself.

Next steps

As System Leaders examine how to use the right levers to improve professional practice within a school jurisdiction, consideration of

Table 1. Professional development activities.

Session Number	Type of Session	Activities
1	Whole group	Introduction to project. Survey completion: GAP Assessment Practices Survey (Appendix D) (Marynowski, Mombourquette, & Slomp, 2017). Resource distribution: <i>Elementary and middle school mathematics: Teaching developmentally</i> (2018); and <i>Visible learning for mathematics Grades K – 12: What works best to optimize student learning</i> (2017), and <i>Interweaving curriculum and classroom assessment: Engaging the 21st-century learner</i> (2014).
2	Whole group	Pre-reading. Reading discussion. Working with NCTM professional resources. Identification of “commit to try” for next time.
3	Whole group	Pre-reading. Discussion of “commit to try’s.” Reading discussion. Identification of “commit to try” for next time.
4	Individual observation	Coach observed individual teacher’s classes. Initial interview.
5	Whole group	Pre-reading. Discussion of “commit to try’s.” Discussion of what the coach saw during individual observations. Reading discussion. Organization of small group observations. Identification of ‘commit to try’ for next time.
6 & 7	Small group observations	Structured small group observations of each other teaching. Survey of participants for next phase of sessions.
8	Whole group	Pre-reading. Discussion of “commit to try’s.” Reading discussion. Identification of ‘commit to try’ for next time.
9	Whole Group	Pre-reading. Discussion of “commit to try’s.” Reading discussion. Survey completion. Cybera presentation.
10	Individual	Final interviews.



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a sustained instructional coaching model in place of traditional professional learning activities, particularly one-time PD, is warranted. Strategizing carefully with the lessons learned through this research project will not only help yield greater outcomes from the investment in an instructional coaching model, but also truly shift and improve teachers' self-perceptions of their effectiveness in both instruction and assessment. ■

Dr. Richelle Marynowski is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge. Her research focuses on teacher professional development, classroom assessment, and mathematics teaching and learning. Amber Darroch serves as Associate Superintendent, Learner Services for Horizon School Division #67.

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Measuring Knowledge and Competencies

By Neil O'Shea, Aspen View Public Schools; Brenna Liddell, Edwin Parr Composite School, Aspen View Public Schools; and Edgar Schmidt, Concordia University

Aspen View Public Schools (Aspen View) and the Faculty of Education at Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE) are working together through the Alberta Education's Research Partnership Program. Through the concept of teacher collective efficacy, CUE and Aspen View educational leaders are developing their knowledge and competencies as identified in Alberta Education's new *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS) and the *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS). Collective teacher efficacy is being developed through jointly planned leadership workshops.

Teacher collective efficacy

The work in schools is complicated and demanding. Schools are the centre of significant social groupings designed to establish learning environments that are respectful and safe, as well as challenging and encouraging. The social context (Van Dijk, 2006, 2008) of schools is an important consideration in relation to improving student learning and achievement.

Key elements of the social context are students, their families, school staff, teachers, administrative leaders, the school district leaders and staff, the socio-economic status

of the families, and geographical location. In addition, interactional components related to the interactive and pedagogical skills of teachers, the leadership skills of principals and the governance and productive bureaucracy of the school district itself are important features. The variability of any one of the elements can have a significant outcome on teaching and learning.

Collective teacher efficacy is a concept made up of measurable collaborative and structured actions taken by teachers to address student achievement in schools (R. D. Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Y. L. Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Understanding teachers' individual and collective sense of efficacy related to the task (requirements) of teaching and the competencies (professional standards) required to teach students is an important concept. Concordia University of Edmonton and Aspen View Public Schools are working together to assess collective teacher efficacy as Aspen View implements the emerging TQS and the LQS.

Through development and use of a collective efficacy survey instrument for teachers and leaders in Aspen View, more targeted workshops (McCoach & Colbert, 2010) are being developed to support the implementation of

the TQS and LQS. As a pre-test, intervention, post-test research model, the participants will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the particular process and determine the next steps for supporting teachers and educational leaders in the implementation of new practice standards. The development of leadership competencies in the specific area of helping classroom teachers understand and practice the new TQS is valuable to Aspen View.

Initial results

The study is not yet completed, however, the collective efficacy pre-test survey results have been analyzed and shared with the principals and senior leadership of Aspen View. The overarching framework for the collective efficacy survey instrument comes from the work of Tschannen-Moran (see <http://wmpeople.wm.edu/site/page/mxtsch/researchtools>), however it is adjusted to take the TQS and LQS into account. The survey instrument used a Likert rating scale from 1 to 9, with 1 being strongly disagree or never, and 9 being strongly agree or all the time. Opportunities for comments were also provided, although they are not addressed in this article.

The Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE) survey is made up of 29 questions, one of which is a permission question and four of which are basic demographic questions about the participants. No personal identifiable information has been used in the results analysis. The remaining 24 questions relate to collective efficacy. These findings are aggregated and are reflective of groups, not individuals. Overall, CTE results showed that teachers believed that they had some degree to a great deal of collective efficacy in working with students.

- Some interesting demographic findings are:
- The teacher response rate is approximately 72 per cent of all teachers in Aspen View Public Schools;
 - 50 per cent of respondents have taught for 10 years or less; and
 - 42 per cent of respondents teach elementary school subjects.

The questions breakdown into three large categories, as suggested and tested by Tschannen-Moran. The categories are Efficacy in Student Engagement, Efficacy in Instructional Strategies, and Efficacy in Classroom Management. The means are based on a 9-point scale.

- Mean of student engagement questions – 6.73;
- Mean of instructional strategies – 7.13; and
- Mean of classroom management – 7.38.

Administrator preliminary results

Overall, administrator efficacy findings indicate that they believed that they had some degree to a great deal of collective efficacy in working with staff, students, parents and school district administration. About 95 per cent of school-based administrators responded to the survey.

The questions breakdown into three large categories, as suggested and tested by Tschannen-Moran. The categories are Efficacy on

Management, Efficacy on Instructional Leadership, and Efficacy on Moral Leadership. The means (based on a 9-point scale) of each category are:

- Management – 6.55;
- Instructional Leadership – 7.15; and
- Moral Leadership – 7.61.


The three highest means for administrators were all in the category of Moral Leadership. The lowest overall mean was in the category of Management, with the lowest mean of 6 being the question related to the extent administrators are able to shape the operational policies and procedures that are necessary to manage your school.

The questions related to administrators being able to facilitate the application of foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and align resources and build capacity to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit, were 6.76 and 6.67 respectively, which were scores that were higher than that of teachers.

As stated, the strengthening of collective efficacy of teachers and administrators is to be carried out through jointly planned workshops. The LQS provides a framework for workshops and work that principals will do in schools. Stories illustrate aspects of collective efficacy, the effects of joint planning and the hopes and challenges principals face.

The Superintendent's Story

Our real purpose in the collaborative project is to assist school leaders in understanding the new *Leadership Quality Standard* in order to



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help teachers embrace the new *Teaching Quality Standards*. Standards in any profession are indicators of the minimal level of competency that one must maintain to remain current in the profession. Standards should never be distilled down to a check list or an evaluative tool. The series of workshops are not designed as, “how to,” modules but rather as an invitation for participants to dig deep, go beyond the surface level understanding and compliance, and discover those cornerstone competencies that fuel their passion for leadership.

The workshops are designed to bring a collective efficacy to the administrative group. The opportunity exists to build something greater than themselves, with others in similar roles through the sharing of experiences and new learnings. The loneliness often found in leadership positions can be challenged by developing stronger, trust-based bonds with colleagues.


People in leadership positions spend much of their time doing. Schools are busy places. We know that in order for leaders to grow and develop they must reflect deeply on their practice. The goal of the workshop model is to stimulate reflection as well as provide an environment free from the busyness of the school. Through collaborative sharing, leaders are better able to examine the competencies in the standards and identify areas of strength and areas for growth. Each session ends with a task or challenge for the participant to be followed up at the next session by providing the space to share their experience.

The project provides promise that at the completion the following questions will be addressed: Do the participants feel more capable as leaders with a deeper understanding of the competencies in the new LQS? Do they feel a collective efficacy with their colleagues? Do they feel empowered to lead teachers from a deeper, value-based place?

The administrator's voice


Administrators in Aspen View are generally finding the sessions to be helpful to improving their administrative practice. The majority feel that the time away from their schools is making a difference in how they are approaching situations within their own schools while other times it relates to how they are preparing their teachers for the rollout of the new TQS. They appreciate the opportunity to share with

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colleagues in private and through group discussions; learning a lot by listening to others and sharing their struggles and successes.

Suggestions for future sessions from administrators include having rapid-fire discussions as a way to connect strategies with the competencies or an opportunity for administrators to come to a session prepared to share one or two of the most challenging things they have dealt with that month, providing details about the situation and allow for discussion with colleagues.

Work in progress

This project is in progress. Its strength appears to be the jointly planned workshops with assigned tasks and follow up. The remaining time of the project will offer a way for the continued development of administrator and teacher efficacy. ■

Neil O'Shea has been a teacher, principal and superintendent in Alberta. He is currently the

Superintendent of Schools at Aspen View Public Schools in Athabasca, Alberta. Brenna Liddell has been a teacher and principal in Alberta and a teacher in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. She is currently the assistant principal at Edwin Parr

Composite School in Athabasca which is part of Aspen View Public Schools. Edgar Schmidt has been a teacher, principal and superintendent in Edmonton, Alberta. He is currently the Dean of Education at Concordia University of Edmonton.

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Shaping Wellness—One Conversation at a Time



The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is a health and welfare trust governed by 10 Trustees. It offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for over 60,000 covered members and their dependants in 58 school jurisdictions and 11 associations across the province. ASEBP is pleased to contribute a regular column in The CASS Connection.

By Kelli Littlechilds, ASEBP

Picture this. You enter a room buzzing with conversation, laughter and idea-sharing. In one area, you overhear a group of educators talking about how much more integrated workplace wellness is in their district because of new opportunities to connect early in the year. In the next group, someone is talking about how much more engaged their students were when they moved classroom instruction outside for a few periods a month last spring. In the back of the room, there's a group talking about small, physical environment changes they can make to classrooms to create more welcoming spaces for students and teachers. As you stand there, soaking it all in, you begin to realize how big your collective impact is.

Experiences like these come naturally while attending conferences that focus on comprehensive school health—ones like Ever Active School's Shaping the Future. In fact, the conversations illustrated earlier are exactly what you get when educators, health and wellness professionals, and other like-minded stakeholders come together to share



their knowledge and expertise on what it takes to build a healthy school community.

While it's likely that these types of conversations are currently happening in small groups across the province, they may not always amount to large-scale change for a variety of reasons. This is why big events

committed to comprehensive school health are invaluable for educators and school wellness advocates, especially when attendance is encouraged by System Leaders. By showcasing what has worked and is working for other wellness leaders in environments similar to your own, moving the needle on

this work becomes an easier goal to grasp, even at the wider, district level.

School districts across the province all grapple with similar challenges, so to hear how one district has been able to overcome or even work within those challenges to build a flourishing workplace wellness program is an incredible gift—one that doesn't escape us at ASEBP. This is exactly why, for this year's Shaping the Future conference, we wanted to focus on the "how" of workplace wellness programs: how to get started, how to keep up the momentum and

how to move workplace wellness in the right direction.

In our session, "Workplace Wellness Superheroes Take Flight," we invited representatives from three Alberta school districts to share how they moved employee and workplace wellness forward. For Pembina Hills Public Schools, success came through the power of understanding their audience and their readiness to engage in workplace wellness initiatives. Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools found the key to building a psychologically healthy and safe work

environment came from fostering social connections in the workplace. And for Chinook's Edge School Division, their approach was to get ideas out there—no matter how big or small or ridiculous they seemed—because ideas have the power to inspire and transform. By having these wellness champions share their unique stories, we saw how resources, commitment and ideas came together to improve workplace wellness.

As the different paths to success for these school districts show, there's certainly no magic bullet when it comes to building an effective, comprehensive workplace wellness strategy, but it does highlight how we can learn so much from each other by simply sharing our experiences—the wins, challenges, key learnings and a-ha moments. Find people in your school, district or elsewhere who are breathing life into their wellness activities and doing things that you want to do and just have a conversation with them. Maybe they'll have ideas that you can adopt or adapt, or maybe their experience will inspire something totally different for your group.

Or, better yet, maybe you're the one who has advice to share! If you know there are other groups that may benefit from the ideas and initiatives your district has implemented, reach out and offer to discuss what's worked for you and what you've learned along the way. If you're a member of The Sandbox (www.TheWellnessSandbox.ca), we encourage you to check out the site's forum—reach out for ideas and inspiration or share your own story. And, if you know of workplace wellness champions in your district who are doing incredible things, encourage them to share their stories. Large-scale, collaborative events like Shaping the Future, sites like The Sandbox and other provincial initiatives are making connecting, sharing and collaborating easier than ever.

Together, our collective progress has the power to create incredible momentum in building healthy school communities for students and employees across Alberta. ■

Kelli Littlechilds is the CEO of ASEBP and has more than 30 years in the health and benefits industry. As the leader of one of Alberta's Top 70 Employers for 2018, Kelli is a champion for personal and workplace well-being.



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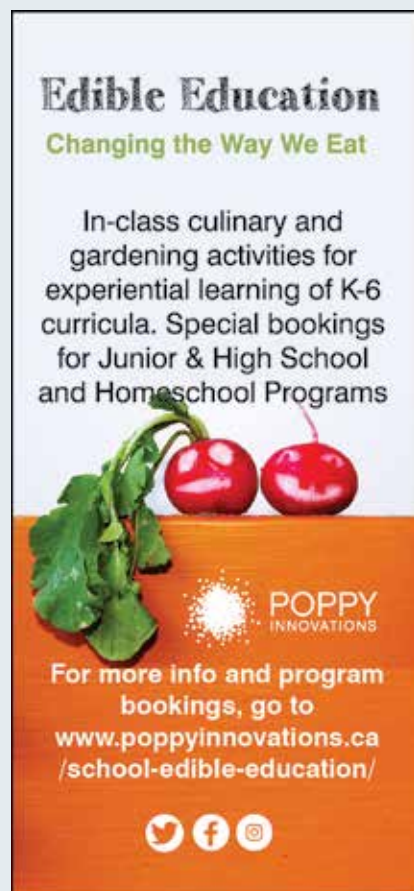
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