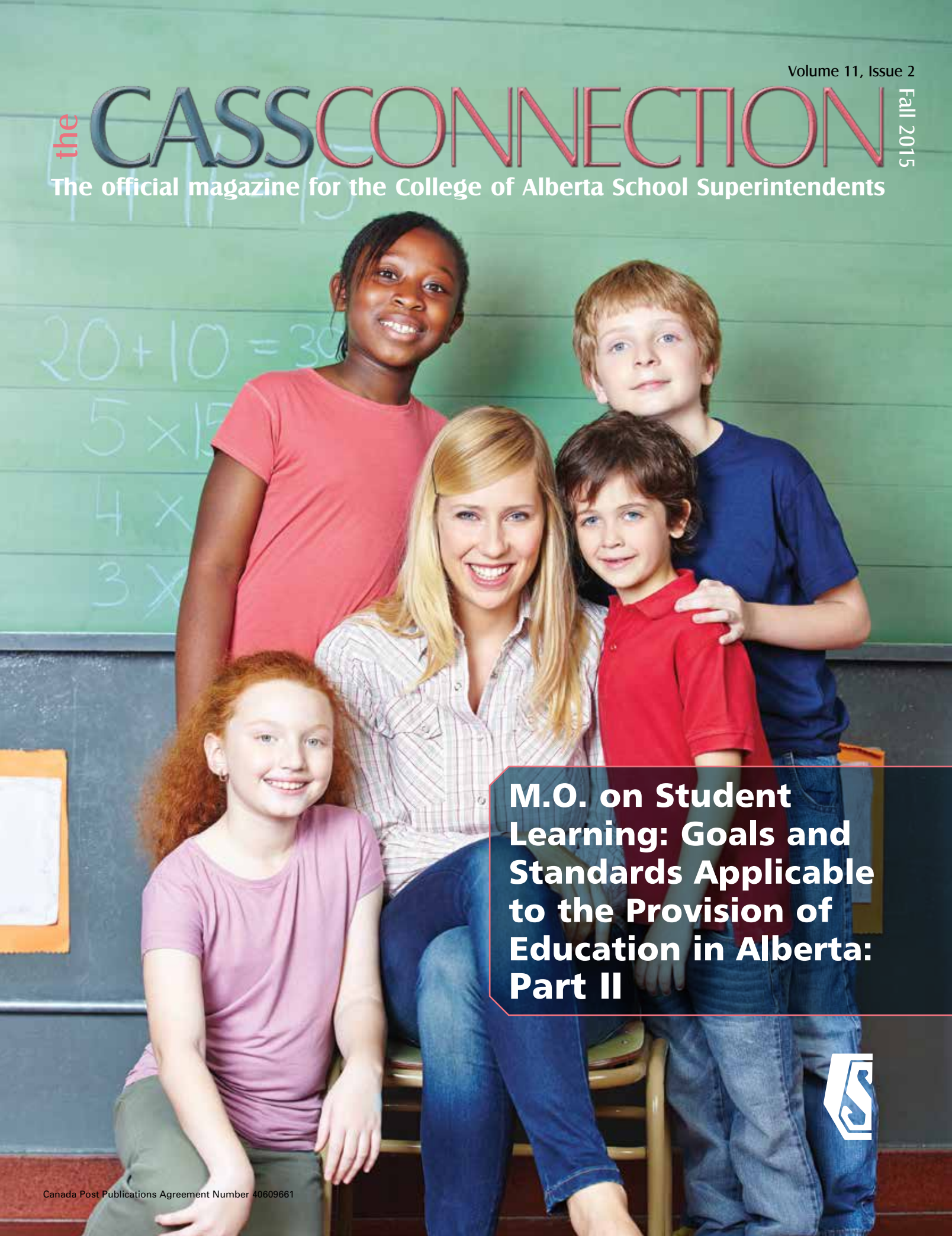


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M.O. on Student Learning: Goals and Standards Applicable to the Provision of Education in Alberta: Part II



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Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable David Eggen | Minister of Education

The beginning of a new school year is an exciting time for teachers, students and school administrators. Fall brings change to the leaves on the trees and to those heading back to class—a new school, another teacher, different students, new friends, fresh subjects to teach, and new skills to master.

It's also a great time for those of us who support what happens at the school level to consider our work. We already have a strong education system, and we have the privilege of working together to make it something we are truly proud of.

This government has demonstrated that education is a priority by funding enrolment growth to provide for every student attending school this year. We have also restored funding to previously announced cuts to school and classroom resources, such as transportation, inclusive education and other support services. We made these funding decisions to help give school boards financial stability so they can focus on meeting the needs of students, including English language learners and First Nation, Métis and Inuit students.

Alberta Education is committed to working with our partners to create a student-centred education system in Alberta. The role of my ministry is to ensure students have the support they need to reach their full potential, and schools have the resources they need to support every student.

The High School Completion Framework is a great example of the work we do to ensure the success of our students. In collaboration with our partners, we develop programs and course options

Alberta Education is committed to working with our partners to create a student-centred education system in Alberta.

that encourage students to complete high school and provide them with skills to enter the workforce.

High school completion rates show that our hard work is paying off:

- Alberta's three-year high school completion rate for 2014 was 76.4 per cent, up from 71.5 per cent in 2009.
- Our five-year high school completion rate for 2014 was 82.1 per cent, compared to 79 per cent in 2009.

Alberta Education's Career and Technology Foundations (CTF) curriculum is another way we are focused on supporting every student through learning opportunities. CTF enables students in Grades 5 to 9 to participate in hands-on learning experiences and to learn real-life skills in communication, collaboration, critical thinking, time management and problem solving.

Over the course of the 2015-2016 school year, Alberta Education will be collaborating with teachers and administrators to gather feedback on the CTF digital curriculum that will be offered through the new online tool for provincial curriculum currently in development.

Alberta Education also worked with partners to help students start the new school year at their best. Our 2015 Back to School online toolkit provides resources for students, parents, teachers and school administrators, including:

- **Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments:** Bullying prevention, internet safety, mentoring.
- **Be Healthy, Stay Safe:** Nutrition, child-care, media literacy, fitness and activity.
- **Making the Grade:** Speech and language development, student learning assessments, time management, study skills.
- **Diploma Exams and Student Information:** myPass, transcripts, rewrites.
- **Getting Ready For The Future:** RESPs, planning for post-secondary, scholarships, career planning, apprenticeship.
- **Expanding Horizons:** Cultural experiences, student exchanges, international education, driving.

Resource links are sorted according to preschool, elementary and junior/senior high school. The toolkit also includes additional resources for those new to Alberta and for students who require additional supports.

These initiatives—and the partnerships that put them together—give me hope for what we can continue to accomplish together. Education is about building a bright future for our children and striving to provide each of them with the opportunity to succeed. When we empower our children to reach their full potential, we create a better Alberta for everyone.

Thank you for the work you do. I look forward to our continued partnership in 2015-2016.



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President's Message

John Waterhouse

President | College of Alberta School Superintendents

Already well into the 2015-2016 school year, it is proving to be one filled with significant opportunities for system leaders. It is important to note the impact that system leaders have on student achievement and affirm the importance and quality of the passion, professionalism and educational leadership that is brought to bear by system leaders on every level of education in Alberta. This will be especially true as we lead our way through the interconnected aspects of student learning assessments, collective bargaining, accountability and assurance, inclusive education, student voice, high school redesign and perhaps the most important of all, teaching and leadership excellence.

Teacher and leadership excellence are directly linked in that the most important work of system leaders is to ensure that their efforts have a direct impact on the teaching practice that occurs in every school, in every classroom, for every student. It is the degree of impact on teacher quality and thus student achievement that measures the level of excellence of system leaders.

The impact that system leaders have on teaching practice is so important because it is they, along with school leaders, who are responsible to ensure that there is high quality teaching occurring in every classroom for every student. It is widely held that the single variable that has the most impact on student learning, that educators and educational systems have the direct responsibility for, is the quality of the teacher in the classroom. This quality refers to the skillful

“...a student in a high-impact teacher's classroom has almost a year's advantage over his or her peers in a lower-effect teacher's classroom.”

application of pedagogy by the teacher in the classroom day in and day out. This means the teacher's practice is informed by a repertoire of research/evidence-based practices that are current and highly skilled as opposed to being a novice or a mechanical user of instructional strategies that may not meet the varied needs of every student.

Hattie (2012) put it both succinctly and supportively in the statement that, “While we may want to believe that all of our teachers are excellent, that is not always the view of those who have been their students” (p.22). Upon examining the research on teacher quality, Hattie (2012), referenced fellow educational researchers who summed up this definitive factor in the statement that, “The effect of high-effect teachers compared with low-effect teachers is about $d=.25$,

which means that a student in a high-impact teacher's classroom has almost a year's advantage over his or her peers in a lower-effect teacher's classroom (Slater, Davies & Burgess, 2009)” (P. 26).

William (2011) is another educational researcher who has come to similar, if not identical, conclusions about the impact of teacher quality on student learning. He says, “It turns out that these substantial differences between how much students learn in different classes have little to do with class size, how the teacher groups the students for instruction, or even the presence of between-class grouping practices (for example, tracking). The most critical difference is simply the quality of the teacher” (p.17).

William went on to review a number of studies that examined the relationship

Continued on page 8

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Barry Litun

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between student achievement and teacher quality, and illustrated the significance of teacher quality in the following quote:

“Another way of thinking about the effects of teacher quality is in terms of the rate of learning. Take a group of 50 teachers. Students who are fortunate enough to be taught by the most effective teachers in that group will learn in six months what those taught by the average teachers will take a year to learn. And those taught by the least effective teacher in that group of 50 teachers are likely to take two years to learn the same material. In other words, the most effective teachers generate learning at four times the rate of the least effective teachers” (William, 2011, p.20).

The conclusion that William (2011) arrived at is similar to those of many other researchers, practitioners and stakeholders, namely, the most effective way to improve educational outcomes is “by increasing the quality of the teaching force (p.26).”

With this research informing our practice as system leaders I am very optimistic about the opportunity CASS members have to engage in informing the work of the Teacher and Leader Excellence Advisory Committee established by our current Minister of Education, the Honorable David Eggen, and chaired by the Deputy Minister, Ms. Lorna Rosen. I extend my personal invitation to you to invest your time and energy in purposefully contributing to the impact this work has the potential to have in benefiting the quality of education Alberta students will receive for years to come.

On behalf of the CASS Board of Directors I wish our CASS members every success throughout the year. ■


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Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

With the change of government in our province this past spring, it is heartening to know the Ministerial Order on Student Learning will continue to guide the work of Alberta Education and school authorities, and will be seen as establishing the goals and standards for the provision of education in Alberta.

Readers of *The CASS Connection* will learn how school authorities are “putting the rubber to the road” in terms of actualizing the vision outlined in the Ministerial Order.

In order to meet the high expectation that all students achieve the outcome to “strive for engagement and personal excellence in their learning journey,” system leaders will need to be well researched, innovative and courageous in moving their respective jurisdictions forward.

With this in mind, I am excited of the opportunity afforded to CASS to represent System Leaders on the Teaching and Leadership Excellence Advisory Committee (TLEAC), initiated by Alberta Education and chaired by Deputy Minister Lorna Rosen. One of the roles of the TLEAC, as stated in the Terms of Reference, is to provide advice with respect to “developing System Leader Practice Standards and Supports.”

CASS has long advocated for a System Leader Practice Standard that is recognized by government, and to that end, has the CASS Practice Standard, Leadership Dimensions and Indicators that has been formally adopted by the membership and which is outlined in the CASS Member Handbook (www.cass.ab.ca). The opening sentence of the CASS Practice Standard states, “Membership in the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) requires a commitment to serving the

public interest by providing exemplary educational leadership.”

The Leadership Dimensions identified in the CASS Practice Standard are:

1. Visionary Leadership.
2. Instructional Leadership.
3. Human Resources Leadership.
4. Ethical Leadership.
5. Effective Relationships.
6. Organizational Leadership and Management.
7. External Influences on Education.
8. Chief Executive and Chief Education Officer Leadership.

The CASS Practice Standard is expanded upon in *The Alberta Framework for School System Success*, a CASS publication based on the research of Ken Leithwood for a CASS commissioned review of the characteristics of high performing school systems. Within the publication, which applied Leithwood’s research to the Alberta context, four practice areas and 12 leadership dimensions are identified. They are:

Vision and Direction Setting

1. Focus on student learning.
2. Curriculum and instruction.
3. Uses of evidence.

Capacity Building

4. System efficacy.
5. Leadership for learning.
6. Professional learning.

Relationships

7. School-system connections.
8. Parent and community engagement.
9. School board leadership.

System Design

10. System alignment.
11. System improvement.
12. Leveraging technology.

I believe that the education partners who have been invited to participate in the TLEAC will recognize the strengths of the CASS Practice Standard and the Alberta Framework for School System Success. They are documents that have guided the work of system leaders

in Alberta for the past decade. I also believe the two researched-based documents will be a strong starting point for the development of a provincially recognized System Leader Practice Standard.

I am excited for the opportunities that will be afforded to CASS members in the upcoming year to contribute to this work, and other goals identified in the TLEAC Terms of Reference.

To close, I want to formally welcome the Honourable David Eggen, who was appointed Minister of Education in May, and Ms. Lorna Rosen, who has been the Deputy Minister since January. I know that both have worked very hard to acquaint themselves with the ministry and to learn of the commitment system leaders across the province are demonstrating to support student learning.

I want to thank the previous Minister of Education, Mr. Gordon Dirks, for his contributions during the time he served as Minister. CASS is appreciative of his participation in CASS events and his support of CASS during his tenure as Minister.

Thank you to the writers of this edition of *The CASS Connection*. Your willingness to contribute your experiences allows your colleagues to learn from you. Together we will ensure that Alberta students benefit from the outstanding education system our province is noted for.

Finally, thank you to the many sponsors who 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. ■

Reference

Brandon, J., Hanna, P., Morrow, R., Rhyason, K. & Schmold, S. (2013). *The Alberta Framework for School System Success*. Edmonton, AB, CASS.

Foundations for Inspiring Education



By Larry Jacobs

Much has been written about the necessity for our educational world to make fundamental changes to meet the evolving learning needs of today's students. While this is a wonderful rallying cry and reflects a growing need recognized by all educators, it does not necessarily reflect the prerequisite for a strong foundation to support the change structures considered in the Ministerial Order (MO) and the *Inspiring Education* (IE) document.

For example, we often talk about the need for teacher collaboration but have not always worked to develop a “*language of instruction*” that allows those discussions to operate from a common framework. Without that framework for discussion, we face the real possibility that communication is restricted to individual or school-developed “*language*,” which, in turn, makes it difficult for an entire school division to work together effectively. This also makes it difficult for resources, coaches, local professional development (PD) and other support structures for teachers to operate at the highest levels of effectiveness.

Concurrently, if we talk about collaboration and yet fail to develop a divisional calendar or teacher timetable that allows staff to have consistent and substantial time to work together, then we fall back on piecemeal strategies that can only free up some of the staff at a particular time to discuss student needs, intervention strategies and assessment concerns.

These could be viewed as fundamental weaknesses that will make it extremely difficult for school divisions to embed the tenets of IE into the framework of their learning environments. The intent of this article is to illustrate how these and other foundational structures have been designed and implemented in a school division.

A “Learning Model”

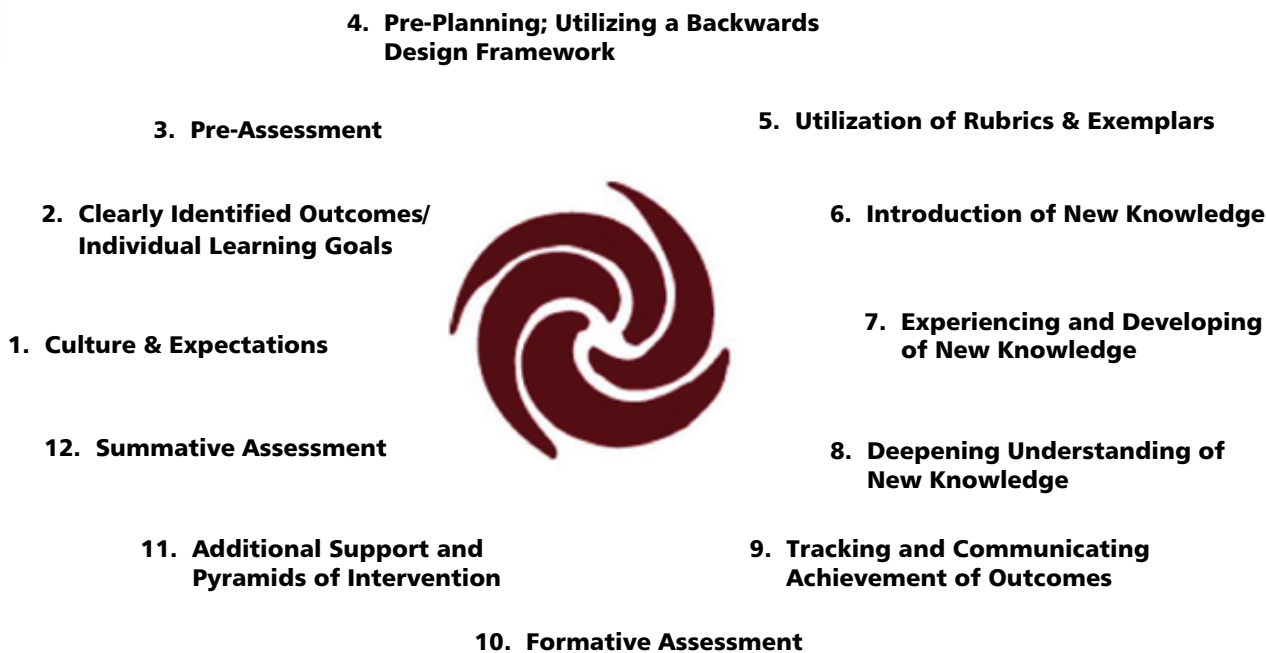
At the heart of our school division's educational journey has been the commitment by all of our staff to research, discuss and build a language of instruction that we refer to as our *Excellent Learning Environment (ELE) model*. It is based on the work of numerous educational authors in the areas

of assessment, instructional design, intervention strategies, differentiation, cooperative strategies, backwards design and other areas/authors of educational thought. The critical point could be that we, as a province, haven't made it a priority to bring those concepts together in an interrelated framework that allows for a common language of instruction. That should be a critical discussion in the months ahead.

In Wolf Creek Public Schools (WCPS), we have attempted that next step; building a learning discussion framework that has 12 components and a well-designed rubric around each of the composite areas (See Figure 1, page 11). We have also committed ourselves to the process of developing video clips, articles and commentary around each of these areas so as to ensure that each component is well understood and modeled for our staff. These are available to everyone in our division and form the basis for our work with all new teachers/administrators in their three year cohort and mentorship program. They are also foundational to the

Figure 1.

12 Components of ELEs



intervention system that will be discussed in the context of our aligned calendar and collaborative response model (CRM).

An “Aligned” Calendar

It is our fundamental belief that an effective collaborative model must be built on a calendar structure that allows teachers to meet regularly as an entire school staff. In the absence of a modified divisional calendar, schools are left to their own devices to alter their staff timetable and modify student learning environments to accommodate a few teachers at a time. This reduces the effectiveness of PD, the ability to work collaboratively in larger timeframes, the framework to consider student performance as a large cohort and the opportunity for teachers to independently plan how to implement the suggestions and commentary from the larger group.

Our jurisdiction has circumvented many of these concerns by designing a calendar framework that allows our staff to have every second Friday to come together for collaborative processes. This adaptation to the divisional calendar allows our staff approximately 16

extra days for collaboration and requires little modification to the timetabling structures of our schools.

As a rural/urban school division our transportation system affords us considerable time to build this type of calendar and ensure that our instructional hours are being met. For those few schools that required other adaptations to their timetable, the impact was not significant and the parents of students in these schools were supportive of the modifications that had to be made. In January of last year, the school division did a large scale survey of all communities to determine their level of support for the calendar and the results were heartening. In light of the increased focus on developing interventions for every student’s success, our stakeholders were pleased to offer their support for continuing with the aligned calendar.

The Collaborative Response Model (CRM)

The collaborative structure that we use on the noted Fridays was developed in conjunction with Kurtis Hewson of Jigsaw Learning. This CRM focuses on utilizing student data

as the foundation for staff analysis of student learning, designing discussion frameworks for teachers that allow for a consideration of intervention strategies and a tracking mechanism that ensures the success of the intervention. This process also ensures that student performance is constantly monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. This allows all students to be monitored by a team of teachers over the course of the year and also protects any student from falling through the educational cracks.

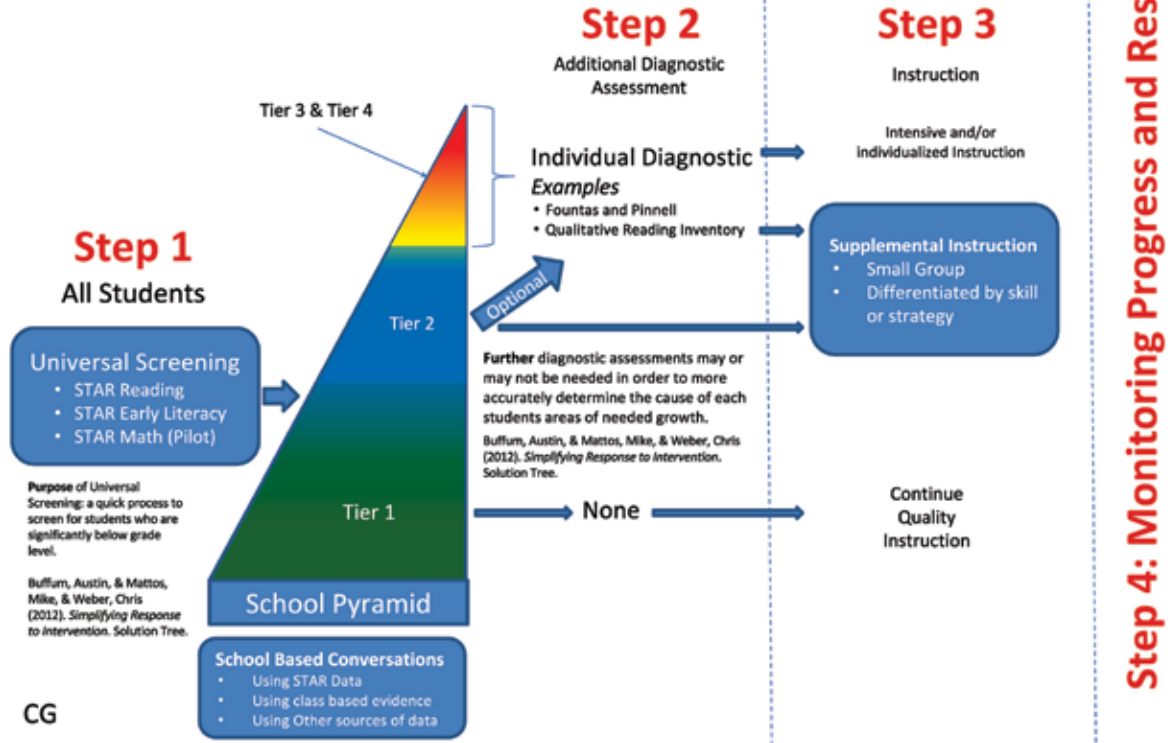
The software that drives this process and ensures “monitoring capability” has been designed to provide all school staff learning teams with a data storage and tracking model built to tier students based on a variety of data and assessment sources. Concurrently, student data from PowerSchool transfers into this software to ensure essential demographic information is in place for users.

This tracking tool has been an essential support to capture the conversations regarding student progress, interventions and next steps. The visual interface also provides real-time updates showing which students require

Continued on page 13

Figure 2.

Literacy Assessment Flowchart



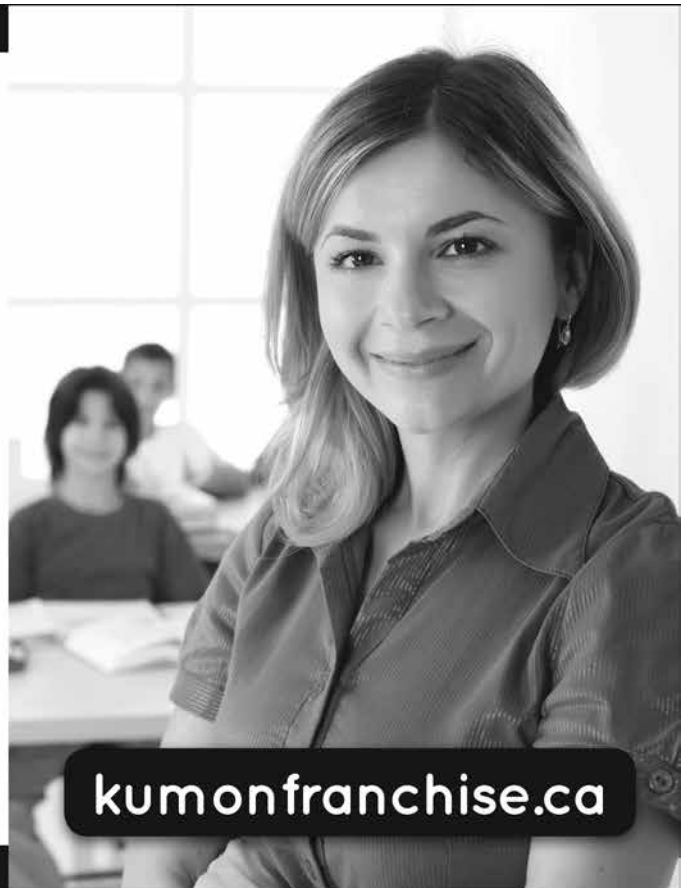
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Continued from page 11

different levels of support while providing auto-notifications to staff with tasks or plans for the individual student.

The data that has been mentioned comes from a variety of assessment sources generated by teachers but one that we use division-wide is called STAR (Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading). This tool allows us to have a common framework for baseline assessments and gives us a snapshot of student performance; specifically in regards to literacy skills.

The division considered a host of other tools but found many of them inordinately expensive, training intensive or incapable of providing assessment for all grade levels. STAR allows us to start our conversations around needed interventions and is quickly administered and analyzed for follow-up data information. In those situations where a deeper or more thorough diagnostic is required, we utilize a variety of more sophisticated tools, such as Fountas and Pinnell, to garner that information and determine appropriate intervention strategies. Figure 2, on page 12, illustrates how that process is used.

Division Support Teams

Early in our educational journey we also recognized that schools need coaches who could assist staff in developing skill sets in the areas of inclusion, technology and the various components of the ELE model. Each of these areas is critical for daily instruction and concurrently, meeting the literacy/numeracy focus of the IE model.

For a number of years we used a model that assigned an appropriate FTE for each of the three roles based on staff numbers in the school. This allowed each school to have in-house supports for the three areas. However, we did recognize that this model was an interim strategy and would have to evolve over the years to meet emerging learner needs. This commitment to evolution would ensure that we were flexible in our implementation of the IE directions and, at the same time, give us the ability to build high levels of staff skills relative to strategies in each of the three areas.


This flexible utilization of our coaches was also based on our understanding that the different components of the IE model required

certain foundational skills prior to moving to the next phase. For example, it is difficult to move efficiently into the competencies until students have some basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Based on that logic, it was also difficult to see how we could move toward success in a new thematic or integrated subject-area curriculum without skills in both literacy/numeracy and the competencies.

Asking a student to become involved in problem-based learning frameworks without the ability to create meaning or utilize creative processes, critical thinking skills or have

the ability to work collaboratively in diverse situations would seem to set the students up for failure rather than the success intended in the MO and IE document.

Consequently, we now have divisional coaches in two areas—learning, which encompasses skills in technology and the ELE model; and inclusion, which stresses assessment and intervention skills. This allows us to have fewer coaches in the division but they now have a complete focus on the coaching role as opposed to the previous model, which split their assignments




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between teaching and coaching. While the coaches currently have one to three schools to work with, it allows intensive work for larger periods of time and greater efficiency in terms of their working closely with teachers who require additional assistance.

We have also formed a smaller group of highly skilled specialists in literacy/numeracy, curriculum and instructional design, psychological assessment, large scale provincial assessments and technology integration. This team works closely with all divisional coaches to provide them additional PD, resources or an opportunity to work shoulder-to-shoulder with them when more intensive interventions or strategies are required at the school or with particular teachers.

Leadership Support

Our division also recognizes that leadership is critical in terms of meeting the challenges in the IE document and providing support for teachers as they attempt to embed those concepts into the classroom. To accomplish this task we have multiple

strategies that we employ throughout the year to assist our administrators.

For example, our leadership development with principals and assistant principals continually focuses on developing the competencies from the Principal Quality Practice Guideline in a highly collaborative, action researched-based environment. Monthly, full-day administrator meetings are designed to support administrator Professional Learning Teams where topics of interest and need are explored. We also use the Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) framework to guide school-based administrators in identifying areas of strength and growth. A 360-degree feedback structure helps guide this process.

We have also designed a process whereby school plans are developed using an Action-Collaboration-Evidence (ACE) framework. District and school-based goals are outlined with the opportunity for school-based administrators to identify and plan strategies and processes to support their school's improvement plans. This plan is reviewed and supported strategically by a central office support team and monitored over the course of the year. Part

of that process is also to outline the administrative strategies that will move the school forward and how these can be supported or augmented by the school division.

Summary

This is a mere snapshot of some of the strategies that we have designed to allow our school division to move forward with effective implementation of the MO and the IE document. It is our sincere hope that our journey provides some assistance to other jurisdictions as they attend to the implementation of the provincial mandate. Please contact us if you have questions or feel that we can be of assistance in your educational journey. We would also welcome a provincial discussion of the various embedding strategies. That will not only help all of us as school divisions but the students, parents and communities that expect we can meet the evolving needs of all learners in our province. ■

Larry Jacobs is Superintendent of Schools, Wolf Creek Public Schools. He can be reached at larry.jacobs@wolfcreek.ab.ca.

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Video Stories Share how Communities of Practice are Supporting Implementation of the Ministerial Order on Student Learning



Submitted by *Thérèse deChamplain-Good*

The Ministerial Order on Student Learning (#001/2013) was proclaimed into law in May 2013. Since then, many teachers, principals and learning communities from across Alberta have taken steps to re-conceptualize teaching and learning to align with the intent of *Inspiring Education* and the Ministerial Order.

In this article, we will share powerful video stories of how 12 districts from across the region are supporting implementation of the Ministerial Order on Student Learning. The videos demonstrate how districts are supporting teacher capacity through the creation of communities of practice that provide for more comprehensive learning over time. The video stories also highlight how Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium (ERLC) (www.erlc.ca) has supported professional learning through opportunities designed and delivered collaboratively with districts.

The ERLC is one of seven regional consortia in Alberta established to support regional professional development needs and create professional development opportunities in an ongoing, coordinated and cost-effective manner. ERLC is funded through Alberta Education grants.

Why create video stories? Chip and Heath (2007) would tell us that stories “stick.” Stories often give us the inspiration and real life examples of what can be done. Real life stories are credible—teachers talking to teachers. They often provide the emotional “hook” we

Table 1

DISTRICT/LINKS TO THE VIDEO STORY	STORY FOCUS/DRIVING QUESTION
Black Gold – Instructional Practice Through Comprehensive Teacher Professional Learning	How are educators in Black Gold engaging in professional learning to enhance their practice and increase capacity to enhance student learning?
Edmonton Catholic Schools – Instructional Practice Through Teacher Driven Professional Development	As a professional learning community within Edmonton Catholic Schools, how can a focus on project based learning enhance teacher practice, learning and engagement for all students?
Edmonton Public Schools – Ministerial Order Through Teacher Cohorts and Collaboration	As a cohort within Edmonton Public Schools, how can we build awareness and understanding of the Ministerial Order on Student Learning and infuse into the existing programs of studies?
Elk Island Catholic – Instructional Practice Through Teacher and Student Engagement	As a professional learning community within Elk Island Catholic, how can project based learning enhance teacher practice and student engagement and learning?
Evergreen Catholic – CCC /3E’s – Through Instructional Coaches for Teacher Capacity	As a community of practice within Evergreen Catholic, how can we enhance teacher practice and student learning through instructional coaches and a professional learning community?
Grande Yellowhead – Inclusive Education Modelling Change in Practice Based on Professional Learning	As a professional learning community within Grande Yellowhead, how can a focus on creating inclusive, safe learning environments that support independence and belonging, enhance teacher practice and the development of the 3Es in all students?
St. Albert Catholic – Instructional Practice Through Shared Teacher Instructional Capacity	As a community of practice within Greater St. Albert Catholic, how can we enhance teacher practice and student learning through differentiated instructional practices such as Project Based Learning?
Parkland – Numeracy Through Teacher Practice that Enhances Student Learning	As a community of practice within Parkland, to what extent does student learning and the development of students’ number sense improve when teacher practice is enhanced?
Pembina Hills – Literacy in the Content Areas Through a Culture of Teacher Collaboration	As a professional learning community within Pembina Hills, how can a focus on developing effective comprehension strategies enhance teacher practice and reading comprehension for division three and four students?
St. Albert Public – Content Based Literacy Through Researched Assessment and Instructional Practices that Inform Teacher Practice	As a professional learning community within St. Albert Public, how can we enhance teacher practice and student learning through implementing effective, research based reading/literacy practices in the content areas?
St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic – Essential Learning and Assessment Practices Through Collaborative Professional Learning	As a professional learning community within St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic, how can a focus on identifying essential curricular learning outcomes and accompanying assessments enhance teacher practice and student learning?
Sturgeon – Differentiated Literacy Strategies Through Collective Professional Learning	As a professional learning community within Sturgeon, how can a focus on implementing literacy strategies to differentiate reading instruction enhance teacher practice and the reading achievement of students in Grades 1 to 6?

need to get started. In addition, stories provide us with evidence.

One of the challenges of the Ministry and the Consortium was how to measure the impact of their professional learning supports and resources. The surveys ERLC implemented consistently indicated that as a result of attending ERLC learning opportunities, participants indicated they intended to change practice to support student learning when they returned to their classroom and schools. But that survey data did not provide us with evidence of *how* they were changing practice and *how* they were implementing the intent of inspiring education, based on their context.

ERLC decided to take a bold step and invite communities of practice from across the region to share how they implemented what was learned at an ERLC session, through the creation of a video story. Twelve districts took us up on that invitation.

Table 1, on page 15, provides a quick summary of the 12 video stories that were created. You will see that each district has taken a slightly different approach to re-conceptualize teaching and learning to align with the intent

of *Inspiring Education* and the Ministerial Order. And that makes sense—first steps were based on their context, what they had already done, and what their current learning needs were. ERLC celebrates the many and varied approaches and hope they inspire others as they begin their journey. You can access all 12 district stories through this link: http://erlc.ca/resources/resources/inspiring_education/.

The ERLC has also created a regional blog to capture stories of professional capacity based on attending ERLC sessions—another approach that demonstrates impact.


Borrowing from Parklands’ “184 Days of Learning” blog, teachers and district leaders

shared the impact in classrooms from attending ERLC sessions. Go to <http://erlcblog.com> to learn more. As one recent contributor to the blog posted, “So, now, at our next staff meeting, when the Ministerial Order and the Critical Competencies are brought up, I can share my story. It’s about doing what’s best for kids...not so scary after all.” ■

Therese deChamplain-Good is the Executive Director at Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium (ERLC), which is one of seven regional consortia in Alberta established to support regional professional learning needs for all those educators who influence student learning.




View the video stories at http://erlc.ca/resources/resources/inspiring_education



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Teaching Solidarity and Humanity

By Brigitte Kropielnicki and Sylvette Fillion



1



2



3



4

In February 2015, the Conseil scolaire du Nord-Ouest (CSNO) announced it had created a new locally developed course “Solidaire/ humaine 35” (Solidarity/humanities 35). This additional course will allow students in Grade 11 or 12 to learn and understand the social injustices that exist in our society. Students will identify ways and strategies that will contribute to building a more just and equitable society on the regional, provincial, national and international scene. One of the targeted prospects is to develop critical thinking and empower young people to discover the various ways to reinvent the world to ensure a more just society.

In line with the principles of *Inspiring Education* and the initiative *Curriculum Redesign* by Alberta Education, the course offers project based learning opportunities. Although basic instruction is offered in the classroom, the majority of the project will be realized in the local, regional or international communities. This new course is innovative as our students will be learning key components of the program outside their school setting; they will be called to leave their comfort zone and go beyond their known surroundings to impoverished environments and, in some cases, developing countries.

In April 2015, students at École Héritage and École Nouvelle Frontière travelled to the small community of San Benito in Nicaragua. This third trip included a record number of participants; 14 students and six accompanying adults. However, on this third trip, expectations were a little different. Because of the “Solidaire/ humaine 35” course, students involved in this humanitarian project were called to actively plan and create their projects as part of the course’s curriculum.

Therefore, in preparation for this humanitarian trip, the students raised over \$8,000 to contribute to the Fundacco Foundation, which coordinates various projects in

- 1 Students helped raise money to build a community latrine and then also helped build it.
- 2 Local youth at the San Benito school received bags full of school supplies.
- 3 The trips were made possible with help from Fundacco Foundation, founded by Father Denis Hébert (now deceased).
- 4 Local school children from Nicaragua with Falher and Grande Prairie students, and parent chaperones.

Nicaragua. These funds were used to help pay for the latrine building project identified as a priority by the local community. And, once on site, with shovels and picks, the students actively participated in the actual building of the latrines.

To raise the money, students had to organize fundraising activities and ask for the generosity of their community members. The students' message to the community was to explain why they were going on this humanitarian trip and what they would be doing over there. They also collected items from their local communities to prepare over 350 Ziplock bags filled with supplies to give to the youth at the San Benito school. This was not a holiday trip, by no means.

This initiative, coordinated by Madame Sylvette Fillion, teacher and vice-principal at École Héritage, is made possible through the collaboration of the Roots of Change foundation and Fundacco Foundation, founded by Father Denis Hébert from Edmonton. Father Hébert lived in Nicaragua for the past 40 years and welcomed our students to stay with local families so they could fully appreciate what it meant to live under different and sometimes hard conditions.

Our students and the adults lived with these fine families, shared their work and enjoyed their warmth for 12 days. Even though our students worked hard every day, they found time to play and socialize with the children and adults of San Benito.

Our students came back to Canada having made a new Nicaragua family and with the understanding that happiness can be a reality even though you may not have all the essential services available in your home and in your community. Students returned with a new sense of appreciation for their quality of life in Canada.

Sadly, on the day that our students came back to Canada, we learned of the passing of Father Hébert. He loved working with many communities in Nicaragua; he loved the people and they loved him more for it. He will be greatly missed. But since Father Hébert was a man of vision, his work will continue and his foundation lives on. The CSNO schools will continue to share his message of hope and of building a world where poverty doesn't exist.


The implementation of the locally developed course "Solidaire/ humanitaire 35" is

in line with the school board's desire to be innovative and responsive to local and international needs. The board wishes, above all, to prepare its students to become engaged citizens, to develop critical thinking in a global and emerging society and to offer a transformational education without limits.

The CSNO thanks all the staff involved in developing the course "Solidaire / humanitaire 35." Their commitment has helped to create a unique and interactive learning opportunity for the students of CSNO and for all francophone students in Alberta. ■


Brigitte Kropielnicki is the acting superintendent for the Northwest francophone school board. She visited Nicaragua in January 2014 with the conseil de l'éducation de la foi catholique (francophone council for catholic education). She visited the different communities and saw various projects that the Fundacco Foundation supports with the help of Roots of Change.

Sylvette Fillion teaches at École Héritage in Falher, Alberta, where she is also the Faith co-ordinator and responsible for the "Humanité/Solidaire 35" course. She has been to Nicaragua with the students on all three trips.



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Research that Resonates:

Student Research Projects Using iMovie and Book Creator



By Andrea Gillier and
Laura Schmaltz

The Calgary Catholic School District is committed to engaging all students for success, which is vital to making the Ministerial Order on Student Learning come alive in the classroom. In all areas of teaching and learning, we want to ensure a learner-centred environment that allows students to explore and understand a variety of 21st Century competencies. The Ministerial Order on Student Learning emphasizes “discovery and the application of knowledge” and using “technology to support the creation and sharing of knowledge [rather] than on technology to support teaching.” We believe that learning opportunities such as this research project epitomize the Order.

Background

The idea for this project came from attending a University of Florida presentation at the International Reading Association conference in 2014. It consists of:

1. A short film created using the iMovie App that demonstrates student understanding of the assigned curricular outcomes.
2. A book created using the Book Creator App that documents all steps of the process in photo, film and written format from introduction to release day.

Research projects are often teacher-driven and may not seem authentic from a student’s point of view. However, when “learners actively build their own interpretation of the world, they can have more ownership of those thoughts” (Jonassen, 1996; 12). By giving full ownership of the research project to students, “their



Documenting their process, from brainstorming through storyboarding to a completed project, allows students to demonstrate critical thinking, conceptualization and construction of knowledge.

interest, motivation and commitment increase, and their natural sense of pride and ownership in the work are enhanced” (Levy, 1997; 197). In addition, by creating a final product to share their learning, learning is made public. This ensures that “learners [keep] thinking and communicating” (Fisher et al, 1996; 122) well after the research project itself is over.

Key to the success of this project is that students understand the learning outcomes that are being targeted, they are given instruction on how to work effectively in groups, they are instructed on the best use of the technology, and they are given time and opportunity to explore how the technology works. Students also must learn how

to effectively reflect on their own learning. Throughout the project, the teacher should be able to ask students thought provoking questions about the progression of their work and the learning process, and students should feel confident in their understanding of the curriculum and its application throughout the project.

The Idea

For this particular endeavour we wanted students to think critically and creatively whilst applying multiple literacies. Students used film as a medium to create and share English Language Arts conceptual knowledge, but this formula could be applied in any subject area and to any number

of outcomes as an alternative to writing a one-dimensional report. Creating a film requires students to use their imagination and consider dimensions, perspectives, images, sounds, and meaning. Documenting their process, from brainstorming through storyboarding to a completed project, allows students to demonstrate critical thinking, conceptualization and construction of knowledge.

Lessons Learned

Teachers and students involved did not originally give as much credit to the “process” portion of the project and ended up regretting the lack of documentation of the work done off camera. This is all part of changing the paradigm of the classroom from teacher-centered to learner-centred. There was also some apprehension around technology use and the ability of students to understand and use the technology effectively. In retrospect, students needed less time with the technology and more time planning so as to not waste time in the editing portion.

Conclusion

Having students conduct research through creating their own iMovie and reflecting on the learning process through Book Creator was a shift in thinking for teachers and students. It required both parties, who were used to a traditional report format, to reframe their thinking about how learning can be demonstrated.

While in this case students engaged in research involving the English Language Arts curriculum, the content was not the focus; this same process could be applied to any content area. The focus is rather on having students engage in a process of exploring outcomes in a way that allows them to gain authentic ownership of those outcomes and to become creators of, rather than consumers of, content.

In his reflection, one student told us that he “knew that you could use iPads to research things online, but [he] didn’t know that [he] could use it for more than that.”

Students mentioned again and again that they enjoyed this project because it changed the way that they thought about school projects

and the use of technology in the classroom. If our goal is to have students who are engaged thinkers, ethical citizens and entrepreneurial in spirit, it is vital that we reframe teaching and learning opportunities to include experiences such as this one. ■

Andrea Gillier is Educational Technology Consultant and Laura Schmaltz is Secondary English Language Arts Consultant with Calgary Catholic School District’s Instructional Services Department.

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Building Ethical, Engaged and Entrepreneurial Students

By Dawn Sugimoto



For several years, Palliser Regional Schools had used a graphic of concentric circles to depict layers of influence in the school system that centred on and supported student learning. Called the Palliser Effectiveness Model, the graphic incorporated the teaching quality standard, as well as correlates or characteristics of effective schools, inspired by 30 years of research led by Dr. Larry Lezotte, in the United States, and the late Wayne Hulley, in Canada.

The original model was tweaked over the years but hadn't seen a major overhaul until this past year when the graphic was reimagined through the lenses of the Ministerial Order for Student Success, Alberta's *Inspiring Education* movement, and Palliser's own evolution in practice.

The result is an Effectiveness Model that truly reflects the systems and individuals most able to positively impact students inside the school system. Even more powerfully, the model now depicts the power of people and the strength of alignment between professionals and support staff at every layer of the Palliser organization.

Where the old model focused on things (system, school, classroom and student learning), the new model identifies people in uniquely influential roles (trustees, superintendent, principal and teacher). Most significantly, at the centre is a single word—student.

"It may seem like a small change," says

Palliser Regional Schools Superintendent Kevin Gietz. "Our old effectiveness model had 'Student Learning' and 'Outcomes Focused' at the centre. That wasn't a reflection of what we do. Our school system, and everyone working in it, are here to serve our students. We do it through relationship building, trust and support. We work with people, not outcomes."

A new level was added immediately around the word "STUDENT." The language reflected the 10 expected outcomes for students outlined in the Ministerial Order.

The next layer is the TEACHER and the language of the teaching quality standard. The alignment between what's expected of the educator and the expected outcomes for the student was obvious.

The next ring is the PRINCIPAL, and the correlates inspired by Effective School research that include high expectations for learning; authentic partnerships; and safe and caring school environments.

Influencing the principal and represented in the next ring of the model is the SUPERINTENDENT, with key expectations of the system leader drawn directly from his job description and his marching orders from Palliser's Board of Trustees.

The final ring within the Palliser sphere of influence is the BOARD OF TRUSTEES, which provides the vision, policy

and accountability structures that guide the superintendent in his work.

Overarching the connected rings is Palliser's mission statement: "Together we will ensure learning success for all students to develop their unique potential as caring citizens in a changing world."

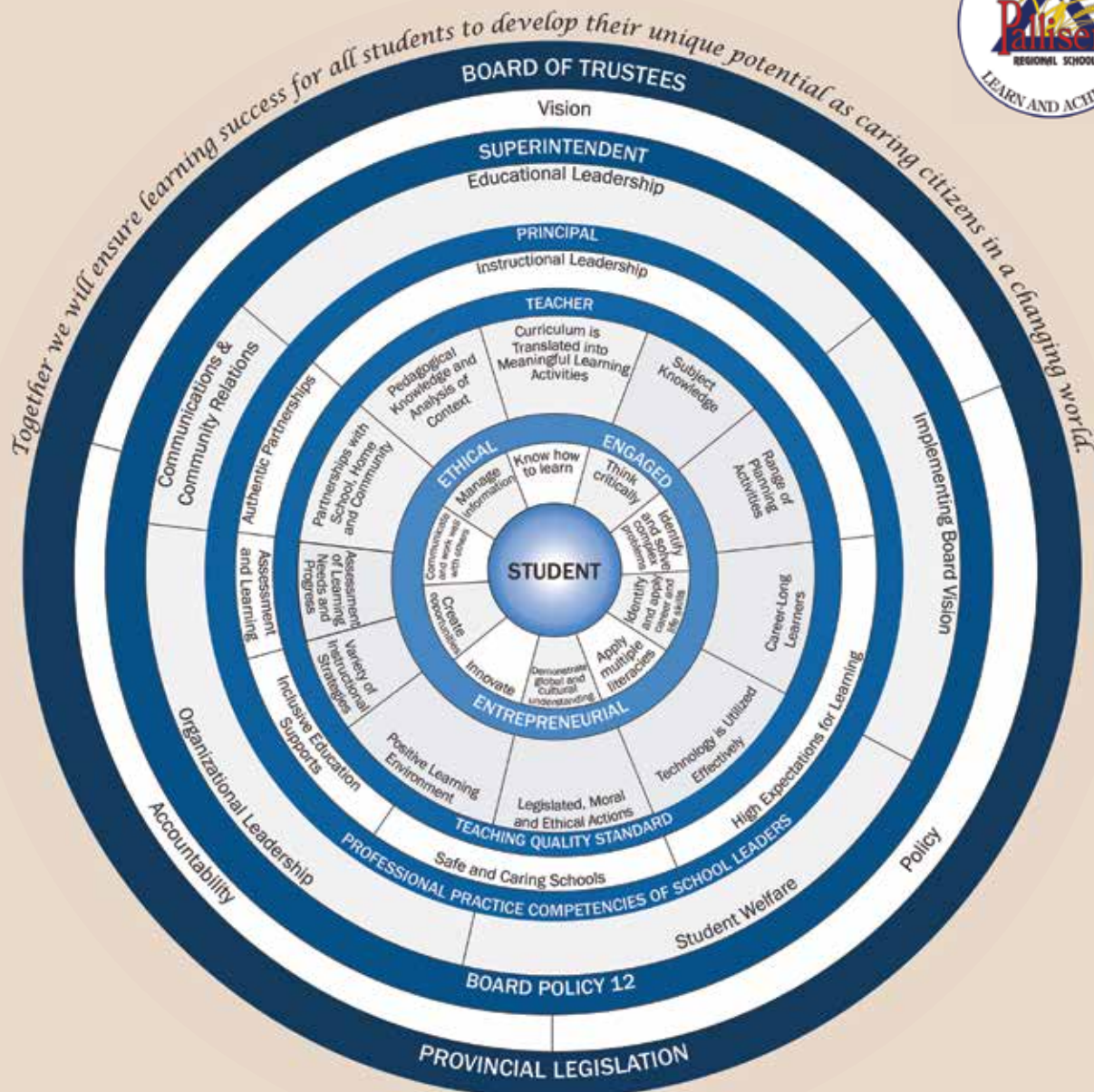
The graphic reveals a high degree of commonality at every level. Every person in the Palliser system, whether bus driver, teacher or administrator, can find his/her place in ensuring an effective system that supports the student to grow as innovator, critical thinker and communicator, ultimately prepared to contribute to the world as a highly literate, engaged citizen. Work as a school caretaker? You're supporting Student Welfare (Superintendent's role), Safe and Caring Schools (Principal role) and a positive learning environment (teacher's role).

Not part of Palliser staff? As a parent or community member, you can see yourself reflected in the emphasis on community relations, authentic partnerships and partnerships with school, home and community, as identified on three layers of the Effectiveness Model.

"It speaks to the work each of us can do to give the student the best possible chance of success," Gietz said. "I can look at the Effectiveness Model and see areas where every type of employee on our team can contribute, whether they work in a classroom, maintain our buildings or work on our buses. If we have someone

continued on page 24

Regional Schools Effectiveness Model



This model for an effective, student-focused school system is based on research as well as principles described by Inspiring Education, professional standards of teachers and principals, and the understanding that alignment of goals and vision at all levels creates an environment for achieving those goals and attaining that vision.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Elected every four years;
Conducts annual evaluations to ensure it is meeting stakeholders' needs;
Operates a centralized system of supports for all schools;
and allocates resources based on student needs.

SUPERINTENDENT

Honours the Board's vision and direction;
Ensures a system-wide culture of high expectations and accountability;
Ensures ongoing improvement through school goals, school reviews,
and accountability processes;
Literacy, assessment for learning and safe and caring school environments are
long-term priorities for student success;
Ensures support personnel and services are in place to support principals and teachers.

PRINCIPALS

Must demonstrate professional practice competency in these areas:

- Fostering effective relationships;
- Embodying visionary leadership;
- Leading a learning committee;
- Providing instructional leadership;
- Developing and facilitating leadership;
- Managing school operations and resources;
- Understanding and responding to the larger societal context.

TEACHERS

Acknowledged as the single most important person to the student's success in school;
Is supported through mentorship, coaching, professional development
and collaboration time;
Fosters high expectations for each student's learning.

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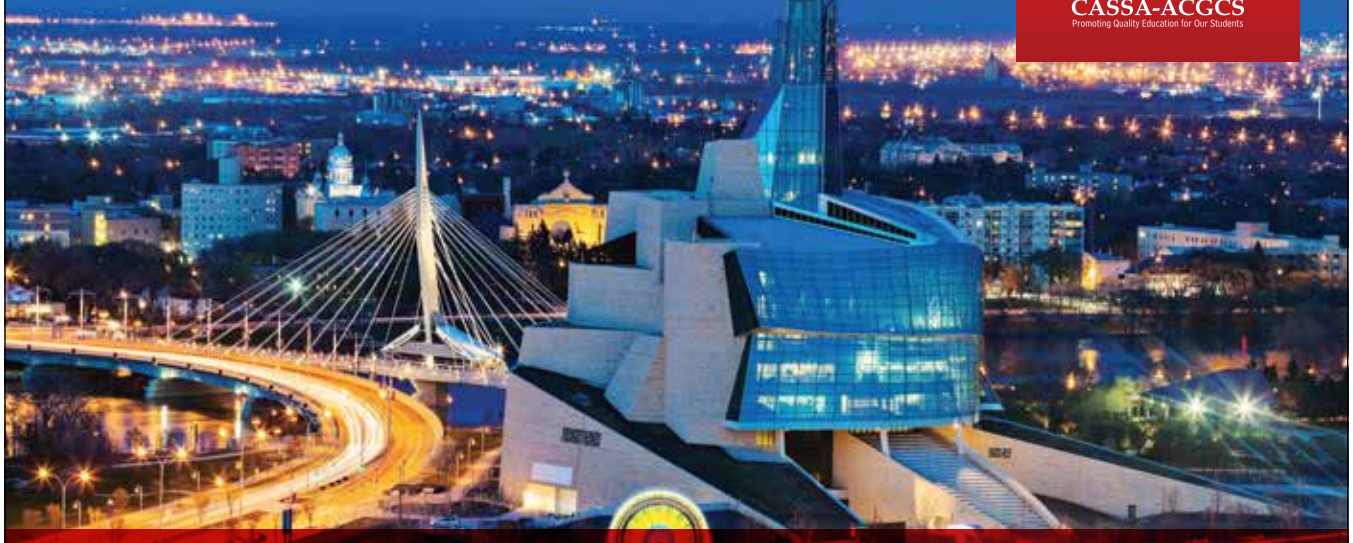
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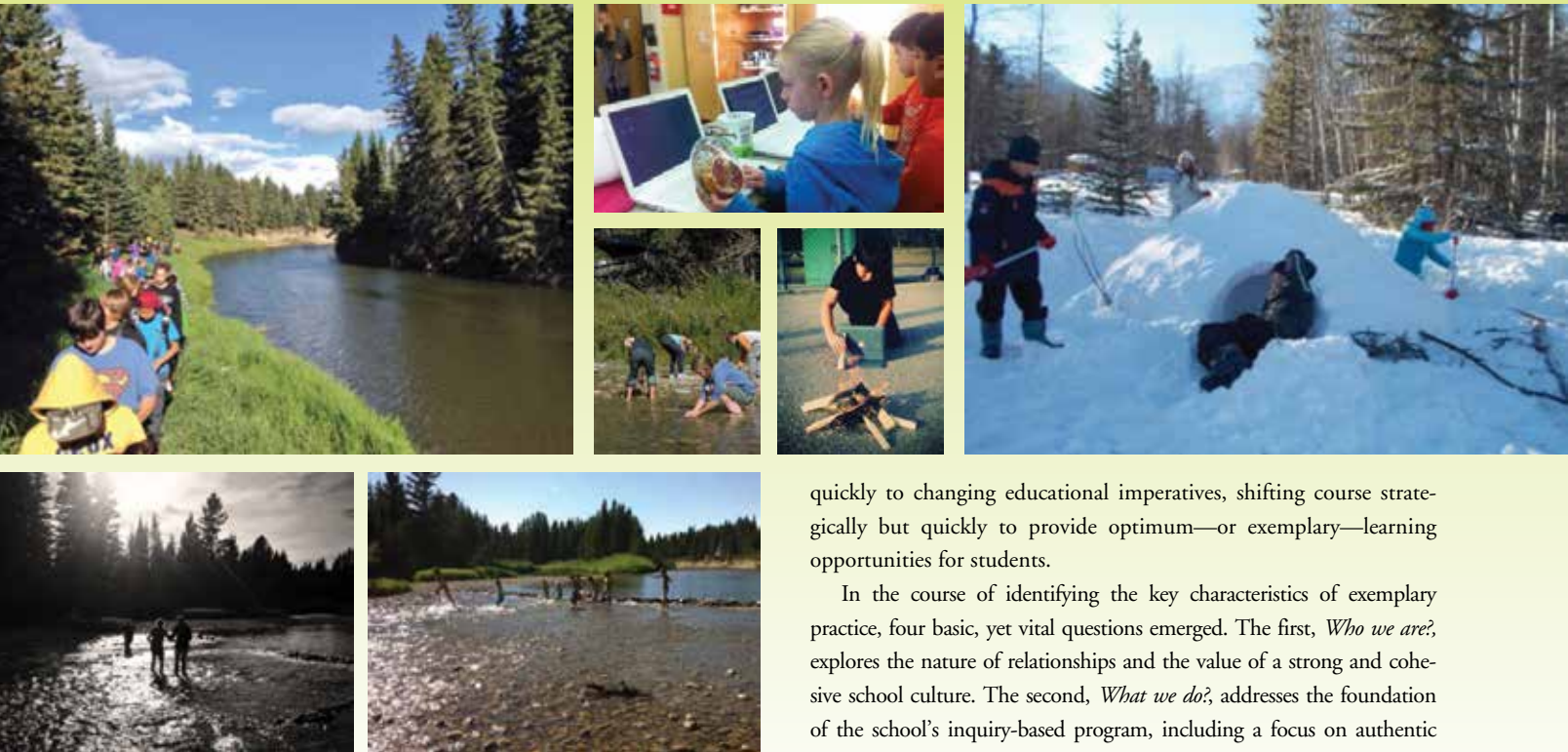
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Developing Exemplary Practices in Support of the Ministerial Order on Student Learning

By Phil Butterfield, EdD



In the spring of 2010, a lively strategic planning meeting of the leadership team at Connect Charter School (formerly the Calgary Science School) was abruptly silenced when then superintendent Dr. Garry McKinnon posed the question: “What does exemplary teaching look like in the Calgary Science School?”

After a brief silence, numerous worthy responses were floated to the group—pedagogical innovation, a focus on genuine inquiry, dedicated teachers, engaged parents—all valid contributing factors to a vibrant learning community, but clearly not capturing the “essence” of the school to which Dr. McKinnon referred.

Dr. McKinnon’s timely question, coupled with the expressed desire of teachers and school leaders to strive for continuous improvement in their practice, led to lengthy reflection and discussion of the attributes that were perceived to comprise a “great” school. As an inclusive public charter school, Connect has both a mandate and a responsibility to explore research-informed teaching and learning practices that build on a disposition of inquiry-based learning infused with the meaningful integration of technology and outdoor education. A one-school system, Connect has the capacity to respond

quickly to changing educational imperatives, shifting course strategically but quickly to provide optimum—or exemplary—learning opportunities for students.

In the course of identifying the key characteristics of exemplary practice, four basic, yet vital questions emerged. The first, *Who we are?*, explores the nature of relationships and the value of a strong and cohesive school culture. The second, *What we do?*, addresses the foundation of the school’s inquiry-based program, including a focus on authentic assessment, technology enhancement, curriculum implementation, and outdoor and environmental education. The third question, focused on *How we do it?*, recognizes the importance of school-based action research, collaboration, developing leadership capacity, and providing professional learning support for teachers, support staff and school leaders. The fourth question, somewhat summative in nature, asks *Why we do it?*, and reinforces the targeted outcomes of intellectually engaged learning and, above all, student success.

Following the introduction of these Exemplary Teaching and Learning frameworks to the Connect Charter School community, it became apparent that an important element was missing. While the documents provided succinct guidance and clarity for teachers and learners, the administration agreed that a similar framework was required to outline the role and vision for school leadership. The Exemplary Leadership Framework overlays the 16 characteristics of exemplary practice onto the seven dimensions of the *Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders in Alberta* (revised June 2011) to create a comprehensive leadership vision.

Pre-dating Alberta Education’s Ministerial Order on Student Learning (2013) by three years, the frameworks for exemplary

teaching and learning recognize the value of diversity among learners and the need to accommodate a multitude of learning modalities in order to achieve the school's vision of "developing extraordinary citizens." They also reflect the essential values of the Ministerial Order to nurture learners who are "engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit" (p. 2).

Among the challenges inherent in the goals of the exemplary teaching and learning frameworks is that of building leadership capacity and expertise within a single school. Doing so is viewed as a critical element of exemplary practice, and a responsibility that the school's leadership team addressed by incorporating an innovative model of distributed leadership. Three exemplary teachers who had expressed interest in, and demonstrated qualities for, school leadership, were designated as *portfolio leaders*. Each portfolio leader formulated a mandate for their position within one of the following areas of expertise:

1. Enhancing and supporting inquiry-based learning;
2. Developing meaningful and relevant student leadership and citizenship; and
3. Building capacity for outdoor and environmental education.

Each portfolio leader engages with teachers in an instructional leadership role, determining needs for professional learning, supporting collaborative planning, and reinforcing the common vision of exemplary teaching, learning and leading.

As a vehicle for sharing exemplary practice with other educators, Connect Charter School hosts *Innovate West* annually, inviting teachers, school leaders and other educational stakeholders to a

dialogue-driven conference focused on collaboration and improving student learning. Exemplary teaching, learning and leading have become an important part of the Connect Charter School lexicon and are living vision statements that ensure learner engagement and success remain at the center of our conversation about present and future educational practice. ■

Phil Butterfield has been a K-12 educator, school counselor and administrator for 25 years and is currently an assistant principal at Connect Charter School (formerly the Calgary Science School). He is also a sessional instructor in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. For further information on the exemplary teaching, learning and leadership frameworks, please contact Phil at phil.b@connectcharter.ca.

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We're Better Together

The Alberta School Employee Benefits Plan (ASEBP) is a health and welfare trust governed by 10 Trustees. ASEBP offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for over 55,000 covered members and their dependants in 58 school jurisdictions across the province. ASEBP is pleased to contribute a regular column in The CASS Connection.

By Jennifer Carson, BBA

Our world has borne witness to some incredible collaborations. Sharing and enhancing one another's ideas has led to life-saving inventions, cures for disease and unimaginably cool technology.

In terms of popular culture, imagine how different music would sound if John Lennon and Paul McCartney hadn't met all those years ago? Would we love Winnie-the-Pooh the same if he'd been brought to life by someone other than illustrator Ernest Shepard? Would Batman be the ultimate crime fighter without Robin by his side? Collaboration, it seems, sets the stage for greatness.

While, thankfully, the success of our collaborations aren't measured in the number of crimes we've solved or technology we've invented, the impact of even a simple brainstorming session can be significant and far-reaching. And it was in this spirit of idea-sharing and recognizing the impact of our collaborative efforts that the idea for what has become The Sandbox was born.

Partners in Wellness

In 2013, ASEBP had seen the demonstrated successes CASS and the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)



had realized in the field of peer-to-peer knowledge, expertise and learnings sharing through the use of audience-specific portals. We'd also heard anecdotally that those focused on employee wellness in the jurisdictions wanted (but lacked) a place to connect and share ideas around health initiatives.

With a sense of what needed to be done, we set out to determine the scope of the need, who our audience was and others that might

be interested in banding together to realize this goal. As luck would have it, in 2014 ASEBP was invited to join the Alberta School Employee Wellness Working Group (ASEWWG)—partners with vested interests in comprehensive school health initiatives in Alberta.

The ASEWWG, now chaired by ASEBP, includes representatives from Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Healthy School Community Wellness Fund, APPLE Schools,

Be Fit For Life Network and Ever Active Schools—we were off to a stellar start.

We Asked and They Answered

Since our team of wellness superheroes were now at the ready, we set out to determine what precisely was needed. The ASEWWG consulted, through an online survey, all those we knew were already supporters of employee health and wellness initiatives, encompassing a vast array of position titles (either in or closely linked to the education sector) and geographic locations across the province.

Results in hand, the team now had a clear understanding of the needs of the wellness champions in the Alberta K-12 education system. Respondents confirmed that they wanted and would regularly use an outlet to collaborate and network with other wellness champions but did not currently have the means to.

A Sandbox for Grown-ups

We knew from working with CASS and ASBOA that an online portal had the potential for success and from the survey that this type of tool was something that wellness champions were looking for. But adjustments needed to be made. While a portal is a perfect host for a known subset, we were working with only a guess as to the number of school employee wellness champions there were in Alberta, and we certainly didn't have direct contact with all of them. We needed something a little different.

After careful assessment of all variables and options, the solution was a fully-accessible public website with exclusive access for school jurisdiction or partner organization employees to comment and participate in the forum and blogs. *The Sandbox: Your space for healthy school workplaces* is a safe place for ideas to grow and build and for employee wellness champions from across Alberta to connect and collaborate in ways they haven't been able to before.


Responding to feedback from the survey, the site includes inspiring, weekly blogs on a variety of topics related to school employee health and wellness; wellness resources that encompass the full gamut of initiative planning from the first spark of an idea to the assessment of completed programs; a robust forum for champions to connect and learn from one another that is monitored by school employee wellness experts from across the province; and finally an events calendar that connects wellness champions with activities they may never have stumbled upon both in their area and beyond.

A Look Ahead

The Alberta school employee health and wellness community is an emerging group whose needs are ever growing and changing with their environments. The Sandbox has the potential to be a canvas for an unlimited number of great collaborations in this community and we expect to see it grow and evolve with the needs of its users.

I am consistently amazed by what can be accomplished when motivated, free thinkers connect and share their knowledge. Who knows, maybe The Sandbox has set the stage for the next history-making collaboration. In the very least, it's clear that we are, truly, better together. ■

Jennifer Carson is the Chief Executive Officer of ASEBP and has worked in the health and benefits industry for over 25 years. During her nine years at ASEBP, Jennifer has championed the organizational transformation from purely a benefits provider to a health services and benefits provider of choice. ASEBP was named one of Alberta's Top 70 Employers for 2015.



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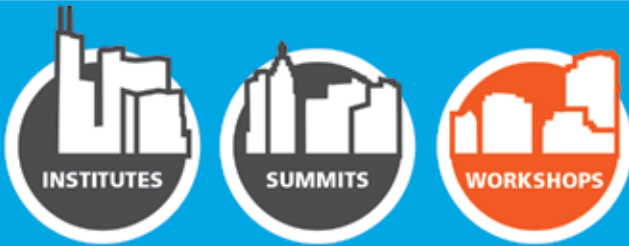
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