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Fall 2018

The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents

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Alberta School  
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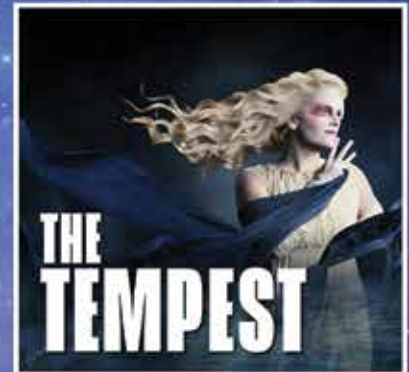
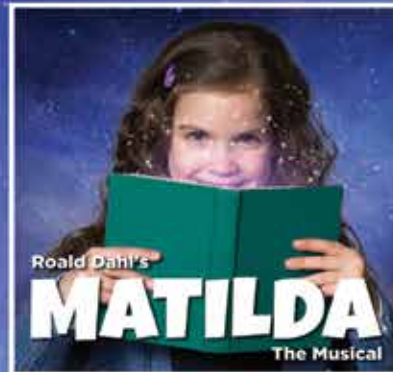
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# Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable David Eggen

**W**e are in the midst of another exciting school year. This year, nearly 700,000 students from across Alberta headed back to class. In September, I was fortunate to visit many of your schools and I look forward to visiting more in the weeks ahead. I always enjoy seeing the excellent work happening in our schools to enhance the learning experience of our students.

Thank you to all the teachers, support staff and members of our school communities for all the work you do to prepare Alberta's students for success. Your passion and dedication is essential to building a healthy, prosperous future for our province and future generations.

Our government is committed to supporting the outstanding work educators do each day. That's why I was pleased to extend the Classroom Improvement Fund into this school year, which means school boards are able to access \$77 million to hire additional staff and provide more supports to students, particularly in areas like math and literacy.

Across Alberta, there is a growing sense of optimism. Families are continuing to trust that Alberta is one of the best places in the world to live and raise a family, and we are again expecting an increase in enrolment of nearly 15,000 students province-wide. We believe that all of our students deserve high quality learning environments and an education that enriches their lives, so our government has fully funded enrolment growth each year, resulting in nearly 4,000 new teachers and support staff.

We are also making an unprecedented investment in school infrastructure, with 37 new and modernized school projects expected to be completed this school year. In fact, we are at the height of the largest school build in Alberta's history, as these 37 projects are on



Minister Eggen visited several schools in September and will continue to do so throughout the school year.

top of the 144 that have been completed since May of 2015. What's more, there are dozens of projects still underway that were announced in Budget 2017 and 2018, and will be opening in the coming years.

Additionally, we are modernizing Alberta's curriculum to make sure that students have the skills they need to build bright futures for themselves and their families. To help shape the future curriculum, I had the opportunity this summer to engage with experts and advocates on topics like financial literacy, diversity and pluralism in Alberta, and computational thinking. The changes also include teaching students about First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, perspectives, culture and current issues, as well as the legacy of residential schools. I am proud of the work our government is doing to reflect the journey of reconciliation and I am confident that the common-sense changes we are developing will give students the skills they need to succeed in a fast-changing world.

We are working to make life better and more affordable for Alberta families


through *An Act to Reduce School Fees*. By eliminating fees for instructional supplies, materials and transportation fees for eligible students, we are doing what we can to make sure students and families can start the year off right.

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Thank you for being an integral part of these important initiatives. Together, we are working to make life better for Alberta's students and their families. We should all be proud of our accomplishments, and I look forward to continuing our work together.



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# Message from the President

**Kurt Sacher**

College of Alberta School Superintendents

**W**ith September 1, 2019 approaching quickly school jurisdictions are working hard to help their staffs align with the new professional practice standards for teachers, system and school leaders, and superintendents. The new standards serve to support the work that has always been done across Alberta to enhance quality system leadership.

It was so exciting to see hundreds of College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) leaders from across Alberta come together in the Kananaskis for our first ever Provincial Learning Conference. It was at this conference that CASS got an early start embracing the new quality standards. Given that 60 per cent of CASS members have been system leaders for five years or less, it is incumbent upon us to ensure the highest levels of support for their leadership development.

In Alberta, school jurisdictions provide so many incredible learning opportunities internally to grow and support leadership development. This is enhanced when jurisdictions work interdependently to share

and build upon their most successful work. As an organization, CASS plays a key role supporting leadership development with programs like Start Right for beginning administrators; Leading and Learning for experienced administrators; CASS Mentorship for new CASS members; and through a variety of learning-focused CASS conferences designed to enhance system leadership development.

In this edition of *The CASS Connection*, there are a number of articles that will provide the reader with insight into specific programs, like the one in Zone 4 where prospective school leaders from several neighbouring jurisdictions receive an intensive program that combines and delivers the best learning from each of the partnering divisions.

In many school divisions in Alberta, there is work being done with post secondary institutions, like the University of Lethbridge, supporting Instructional Leadership programs within their divisions. In Chinook's Edge, for example, we have seen considerable growth for school-based administrators and system-level administrators who have been involved in this local leadership development program. We have seen it have an impact on quality learning environments

in our classrooms and on student learning in our rural school division.

We have found that the true power in this model comes from an inquiry-based approach where system leaders stand beside school-based administrators, who in turn stand beside their teachers, who stand beside their students to challenge and support learning at its highest level throughout our system. Because of our involvement in this model our staff are committed to professional growth and our system is carefully aligned to ensure our people receive the support that they need. I am proud of how our school-based and system-level administrators have become such consummate professionals as they develop their skills through this particular instructional leadership model.

In his book, *District Level Leadership Matters*, Marzano makes a very strong case for the role quality system leaders play in improving student learning. In Alberta, thanks to the great leadership capacity building underway, along with tremendous support from CASS, our relatively new contingent of leaders are in good hands in the province of Alberta. Special thanks to the contributing authors for this edition. Thank you for sharing your expertise! ■

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# Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

When the theme for this edition of *The CASS Connection* was established, work was well under way for three Research Projects initiated by the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), each of which speaks to the heart of enhancing the quality of system leaders and system leadership.

A summary of the findings of the research suggests that superintendents need to focus on building sustainable learning cultures that promote critical reflection, shared responsibility for student success, and the use of school and classroom data to drive continuous improvement. The studies also found that when superintendents align resource allocation with instructional priorities, the positive impact on student outcomes is measurable.

The trilogy of professional reports are available on the CASS website at <https://cassalberta.ca/resources/research-and-position-papers>, and include:

1. *School System Leadership Development*, a Best Practices Literature Review authored by Dr. Barret Weber and Alvin Mardhani-Bayne;
2. *Review of Leadership Development Programs for Alberta School Authorities System Leaders 2017-2108*, authored by Joanne Bergos and Stephen Lynch; and
3. *Leadership Learning through University & School Authority Partnerships in Alberta*, authored by Cam Oulton.

The literature review by Dr. Weber and Ms. Mardhani-Bayne provides a discussion of the “systemic conditions that are needed for senior leadership to impact student learning and achievement.” Written in a case study format, the review describes approaches to the development

of system leadership in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Ontario, the states of Kentucky, Minnesota and New York (through the work of the American Association of School Administrators), and what is being done in New Zealand (through the work of the Ministry of Education).

Through their research the authors identify five key lessons learned, and through the following statement provide a challenge to CASS and CASS members: “We firmly believe that, with a laser-like focus on the conditions that impact student learning, system leaders can impact the drivers that matter.”

In their review of leadership development programs in Alberta, Ms. Bergos and Mr. Lynch tell the stories provided by 52 different school authorities. They have published a searchable encyclopedia of information that can assist readers in finding the program structure, elements and content, as well as contact information from the 52 school authorities, in order to support the creation or enhancement of leadership development programs for current system leaders, principals and assistant principals. This is a great resource to use for identifying and preparing future system and school leaders. A key aspect of the report is that it also provides how the respective school authorities define and measure success of their programs.

The authors encourage CASS and CASS members to, “use this information to increase networks of information and support to build leadership capacity across the province.”

CASS will be using the format of this report to tell the stories of Alberta School Authorities that have developed strategies to support wellness of staff and students in their respective jurisdictions.

In *Leadership Learning through University & School Authority Partnerships in Alberta*, author Cam Oulton shares the stories of seven Alberta School Authorities and two universities, referencing partnerships between the School Authorities and the universities in the development and implementation of leadership development programs. Five key advantages were identified by the participants, including:

1. Increased trust;
2. Increased credibility;
3. Bridging theory and practice;
4. Exposure to adult learning practices; and
5. Focussed external expertise.

Mr. Oulton also provides the potential challenges to creating and maintaining successful partnerships, and challenges CASS to continue the research to include all school authorities and Alberta universities involved in leadership development partnerships.

In a Foreward specifically written for CASS, Dr. Michael Fullan and Dr. Santiago Rincón-Gallardo succinctly summarized the findings of the Research Trilogy: “We have noticed that CASS members are focused on the learning agenda like never before—with clearly articulated strategies, nuanced and collaborative approaches to leadership, and a relentless focus on improving student learning.”

Thank you to the authors in this edition of *The CASS Connection* for telling additional stories of how every student is important and supported in their respective jurisdictions.

And, 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.



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# Effective Leadership for Learning

*By David Griffin, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools, and Paul Stewart, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools (retired), City University of Seattle*

**T**he field of education is becoming significantly more diverse, and expectations of teacher effectiveness and adaptability are continually growing. The *Leadership Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2018) notes the importance of teaching and administrative staff building personal and collective professional expertise. Together, administrators and teachers are encouraged to work towards sustained and meaningful growth for the betterment of student performance and the teaching profession itself.

The positive pressure of formal leaders and the leadership capital within a building will be the driving force behind the creation of leadership for learning cultures. Each context can find creative solutions and implement common core principles for creating a leadership for learning culture and promoting distributive leadership.

There is some disagreement on the level of influence school administration has on school culture and many contextual factors need to be taken into consideration. However, although it is clear that cultures are built from within an

organization, an administrator can foster that growth through their leadership style and relationship building with staff. Leadership is vital to the success of teachers, and that principals have the power to improve or stagnate teacher performance.

Principals can have significant impacts on school culture in both positive and negative ways. In response to the stagnated growth of teachers, research suggests that growth comes from within an organization's front lines. Leadership for learning cannot be mandated by administration alone.

Alberta Education (2018) has pushed for higher standards of leadership in our school systems with the *Leadership Quality Standard*. Formal leaders need to use data to create a clear vision and mission, build capacity to support organizational improvement and work on it continuously.

There is a new standard to hold teachers, leaders and superintendents accountable in Alberta that will take effect at the start of the school year in 2019. The problem is that training programs, for the most part, have been preparing leaders for their role

without understanding how they might be held accountable in the future. Previously, all educators, regardless their role, were held to the same standard. This is changing. The concern is how are we preparing aspiring leaders, and those new to the role, to meet these standards and in order to do their best, what do we want them to know, do and be?


In 2016, the Alberta Government had presented the draft *School Leadership Standard* (Alberta Government, 2016) that was based on the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* (PQPG) from 2009, with the

inclusion of one more competency, which was supporting the application of foundational knowledge about First Nations, Metis and Inuit. On April 7, 2018 there was a ministerial order signed making all teaching professionals accountable for this standard.

For the first time there is a separate standard for leaders and superintendents. The *Leader Quality Standard* (LQS) maintained all the draft competencies but added an additional one: Modeling commitment to professional learning. This new competency clearly indicated that leaders need to commit to actively build their professional capacities and expertise. This new standard will not be in effect until September 2019. The draft had indicated the need to establish formal supports to ensure the successful implementation of the standard and now that the new LQS will be law, the need to address transitions and supports for this training will be imperative.

Alberta Education is pushing for teacher and administrator growth and adaptability in the new *Teacher Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2018) and *Leadership Quality Standard*. School districts are obligated to provide resources and support to ensure the continual growth of their staff. In setting up straightforward, focused and achievable professional development goals, administrators can attain constant and realistic growth throughout their careers. Emphasizing administrator accountability for reaching straightforward, focused and achievable learning targets can be a significant element to help them grow. Instructional leaders are considered the most important factor in teacher growth and effectiveness. By creating a culture where teachers can grow in ways that are meaningful and attainable, we will have positive outcomes for students.

Demands on school leader growth and adaptability have grown rapidly in the past decade and continue to grow based on the increasing rate of change in our society and the educational field. Creating successful learning cultures amongst administration and school-based leaders has been a focus area for many school districts and many resources are being delegated towards this area. The Alberta government—through the *Teaching Quality Standard* and the more recently developed *Leadership Quality*



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*Standard*—provide a map for administrators to reach a specified level of excellence, to pursue professional growth and to be life-long learners. However, not all professional growth models are created equally among school districts.

In response to the demands on school leadership adaptability, school divisions are being challenged to change professional development practices from one day sitting and to provide learning that has staying power. Organizations are under pressure to increase performance. Due to budget constraints, professional learning resources are not inexhaustible. Therefore, learning models need to have a clear vision and mission, with creative solutions to common problems.

These solutions will look different in every context but a successful leader promotes and facilitates meaningful professional development for teachers and support staff. Through giving administrators a sense of accountability and efficacy, they can grow and they can help their colleagues to grow. Educational leaders need to see themselves as the biggest part of a solution if a positive learning culture can be created. When administrators go to professional development opportunities, the growth stops with them if it is not shared with the leadership team.

Creating a culture of leading learners is essential to recoil the stagnation of teacher growth. With the growing demands of the *Teaching Quality Standard* and the *Leadership Quality Standard*, stagnation is not an option. School district leaders need to be adaptable and creative, but also need to create a foundation that is a stable environment for staff learning. The district learning culture must be driven first by the formal leaders, second by the informal leaders and finally by all leadership staff. This approach to creating a strong learning culture on a district leadership staff will be successful if there is a process in place to hold each staff member accountable to learning and growth.

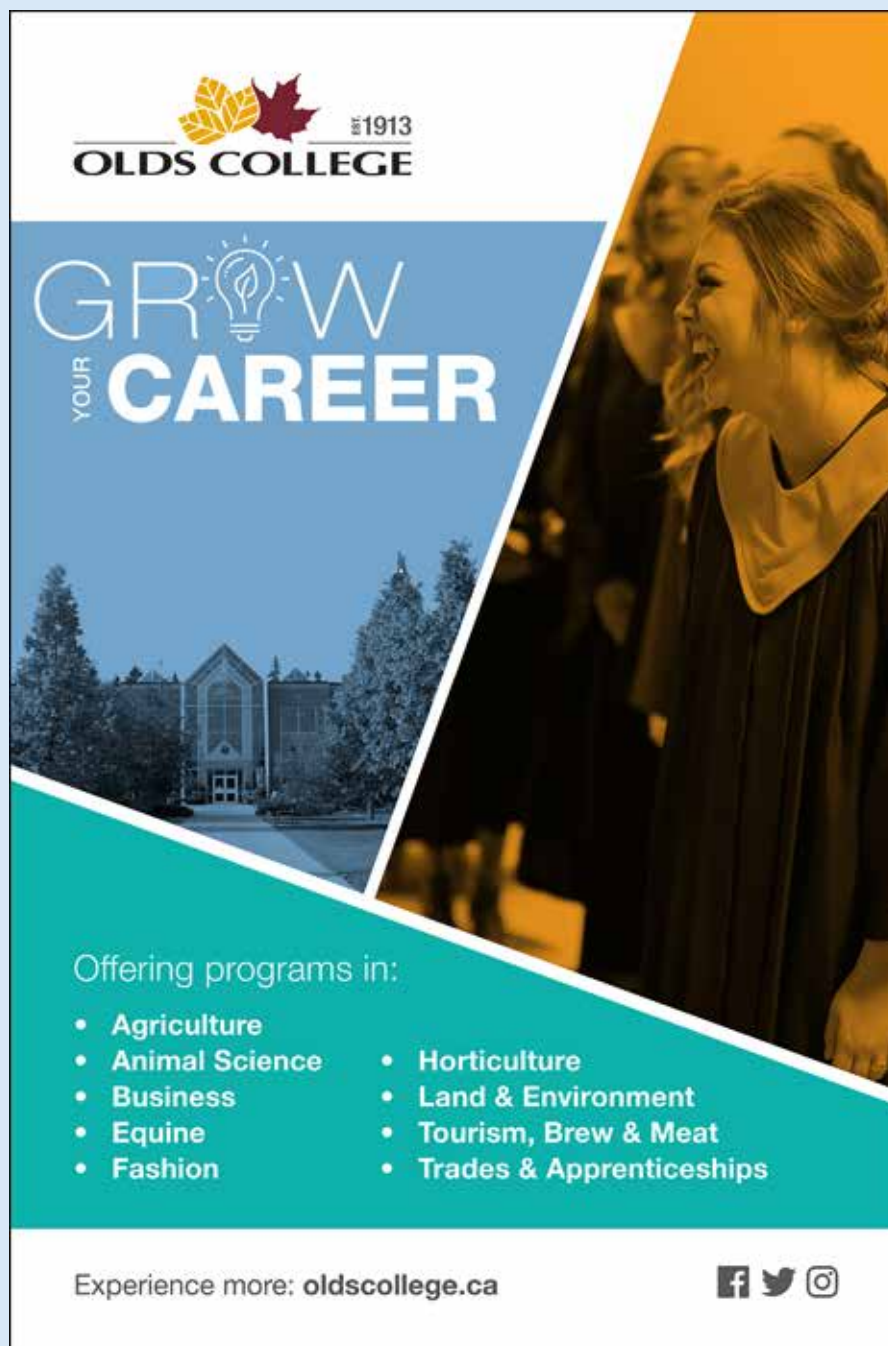
It is important to understand that a lack of quality leadership in schools will stunt the growth of teachers. Administrators need to identify and support leadership in schools in order for a successful leadership for learning culture to be created. If principals cannot trust their staff to learn and grow on their

own, the culture issues are deeper than professional development plans and capacity building. Administrators must trust their staff in order for their staff to trust them.

Administrators can create a successful culture of leadership for learning working with their staff. It takes a diverse team to meet the needs of a diverse staff and student population. Seeing potential in other people is one of the most important leadership qualities an administrator can have. Creating an environment of positive pressure is the cornerstone of building capacity. Being acknowledged as

having a special skillset and receiving an offer of an informal leadership role in a school, can be empowering and ultimately will benefit children and the education system. ■

*David Griffin is currently a vice principal in a rural school with Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools. David completed the Division leadership development program along with his M.Ed. one year ago. Paul Stewart is a retired Associate Superintendent with Red Deer Catholic Schools and is an instructor with City University of Seattle.*



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In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Middle Earth stands in jeopardy because members of the "fellowship" can't stop bickering over ownership and hierarchy. In fact, the journey to destroy the Ring of Power would never have begun were it not for a small Hobbit, who interjects amongst all the inter-fighting: "I'll take it."

One by one, men, elves and dwarves fall silent. They see themselves as the leaders, the powerful, the knowers of things. In charge. And, yet, a three-foot Hobbit has said simply, "I'll do it." What makes this small creature step forward to shoulder this burden, knowing that doing so will almost certainly be fatal?

Servant leadership.

Indeed, if we applied Lao Tzu's rubric from the *Tao Te Ching*, Frodo Baggins would be the "highest type of ruler"—"one of whose existence the people are barely aware."<sup>1</sup>

Servant leadership requires no rank, no positional power and no credit. Servant

leadership has no agenda other than harnessing peak performance through service...and forms the heart of leadership coaching.

Five years ago, our district had a different view of coaching than it has today. Then, the consensus was that coaching is directive, advice-giving and expertise-based. In other words, someone who is an expert gives advice to someone who is deemed "not an expert" and that's coaching. Don't get me wrong; the intention is always to support the learning and growth of aspiring and new leaders. But the traditional mentorship method is grounded in the expert/apprentice model, which is where many organizations are comfortable to live.

As Thomas Crane outlines in his book *The Heart of Coaching*, traditional hierarchical management creates an environment in which "people learn to wait for 'The Boss' to tell them what to do. In the worst situations, they degenerate into a state of 'learned helplessness,' allowing small problems to reach critical proportions

because no one has given them orders. People learn to delegate up."<sup>2</sup>

While Crane's picture may be overly grim, one can argue that the expert/apprentice dynamic can create an ongoing dependence in which one person (the apprentice) always asks the questions and the other person (the mentor/expert) always provides the answers. The mentor/expert benefits by having their expertise confirmed and the apprentice benefits by seeming to solve problems quickly and easily.

But this dependence actually undermines the apprentice's learning and ties the mentor/expert to the role of answer vending machine indefinitely. There is little chance of either moving forward from the dynamic without an intentional paradigm shift in which the mentor/expert is willing to exchange their expertise for curiosity and the apprentice is willing to look to themselves as a source of knowledge, ingenuity and wisdom.

# The Emergence of Coaching from Servant Leadership

By Darrel Robertson, B.P.E.,  
B.Ed., MBA, Edmonton  
Public Schools





From Crane again: “A paradigm shift is a big change—a surprising, abrupt, unprecedented, revolutionary, rule-alerting change.... The business world is in the midst of just such a paradigm shift....The rules have changed. The processes that people previously used to achieve their objectives are no longer valid, and the traditional roles and hierarchical working relationships are no longer effective.”<sup>3</sup>

Leadership coaching asks the coach to abandon their role as expert, as mentor, even as supervisor, and stand in service to the person facing a question or challenge. In fact, as though channeling Lao Tzu, coaching asks that the coach’s existence in the conversation be barely noticed. None of this is as easy as it sounds.

Leaders can be very attached to their expertise and knowledge. It’s expertise and knowledge that helped us become leaders, after all! Yet, what we know as educators and from neuroscience is that the brain is most engaged and active when it is discovering for itself rather than when it is having data poured into it. In fact, the study of neuroplasticity has shown that learning and discovery actually create physical changes in the brain. The study notes, “From

the micro changes in neural pathways right up to the macro effects typically accompanying a brain injury we are now convinced that the brain can physically change. This fundamental process is at the heart of most of the work that coaches do with their clients. In fact, we believe that coaching facilitates ‘self-directed neuroplasticity.’...It underpins the basis of change work.”<sup>4</sup>


True leadership coaching places the coach in a service role where he or she is no longer expert in a subject matter (though the coach may well indeed be) and only “the expert of the coaching process.”<sup>5</sup> Conversely, the “coachee” is challenged to uncover and synthesize information often lying just underneath their consciousness. Questions asked by the coach not only help surface that information, but also facilitate the coachee putting the information to use in ways that make sense for them.

Little did we know five years ago how hungry our district leaders would be not just for coaching, but to step more fully in their roles as servant leaders by honing their coaching skills. It started modestly. Our Chief Communications Officer, who also happens to be a Royal

Roads University Certified Executive Coach, was asked by our Leadership Development Framework team to offer a half day introduction to coaching to a group of principals. One day, one time. But there was a desire to know more, learn more about coaching and its potential for empowering staff to access the expertise and knowledge they already possessed. The sessions were called “Holding People Capable,” and it’s exactly what we were learning to do.

At their request, that first principal group turned itself into a cohort that met several more times for additional instruction. From there, our Leadership Development Framework began offering sections to current and aspiring leaders in our district. Again, the initial goal was to provide an introduction to coaching, but people wanted more.

It was clear we were tapping into something so vital and necessary; supporting the learning and growth of others through a journey they’ve charted for themselves and that the coach has facilitated through questions and observations. Leaders could see the power of moving from “Let me tell you what to do.” to “What’s your next step?” It was a paradigm shift.



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Before long, we had multiple cohorts running. Some principals and other leaders accessed the District's Professional Learning program and received their Certified Executive Coach designations from Royal Roads. Together with an external coach facilitator, they now help lead coach training to staff across the district. In four years, more than 300 staff have received training with no signs of interest waning. The sessions are consistently among the most highly rated within the Leadership Develop Framework offerings with staff feeling that the training has immediately changed how

they view leadership and how they interact with staff, colleagues and even their families.

As one participant commented on an evaluation: This series redirected how I approach my interactions with staff. Rather than jumping in with the answer, I am slowing down...asking questions and listening. It may seem like a small shift, but a significant shift when I think about the possibility of using my role in my building to build capacity in others.

Another participant commented that coach training resulted in their focusing "less on being the source of knowledge and answers

and more on being the source of capability and empowerment."

Leadership coaching is a transformative tool, one of many tools servant leaders would be well advised to master. And, like any tool, there are times it's just the thing and times it's not appropriate at all. But once you have this tool, you'll never be the same kind of leader again.

Our district leaders have recounted the transformational experiences they've had during and because of this training. Isn't this what all learning should do; move you from the place you were to someplace different? Shouldn't learning be so profound that you're aware your new knowledge has shaken your cognitive foundations? That's what coach training has done in our district. It has deepened our understanding of and belief in what it means to stand in service to each other as leaders. It has reinforced the fact that, to build capacity in others, you actually have to *build capacity in others*.

Building capacity demands we hold people capable to harness their own knowledge, abilities and experience to grow, learn and thrive. ■

*Darrel Robertson is the Superintendent of Schools for Edmonton Public Schools. He holds an MBA from Cape Breton University, and Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Physical Education degrees from the University of Alberta.*

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A detailed black and white line drawing of the Eiffel Tower, showing its intricate lattice structure and the surrounding base with some foliage.

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# Placing System Learning at the Heart of System Leadership

By Kurtis Leinweber, Foundations for the Future Charter Academy, Dr. David Townsend, Alberta, British Columbia and Australia, and Dr. Marilyn Chaseling, Southern Cross University, Australia



FFCA high school administration with the freshman students at their orientation.

**F**oundations for the Future Charter Academy (FFCA) serves 3,500 kindergarten to Grade 12 students in seven campuses; four elementary campuses feeding two middle campuses, which in turn feed one high school. As Alberta's 43rd largest school division by student population, we strive culturally to be "one school."

Like other jurisdictions, we have our challenges. Our inaugural high school's Fraser Institute rating (2005) was 4.4/10—that put us at number 221 in the province! Our student demographics have shifted significantly too. Now, 32 per cent of our high school population is coded English as a Second Language (ESL). Also, we have seen

a sharp increase in the number of students requiring specialized learning and social-emotional supports.

Yet, in the face of these challenges, we have managed 12 years of continuous improvement. While we recognize the limitations of the Fraser rating system, our 9.2/10 rating in 2017 is one indicator of our growth.

This article describes how some of our current system's leadership structures, methods and processes help us build current and future leadership capacity. To achieve effective system leadership, we:

- Use an all-campus leadership council for system decision-making;
- View key system-leadership roles as fluid, and

- Follow a collaborative-inquiry learning methodology that supports a regular, focused process of generative-dialogue conversations.

These place the leadership of learning at the heart of our system leadership work.

## Commitment to collaboration

At FFCA, we are committed to a culture of collaboration and distributed leadership—everyone is responsible, in some way, for the education of every student. Structures and processes are in place to support this culture. It is sought during staff recruitment and developed through our work in teams throughout our jurisdiction.

Formal leaders actively seek and embrace the contributions of staff at all levels when decisions are to be made, and staff value the importance of frequent communication and collaboration as they learn together.

## Leadership-of-learning site visits

At the heart of our learning culture is a collaborative inquiry methodology using generative dialogue as the conversational process for "how" we learn and work together. Three years ago, our senior leadership began monthly visits of 60 to 90 minutes to meet with the leadership team of each of our seven campuses—a total commitment of two days per month. Each visiting team is made up of the superintendent, deputy superintendent a university researcher, and at least one system coordinator, principal or associate principal from another campus.

Our Coordinator of Instruction described these visits as "a means for bringing us together, allowing us to know what is happening in campuses, what they're trying to investigate and to learn, and how we can support this." Monthly visits provide opportunities for personal



contact, reflection, advice, support and celebration among all our educational leaders.

### Generative dialogue

Each campus leadership team uses a professional growth plan and the collaborative-inquiry process of seeking answers to guiding questions, to guide and inform their professional practice, and determine the extent to which they are achieving their goals. In each meeting, external team members respectfully solicit answers to the questions which form the foundation of the *generative dialogue* conversation:

1. What have you done since our last visit, specific to your team or individual goals?
2. What have you learned from your efforts?
3. What evidence do you have which informs your learning or what data would you like to share?
4. What will you do between now and our next meeting, specific to your goals?
5. What support do you want or need from the district or from other sources?

In these meetings, the emphasis is on listening carefully, appreciating the work of others,

valuing the evidence of practice, and constantly exploring more effective ways to promote the learning of adults and students alike.

As staff teams within campuses have become more successful in their own learning initiatives, they have been increasingly invited to share their work with the visiting team. This further enhances the celebratory and relationship-building dimensions of the process. Campus leaders and teacher teams have shown growing appreciation for the richer structures and processes. These have given them more voice and validation. Team meetings are increasingly characterized by openness, sharing, thoughtfulness and a focus on evidence.

### The central office team – fluid partners in learning

The relationship between system and campus leadership plays an important role in enhancing the collaborative culture at FFCA. Our central office educational leadership team consists of four team members of which two are seconded from campus leadership positions

(principals or associates) for a three-year period. These positions are referred to as “coordinators”—an intentionally non-hierarchical term. They are process, not decision, focused, playing a distinct role in coordinating and facilitating the learning and work of campus and system leadership teams. This egalitarian structure helps promote collaboration amongst system and campus leadership.

The fluidity of personnel through the coordinator roles also does this. A principal who previously served as a coordinator described the experience as having, “equipped me with a deep understanding of why and how things work, making me more committed and better able to connect the work of our campus to the common system vision.”

Also contributing to the collaborative learning culture is the role of modeling by central office personnel. As with campus teams, the central office team is visited monthly for conversations by the university researcher and a group of campus administrators. These visits allow campus leaders to gain insight into the goals, guiding questions,

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strategies and measures of success on which the central office team is working. This transparency helps build trusting relationships between system and campus leadership, which is further supported by our process for system decision making.

### System decision making by an all-campus council

An established framework provides guidance for how system decisions are made. As previously stated, system coordinators do not have authority over campus leaders.

Moreover, rarely do the superintendent or deputy superintendent make unilateral decisions. A campus principal described our superintendent's work as "being excellent at asking questions, wondering and working through things with us. We never feel he's telling us what to do. He's just right there with us figuring it out."

Our Admin Council, comprised of all campus and central office administrators, follow a process of consensus building for issues of policy or practice that impact multiple or all campuses. Building consensus

takes time with difficult decisions requiring many conversations. Nevertheless, grounding the dialogue in our guiding principles enables us to come to consensus on most issues. Even when we don't, we each learn from the different perspectives amongst us. So, on those rare occasions when the superintendent or deputy is required to make the final call, greater commitment to those decisions ensues.

### Promising outcomes

By engaging in the aforementioned structures and processes, we are learning what best improves our system leadership at all levels:

1. Operating as a non-authoritarian organization (as much as possible) with a fairly flat leadership structure takes time, but builds coherence, commitment and capacity.
2. Seconding central office leaders, for limited terms, from a group of experienced campus leaders provides legitimacy, supports internal continuity, and builds capacity.
3. Engaging in continuous leadership-of-learning through regular collaborative inquiry and generative dialogue ensures that all team members have a public and active commitment to their own professional growth. Moreover, it contributes directly to enhanced trust and respect across the system.

In the words of our superintendent, "collaborative learning is a key part of our organizational fabric through which we prepare our current and future teams to lead together." ■

*Kurtis Leimweber is the Deputy Superintendent at Foundations for the Future Charter Academy, where he has served in various leadership roles for 21 years. FFCA is a public charter school located in Calgary, Alberta.*

*Since retiring from the University of Lethbridge's Faculty of Education in 2014, David Townsend has continued his involvement in leadership initiatives with schools in Alberta, British Columbia and Australia.*

*Marilyn Chaseling is an academic at Southern Cross University, Australia. Her research interests include school improvement initiatives in both Australia and Canada.*

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# "Kids These Days" are the Least of Our Concerns



## *The Connection Works Project: A Network for Educator Wellness for System Leaders*

*By Darlene Ferris, M.Ed., Wild Rose School Division, and Dr. Jody Carrington, Clinical Psychologist*

One of the most prominent concerns of many school divisions across our country is the mental health of students; the Canadian Association of School Superintendents (CASSA) has identified school-based mental health as national priority. There has been acknowledgement, however, that the language and protocols on how best to approach mental health concerns have been far from universal, often leaving system leaders feeling ill prepared.

After walking through some significant crises together, namely the death of three sisters in a small farming community, a Wellness Director and a Psychologist started

talking about how we need to do better. For students, yes. But perhaps even more critically, for staff. For those of you who do the holy work of holding our children every day.

When the hard stuff happens and the difficult students come, we need to look after you, first.

This is why we have spent so much time with different divisions across this province talking about how to lead our staff in a way won't just hold our most worrisome students "at bay," but will prevent further concerns.

Philosopher Cornel West said, "You can't lead the people if you don't love the people. You can't save the people if you

don't serve the people." These words have become our guiding light as we continue to work with divisions across this country, which has led to the development of The Connection Works Project: A Network for Educator Wellness.

Here is what we believe to be true—unless you put the people who you lead first, you will have few dedicated followers who will be able to manage anyone well. We must lead our staff so they are better able to serve our students. Here is also what we know to be true—unless you lead staff first, they will not be able to deliver for your students. Your students don't stand a chance unless your staff are ok.



Reagan Weeks (Assistant Superintendent of Prairie Rose School Division), Paul Corrigan (Assistant Superintendent Faith and Wellness, Elk Island Catholic), Darlene Ferris (Director of Wellness, Wild Rose School Division) and Dr. Jody Carrington (Registered Clinical Psychologist), discussing the importance of making staff wellness a priority at the Provincial Rural Education Conference in March 2018.

Dr. Carrington and panel were also invited to speak at the National Rural Education Conference in Saskatoon later that same month.

We have incorrectly assumed, it seems, that by identifying the “problem” kids and making a plan on how to deal with them, we will be addressing the ever-growing concerns of student mental health, including our most significant worry, the identification and prevention of potential school shooters. The logical answer would be to provide more resources for students, more programs that teach them how to cope, more technology that allows for “optimal learning.” Here’s the deal, though; when it comes to mental health concerns, relationship matters more than anything.

You can have the best programs and all the technology in the world but if the people you are guiding to deliver these programs and resources to kids are not a priority, they will not be in a place to assist those children in making sense of all those resources. Who we are leading within the system are the educators themselves. They are the ones who, if equipped with the right language, and who, if they feel appreciated, will be much better able to continue to do this hard and holy work of walking with our students who have the most significant struggles.

The truth is, if we do not start focussing on those who hold our children for 950 hours every single year, the kids don’t stand a chance.

And what about “kids these days?” As West says, you can’t save “the people,” (i.e.,

the children), if we do not have a method to serve them well. See, despite many programs available to “serve the children,” “kids these days” have never felt so unheard. So unheard that they are taking desperate measures. Even to the point of threatening to shoot us. And we are still not listening. Focusing our efforts on students is not the answer.

So, what is the answer? It appears that what we need is an infrastructure that supports staff. First. And one that provides them with a language to better understand and “serve” the children. Because the truth is, we are wired to do hard things. Your educators, E.A.s, bus drivers, librarians and custodians, are designed to do hard things, including helping the toughest kids make it through their struggles the best way possible. But we can only do those hard things most effectively when we remember this—we are wired for connection. Even at the divisional level. Connecting divisions across each respective province, who speak a common language, to become sources of support during times of crisis, seems a logical direction, given we are all serving children facing many of the same challenges. Working in isolation on universal challenges is a misappropriation of resources, talent and time.

The Connection Works Network in this province now consists of four amazing divisions, with several more in the consultation

phases. These original four now speak a common language, have resources available to each other in times of crises and have each completed three unique steps.

First, each division in the Network have staff who share a common language around relationships, trauma, grief and compassion fatigue. It was imperative from our perspective that staff from every walk of the division (including bus drivers, custodians, administrative assistants and librarians, before and after school care providers, along with teachers and E.A.s) be provided with a relationship-based, trauma informed platform from which to understand, assess and treat children. Where possible, community partners have also taken part in these professional development days. In each of those divisions, we have also developed and hosted parenting evenings where we talk about relationship and connection, using the same language that school divisions now speak.

Secondly, those four divisions established a clear understanding of their Wellness Teams, clarifying the roles of the clinical team leads and supervisors, as well as the counsellors, coaches, and/or therapists who work directly with the children and the family. See, we believe that if mental health is a national priority, establishing clarity and creating an expertise within the clinical team of each division can then provide a sustainable guiding force as divisions move forward.

“Mental health” will never be a problem we will solve. It will require an ever-ready infrastructure of individuals who understand trauma and relationships, and who can act as the conduit to share the stories of the toughest kids with those who need to hear it the most. Thus, we have developed a three-day workshop for Wellness Teams, to once again create a common language amongst divisions who are networked together. Each of those Wellness Teams have completed a three-day workshop designed to walk clinical teams through a trauma-informed assessment process.

The “stories” of the most difficult kids can then be delivered to the people who need to know about them most, everyday (often including the bus driver, the administrative assistant, their EA, and/or their teacher). The identified “village” of each



child becomes responsible for carrying out the respective treatment plans. Relationship and connection are the cornerstone of this model, and because relationship knows no hierarchy, having all people involved with the child—understanding their story—has allowed these divisions to “serve the children” in a much more empathic and comprehensive way.

It has also served to ease the burden of having one or two staff responsible for the “tough ones,” thus increasing staff efficacy across the board. In the two most recent divisions involved in this process, and in our future work, we will formally measure changes in staff efficacy, which has become an important component in enhancing quality system leadership.

Finally, these divisions now have a Network status and are available to each other in times of need. Over our many years of working with school districts, it is far too common that significant tragedy will hit. We know that when the unthinkable happens, like three sweet sisters dying in a farming accident or when a horrific bus accident occurs, it is difficult to care for our own. Even the best forget everything they know to be true when it's their own staff or their own students who are affected.

Within our province, once the initial one-time training process has been completed by your division, you have access to all other

divisions in the Network. This Network will be connected via a yearly required conference that will maintain each division's Network status. New staff to your division will have access to training options on a yearly basis.

We are creating a shift in culture that we feel is necessary. It is time, dear ones, that we start to look after you as leaders, so you can look after our most precious resource—your staff. Divisions across this country, and most recently the United States, are looking to this innovative approach that we are embarking on here in Alberta. We would

love you to join us in this process. If you would like to inquire about how becoming part of the Network might benefit your division, we would love to hear from you.

Carry on amazing ones. You are doing the most important work on our planet. ■

*Darlene Ferris, M.Ed., is the Director of Wellness for Wild Rose School Division. Dr. Jody Carrington is a Registered Clinical Psychologist from Olds, Alberta. Please contact Darlene Ferris at [darlene.ferris@wrsd.ca](mailto:darlene.ferris@wrsd.ca) or Dr. Jody Carrington at [jody@drjodycarrington.com](mailto:jody@drjodycarrington.com).*



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# Mentorship:

## An Effective Model in a Small School

*By Teresa Di Ninno, CEGEP, B.A., B.Ed., M.A., and Jeney Gordon, B.F.A., B.Ed.,  
CAPE Public Charter School*

Collaborative projects allow skills, talents and aptitudes to emerge.

Skills, talents and aptitudes are identified and mentorships are established.

Mentorship provides opportunities and supports for candidates to develop administrative skillset; best candidates emerge.

Openings in administration are filled and supported through ongoing mentorship relationships, creating increased skills and efficacy, satisfaction, and low staff turnover.

Explaining the structure of our charter school to parents in Medicine Hat often involves the phrase “a jurisdiction of one,” meaning the jurisdiction has one school site, a Board of Directors, a Superintendent, a Secretary-Treasurer, and site administration consisting of one Principal, a Vice-Principal and a Director of Student Services.

Since charter schools are publicly funded on a per-student basis, as are other public schools, total funding is based on enrolment. In our charter school low enrolment, due mainly to capped class sizes, results in limited funds. As a result, our school often lacks resources for the identification, development, mentorship and support of system leaders. From its inception in 1995, CAPE has adopted a collaborative model of decision making at every level. Because of the belief that the school, parents and community working together in support of student learning is the optimal structure to meeting





student needs, a horizontal model of governance was—and continues to be—the preferred model. This horizontal model is used throughout the various organizational levels and is based on collaboration.

Within the collaborative model, people work together for various endeavours. Administration seeks to identify skills, talents and aptitudes within the teaching staff. The specific individual skills, talents and aptitudes become apparent through these collaborative working relationships. Strengths are then fostered through mentorship by peers or by administration. Developing individual strengths also requires a personalized model. Although mentorship was the preferred model and informal evidence suggested that this was an effective model for our organization, research data was needed to support what we believed. As a result, our school principal, Jeney Gordon, worked with Dr. Sharon Allen of the Medicine Hat College on a three-year study on mentorship. This effort yielded some very powerful and useful information.

While a plethora of research speaks to a multitude of vehicles used for professional development, much less research addresses the need for individualized teacher development and professional development programs, as noted by Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Zwart, Wobbles, Bergen & Bolhuis, 2007, as cited by Hilton et al., 2015. Furthermore, Clarke and Hollingsworth agreed that many models of professional development have failed to take into account individual learner variables and what is required for these individuals to change or improve practice.

Mentorship is personalized. It allows for the protégé to have an active role in the learning. Specific, learning-focused feedback is provided. Topics of discussion, pacing, timing and directions for action can all be individualized for the individual protégé.

Mentorship involves the accumulation of skills to develop job satisfaction and personal satisfaction. Unlike coaching, which focuses on skill competencies alone, mentorship acknowledges the satisfaction that comes from being cognizant of one's development and working towards a goal to gain a greater feeling of self.

Mentorship offers both cognitive and affective benefits. Mentors offer cognitive expertise as they are knowledgeable peers. There are also social and emotional benefits offered by mentorship that group models cannot support. As a relationship builds between mentor and protégé, there is an increase in trust, safety and risk-taking as the social and emotional support are present.

Mentorship is reciprocal in nature. Unlike top-down or lecture-type strategies, mentorship has the capacity to exchange learning between the individuals in the

relationships. As relationships build and learning becomes a group process, the human capital of the organization increases and thus continues to support the organization.

One of the four main conclusions of this study is that the effectiveness of the mentorship relationship was firmly based in trust (Landsberg, 2015). The development of trust comes from working collaboratively and repeatedly with a group of peers. Being a small jurisdiction has been viewed as an asset in the development of relationships, and therefore a support for building effective



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and long-lasting mentorship relationships. J. Gordon's findings clearly indicate that, in our setting, mentorship is indeed a suitable vehicle for the identification, development, mentoring and support of skilled and confident school-based leaders as part of succession planning.

The mentorship process began informally with the support of Dr. Robert Lowry in the summer of 1997. Under his guidance, the then-principal, Teresa Di Ninno, gained the expertise and knowledge needed for the principalship and developed the confidence to effectively manage a fledgling charter

school. Under his tutelage and guidance, the principal developed relationships with Ministry, other charter schools and other jurisdictions; gaining knowledge of the system as a whole and how it operates.

Just as importantly, she developed the skills necessary to work productively with teachers, support staff, parents and community. This led to the eventual move from principalship into superintendency. The investment of time over a number of years is what Mrs. Di Ninno, the current superintendent, credits as being the reason she

effectively and confidently serves in administration today.

The value of invested relationships was then repeated when CAPE needed to fill the principalship position. For a number of years, Mrs. Di Ninno provided opportunities, guidance and input for various administrative tasks that required competency and confidence. This process started with minimal requests of the proteges and evolved into larger and more varied requests so that the competency and efficacy of the candidates became increasingly apparent. Scheduling, supporting colleagues in parent meetings, writing IPPs and co-planning were only a few of the possible opportunities presented to proteges.

As competencies emerged, opportunities were tailored to suit the skillset of the individuals. While some teachers showed interest and aptitude, others did not. The candidates that showed promise and interest were then mentored further and assumed larger responsibilities, allowing successful candidates for administration to be identified. This process eventually led to J. Gordon assuming the principalship of CAPE Public Charter School in the fall of 2006.

Similarly, the person who serves as vice-principal was identified and mentored. Parent meetings, record keeping, tiered planning and applying the discipline policy allowed skills to be practiced and refined before a suitable candidate was identified. The mentoring relationships for all three of CAPE's administrators have remained intact for the continuous development of administrative skills and efficacy.

The Board of Directors has supported the identification and mentoring process philosophically and also in tangible ways. As CAPE grew and required the services of a counsellor and academic assessor, the Board financially supported one of the teachers in her desire to acquire a Masters of Counseling. While she was doing the coursework, the administration manipulated and adjusted the timetable and workload so that their colleague could attend courses, complete practica and still support her family. Afterward, she continued her studies in her area of interest, student assessment and program supports. As a result of this identification, mentorship and support, CAPE school now



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has a full-time Director of Student Services who is recognized as a registered chartered psychologist and conducts all levels of assessments at no cost to families.

Collaborative leadership identification and mentorship has also encouraged staff development to higher levels of education. In early 2000, the school hired an educational assistant with a unique skillset in an attempt to support a student with very specific needs. For the following two years, the then principal, Mrs. Di Ninno, worked closely with this assistant. She then acquired teaching credentials and returned to CAPE as a full-time teacher. As the relationship developed even further, the teacher expressed interest in seeking a Masters in Education, which again the Board supported. While the financial and logistical support of this individual as she worked full time while attending university in another city was an ambitious endeavour, it culminated in the school having in-house expertise in student assessment and neurological disorders.

The process has also resulted in the establishment of mentor teachers, lead teachers and the development of expertise within our building. It must also be noted that this same process has been utilized with support staff and has resulted in an excellent executive assistant, to mention only one example. As the school continues to grow, this cyclical process of identification, mentorship and support continues. In CAPE's experience, a collaborative, horizontal model of leadership has provided effective in creating skilled and confident school-based leaders with the ultimate goal of supporting our very varied student population. ■

*Teresa Di Ninno, CEGEP, B.A., B.Ed., M.A., is an alumnus of McGill University and the University of Toronto. Teresa began her teaching career in Alberta in 1980. She is also the founder, past principal and current superintendent of CAPE Public Charter School in Medicine Hat, Alberta.*

*Jeney Gordon, B.F.A., B.Ed., Diploma of Vis. Com., is an alumnus of the University of Lethbridge. She was born and raised in Medicine Hat. She started her teaching career at CAPE in 1995 and spent all but three of those years teaching there. Jeney has been the principal of CAPE Public Charter School for the 13 years.*



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# Growing School Leaders Collaboratively



By Paul Stewart, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools (retired), City University of Seattle, and Ryan Ledene, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools

**D**emands on teacher and administrator performance have grown rapidly in the past decade and continue to grow based on the increasing rate of change in our society and the educational field. Creating successful learning cultures among staff have been a focus area for many schools and school divisions, and many resources are being delegated towards this area.

Alberta Education, through the *Teaching Quality Standard* (2018), requires teachers to be life-long learners and pursue

professional growth. However, not all professional growth models are created equally among school divisions, and even among schools within the same division. The strategies and models for creating learning cultures includes Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), embedded weekly professional development and full day professional development models.

In response to the demands on teacher adaptability, schools and school districts are being challenged to change professional development practices from one-day, sit-and-get

learning opportunities that have little staying power. Organizations are under pressure to increase performance and by holding division-wide professional development days, it looks like they are moving forward. Taking this one step further, school district senior administrators then need to also look at how are they training future administrators and how do they find sessions that fit with provincial standards and district goals.

Until recently, administrators did not have specific government standards to guide development and growth. Yet administrators can have a positive impact on both school culture and teacher growth. Leadership for learning through school administration teams need guidance and support. This is where the *Leadership Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2018) comes in to support higher standards of leadership in school systems.

Cultures are influenced and can be built from within an organization. A school administrator can foster the successful growth of teachers through their leadership style and relationship building with their staff. Each context can find creative solutions and implement common core principles for creating a leadership for learning culture and promoting distributive leadership.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult for school districts to meet the learning needs due to size, location and accessibility of professional development opportunities. Due to budget and other constraints, professional learning resources are not inexhaustible and sometimes they are not available. Therefore, learning models need to have a clear vision and mission, with creative solutions to common problems. These solutions will look different in every context.



Zone 4 human resource and personnel senior administration staff have worked together over the past years and occasionally referred to themselves as the HR Gang. At Zone 4 CASS meetings, the cohort would share experience, expertise and inquiries, such as new teacher recruitment (especially French Immersion and CTS); and administrative procedures, such as in preparation for legalization of Cannabis, and collective agreement items. Some districts from the Zone also worked together and developed an evaluation tool for new teacher supervision and evaluation based on the Alberta Education TQS (1997).

Administrative procedures/policies/regulations related to the Alberta Education TQS (1997) and exemplars for leadership development were also developed and then adapted to fit specifics for each jurisdiction. For example, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools (RDCRS) added a Faith exemplar/component as developed by provincial Catholic schools but also fit specifics for Red Deer Catholic schools. Rural districts with smaller or spread-out schools also added assessment exemplars that would be specific for their rural areas.

Districts in Zone 4 have their own process for recruiting their internal leadership candidates. Several Zone 4 CASS districts then took the collaboration a step further and have worked together for many years collaborating to develop leaders within their jurisdictions by working with partner districts; we call this the Aspiring Leaders program.

The Aspiring Leaders program is a collaborative effort by central Alberta Zone 4 school boards to develop leadership within their organizations. The future leadership candidates come together over a two-year span that have included six to eight sessions that are taken in conjunction with the Zone 4 group and then two to four sessions that are specific to each participating jurisdiction. Sessions are presented by CASS leaders and other presenters.

Through this process, future leaders are grown and current leaders share their knowledge and experiences. Professional development sessions during the Zone 4 meetings included courses such as “The Influencer,” “Crucial Accountability,” “5 Dysfunctions of a Team,” and

the Alberta Teacher’s Association’s “Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation” workshop. Specific topics included sessions such as “The Story of Lester,” in which a superintendent shared experiences working with a marginal teacher and helping this teacher to grow to acceptable levels or realize that teaching is not the career for them.

Working with the district budget process is a popular session for most districts, followed by hiring and interviewing new staff. Presenters included superintendents and associate superintendents from various Zone 4 school boards. Del Litke, former Superintendent of Foothills School Division, Kurt Sacher, Superintendent of Chinook’s Edge School Division, and Paul Mason, Superintendent of the Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division, have been presenters who have shared their expertise in working with staff and helping future administrators develop skills they will need to become leaders in today’s education system.

The district-specific sessions relate to each district’s needs, policies and location. Current district issues and needs will result in a different focus. Each district will address their budgeting procedure, hiring policies, collective agreement items, education plans and results from provincial surveys and how this relates to school administrators and their future role as leaders in a school. Other differences, such as Red Deer Catholic

Regional Schools being a Catholic division, will also result in specific professional development sessions that may not be applicable to public school districts. In the RDCRS cohort, senior administration presented on issues relevant to the school division. This included leading an authentically Catholic school and working within the centralized budgeting framework. It is also a requirement for Red Deer Catholic Aspiring Leaders to complete two Master’s courses in theology or religious education.

By coming together as CASS leaders and with specific Zone 4 issues, working together has helped members share expertise and grow as leaders. Bringing aspiring leaders from the Zone together helps these future leaders to get a wider perspective and professional development that may not be possible from inside a single school district. Growing leaders and developing stronger teachers will help all our school districts meet the needs of students and families as we all strive to make a difference. ■

*Paul Stewart is a retired Associate Superintendent with Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools and he helped develop the Zone 4 leadership program. Ryan Ledene is currently Associate Superintendent of Faith Development and Division Support with Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools. His portfolio includes the Aspiring Leaders program.*



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## The Integration of Wellness

By Kelli Littlechilds, ASEBP

Education sector leaders face increasing challenges and pressures in today's fast-paced and ever-changing educational environments. These pressures can be both externally driven (e.g., sustainable funding, new legislation, increased and changing stakeholder expectations, etc.) and internally driven (e.g., attracting and retaining teachers and principals, succession planning, use of technology, etc.).

No matter the source, one constant is that school trustees and other stakeholders have come to depend on their system leaders to quickly adapt and make creative and appropriate decisions under pressure. While this can be exhilarating and rewarding, we also know that constant change and competing interests can affect our physical and mental well-being. That's why organizations and their leaders must work hard to demonstrate and promote wellness in the workplace while ensuring it doesn't add further complexity to their roles.

The integration of wellness into the fabric of our education system's organizational cultures is a goal ASEBP and CASS have been tackling for the past several years—both together and separately. From diving into the

world of leadership resiliency to revamping services and supports, the end goal is to ensure Alberta's education sector leaders have ready access to tools that bolster wellness throughout all aspects of their workplaces and, ultimately, their lives.

### Tackling Resilience

**Tools:** *Resilience in Leadership Toolkit, Supporting Leader Wellness and Resilience through the ASEBP Benefit Plan*

**Access:** CASS Chief Superintendents Portal

In 2014, CASS and ASEBP came together to embark on the Resilience in Leadership (RiL) project to better understand resilience among CASS members and to develop new evidence-based initiatives to support them in enhancing and sustaining resiliency in their roles.

Through consultations with CASS members and a confidential and anonymous survey of this group (developed with Dr. Graham Lowe, organizational consultant and well-known expert on work issues), we learned that Psychological Capital—including states of

optimism, confidence, hope and resilience—contributed to a school district's performance and engagement among senior education system leaders. With this in hand, we created the *Resilience in Leadership Toolkit* and the *Supporting Leader Wellness and Resilience through the ASEBP Benefit Plan*.

The Toolkit includes a Facilitator Guidebook, presentation, discussion questions and a Resilience in Leadership (RiL) Roadmap, all aimed at supporting superintendents and other education sector leaders in communicating and raising awareness about the importance of the RiL survey findings. To help support uptake of the Toolkit, we held two half-day workshops for CASS members in the summer of 2017, along with multiple subsequent presentations to provide in-depth exploration of the Toolkit, foster discussion and reinforce the opportunity CASS members have to be powerful influencers of their own health and the health of the education system as a whole.

In addition to the Toolkit, we also created the *Supporting Leader Wellness and Resilience through the ASEBP Benefit Plan* resource to more effectively communicate how ASEBP benefits



can support CASS members on their health journey and where to get assistance to support their role as wellness and system leaders.

While our work with the RiL project is far from complete, what we've accomplished with CASS so far has helped to guide our efforts in this space and stay focused on building capacity and resilience as a means to enhance workplace wellness across the sector.

### The Power of School Leadership

**Tool:** Funding support from the McConnell Foundation

**Access:** September 2018

Through our work together, we (CASS and ASEBP) understand the important role school leaders play in the integration of well-being at all levels of the educational environment. This learning is something we want to share with as many like-minded organizations as possible. So, when we were approached to participate in the McConnell Foundation's provincial and national consultations on education sector well-being, it was clear that this was a natural fit for both CASS and ASEBP.

As a result of these consultations, the McConnell Foundation has also recognized the power school leaders have as agents of change when it comes to system-wide wellness and has identified key areas of investment across Alberta to support education leaders in their efforts. To this end, as I'm sure you're aware, in September it was announced that CASS would receive funding from the Foundation for a new position to support wellness among system leaders.

The creation of this new position at CASS will help further efforts to integrate wellness into organizational priorities, structures, resources and, of course, the culture in the province's education sector.

### Your Partners in Workplace Wellness

**Tool:** Workplace wellness liaisons

**Access:** health@asebp.ca

The Health Promotion Services team at ASEBP is available to collaborate with education sector leaders across the province to help create a sustainable culture of wellness. By taking a broad look at long-term wellness support and capacity-building, ASEBP's team of workplace wellness liaisons work with education

sector leaders to create effective wellness plans focused on the needs and interests of their employees, connecting them with community resources to help sustain their programs and efforts.

ASEBP's workplace wellness liaisons provide support with customized school jurisdiction health profiles and facilitated in-person sessions, promotion and strategies to assist teams in applying specific resources and tools—like the Employee Family Assistance Program, The Sandbox and the Idea Readiness Tool—to their wellness initiatives.

With these tools and the many others available through ASEBP and partners like CASS, we know we can move the needle of employee wellness at all levels of the education sector in the right direction. We hope you'll join us in our shared goal of making Alberta's education sector the healthiest it can be. ■

*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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