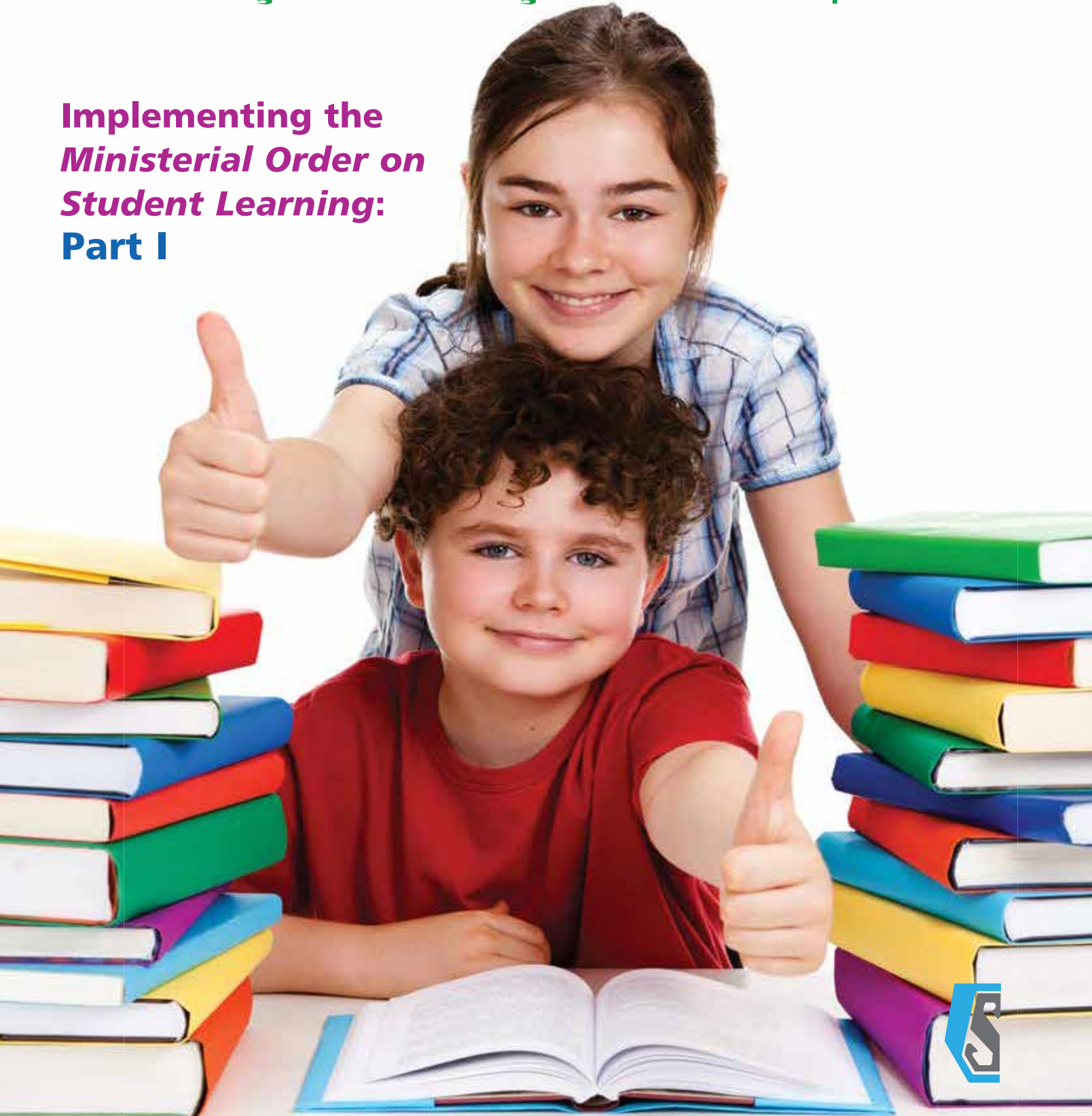


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Spring 2015

Implementing the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning:* Part I



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contents



Messages:

- 7** Message from the Minister of Education
- 9** Message from the President of CASS
- 11** Message from the Executive Director

FOCUS ON...IMPLEMENTING THE MINISTERIAL ORDER ON STUDENT LEARNING: PART I

Features:

- 12** Reflections on Living the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning*
- 16** Inspiring Hearts & Minds in the Rockies
- 20** A School's Learning Journey
- 22** Travelling Along RTI's Principle-Based Route at STAR Catholic Schools
- 24** The CAP Framework in High Prairie School Division:
Making a Difference

Department:

- 27** ASEBP's Healthy People, Healthy Workplace News:
ASEBP's Employee & Family Assistance Program Promotes Wellness for All

30 Buyer's Guide



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Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable Gordon Dirks | Minister of Education

We want to ensure every student has the opportunities and tools needed to reach their full potential.

After dealing with the bone-chilling cold of winter for five months, the prospect of warm sunshine is exhilarating. It is one of the main reasons springtime in Alberta is one of my favourite seasons. It is not just the weather, it is the excitement in the air and the spring fever. As everything begins to feel alive again, spring also becomes a time of rejuvenation. Many of us use this season to prepare for the rest of the year. You may give your home a thorough cleaning or plant vegetables to harvest in the fall. Here at Alberta Education, we are also sowing and preparing for the upcoming year.

In December, my ministry released a series of 16 *Education Act* regulations to stakeholders for comment. Reviewing and finalizing the regulations are an important step toward proclaiming the *Education Act*, which was given royal assent in December 2012. Over a 45-day period, we gathered input from our education partners, and other interested Albertans, on the proposed regulations. The comment period concluded on January 31, and the input is currently being thoroughly reviewed. After careful consideration of all the input, we plan to proceed with the regulations and move toward proclamation of the *Education Act*.

Albertans have been exceptionally clear with us that any educational decision needs to put the student first, and we are confident that the *Education Act*—which will replace the current *School Act* upon proclamation—will help ensure all students have the supports and environments needed to succeed. We also recognize that school authorities

require lead time to prepare for the *Education Act* and to implement regulations—and we're committed to working together with our education partners throughout this process.

But this isn't the only way we are preparing for the rest of the year. We have taken steps to ensure we have more classroom space for our growing population. It is no secret that Alberta's population has been steadily increasing, and so has the number of students. Currently, there are more than 657,000 students in Alberta's classrooms, and that number continues to grow.

With this in mind, we have embarked on the most expansive school infrastructure project in Canadian history—with 230 approved school capital projects underway or recently completed. We expect the majority of school projects announced in 2013 and early 2014—the second phase of our capital plan—to be open for students in 2016. For even more accountability, Alberta Premier Jim Prentice has created a four-member cabinet committee to provide senior-level oversight, help streamline processes and ensure these schools open on time as promised.

However, just getting kids into classrooms is not enough. We want and expect these spaces to be welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments. We want to ensure every student has the opportunities and tools needed to reach their full potential.

We are helping to meet this goal through the *Education Act* as well. We can all agree that bullying in any form is unacceptable, and the *Education Act* aims

to promote healthy relationships and the prevention of bullying.

I spent several weeks this winter traveling the province, meeting with school board chairs and superintendents and hearing about their successes, their challenges and their ideas for improvement. Albertans can rest assured their children's education is in the hands of some of the brightest and most dedicated leaders in the world, and I left every meeting grateful for their insights and confident in our collective future.

In particular, I was delighted to hear how enthusiastic everyone was about *Inspiring Education*, the visionary guidebook for the future of learning in Alberta. We all agreed with the document's goals of allowing for innovative approaches that leverage the knowledge of our professional teachers and communities across the province to help all students succeed. That said, each district saw unique ways forward, and there is a great deal of input on which to reflect in the coming months.

With all of this ongoing and upcoming work, it is imperative that all education partners continue to work together. Partnership and collaboration is critical to achieving our common goal of putting the best interests of students first. With leadership, advocacy and ongoing support, we will continue to go above and beyond this goal, and we will strengthen Alberta's world-class education system.

I would like to thank CASS for their teamwork on important education issues, and I look forward to the rest of the 2015 school year and the work we will complete together.

“We can no longer settle for being a ‘good school’ for most students . . . we must be a great school for every child.”

—Mike Mattos, creator of RTI at Work™



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President's Message

Karl Germann

President | College of Alberta School Superintendents

Former Education Minister Jeff Johnson left a legacy for the students of Alberta by signing the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning (#001/2013)* on May 6, 2013. While signing a Ministerial Order may appear somewhat insignificant, this moment in history is significant; it signifies that the ministry believes educators in Alberta can foster the development of ethical students who are driven to be entrepreneurs, and are highly engaged. The Order provides the framework to achieve this ambitious goal.

Gordon Dirks, our current Education Minister, frequently refers to both *Inspiring Education* and the *Ministerial Order of Student Learning* as frameworks to both ensure basics are addressed while still ensuring innovation and creativity are

I believe Alberta will experience a significant shift if we support, encourage and challenge our high-quality teachers to fulfill the shifts outlined in *Inspiring Education* and the *Ministerial Order*.

fostered. He often encourages educators to more frequently tell a story about the positive shifts now underway as a result of *Inspiring Education*.

Our role as leaders is to both encourage and influence our teachers to believe in the vision and translate the vision into meaningful educational experience for students.

In 2001 I moved our family from Meadow Lake Saskatchewan to Grande Prairie, Alberta. We had no idea what we would encounter. At first I witnessed an Alberta that was highly driven and focused, full of students and teachers who wanted to unpack the curricula and create meaningful experiences for children in

Continued on page 10

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Continued from page 9

their care. A closer examination revealed a school system somewhat paralyzed, yet desiring meaningful change.

Around that same time, AISI Cycle 2 was conceived and meaningful experimentation began to occur. For me it was difficult to understand how one province could be so different from the other. Alberta teachers, it seemed, were working hard and highly educated but in some instances, limited in their approach to instruction. Teachers seemed restrained by a phenomenon I now refer to as “outcome paranoia.” One by one, outcomes were covered by the teacher in the classroom; at times an innovative task or project was injected into the classroom—but not for too long as it might interfere with how “education” was understood at that time.

Fast forward the tape to today. I thank both AISI and teachers who have a strong desire to continually improve. I believe Alberta will experience a significant shift

if we support, encourage and challenge our high-quality teachers to fulfill the shifts outlined in *Inspiring Education* and the Ministerial Order. I am proud to observe and sometimes be a part of the significant shifts emerging in today’s classrooms throughout this province.

George Couros, a district principal in Parkland School District, defined 10 qualities of a master teacher and they can be found at www.georgecouros.ca. To bring the Ministerial Order alive, he notes that highly effective teachers are connecting in new ways with students and are developing a meaningful relationships. If we first “read” out students and families, we will build stronger relationships and ultimately be able to better design learning experiences for the many different personalities in our care.

This fall I witnessed amazing growth in a group of Grade 9 teachers who decided to embrace project-based learning to help students find a passion for learning. Once the essential question

was developed, students and teachers explored how to develop alternate energy systems that would have a positive impact on the environment and economy. They pitched their idea through a Dragon’s Den approach and showcased their learning at the high school’s learning commons, in front of superintendents and on YouTube. This authentic learning experience created meaning and relationship, exactly what the *Inspiring Education* asks us to achieve.

I continue to learn how to lead by experimenting with support, encouragement and a bit of pressure. I have learned as a leader that you continually need to remind your staff that you desire change both for their own sake and the sake of the kids. It is acceptable for staff and students stumble and fail along the way because that is how we learn the best—pushing ourselves to be the best. Finding our passion changes everything, and I hope the Ministerial Order helps you become the best version of yourself. ■

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Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

The opening clause of the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning (#001/2013)* states: “WHEREAS the fundamental goal of education in Alberta is to inspire all students to achieve success and fulfillment, and reach their full potential by developing the competencies of engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit, who contribute to a strong and prosperous economy and society.”

This is a powerful statement and, at the time the Ministerial Order was proclaimed, it caused me to reflect upon the growth I have experienced during my career. I have gained a much deeper understanding and appreciation about how important it is for our education system to inspire “all students to achieve success and fulfillment.”

While I feel that I did whatever I could to support students as a teacher, a school leader and a system leader, I admit that early in my career I would share a belief that students had the right to fail if they chose not to take advantage of the supports the education system afforded them. My belief system changed when I accepted that “the fundamental purpose of school is learning, not teaching,” as stated by Richard DuFour.

As educators, it is our collective responsibility to accept the challenge of ensuring every student achieves success. System leaders are likely best positioned to establish the practices and to provide the supports required within their respective jurisdictions to achieve this goal.

I base my comments on research by Robert Marzano and Timothy Waters. This research was referenced by Dr. Del Litke, CASS director of Leadership Learning, during presentations at CASS zone meetings over the past three months.

Teacher	School	District	Student
P50	P50	P50	P50
P84	P50	P50	P60
P98	P50	P50	P70
P50	P84	P84	P57
P50	P98	P98	P63

Effects of district, school and teacher on reading achievement.

Teacher	School	District	Student
P50	P50	P50	P50
P84	P50	P50	P64
P98	P50	P50	P76
P50	P84	P84	P59
P50	P98	P98	P67

Effects of district, school and teacher on math achievement.

The research by Marzano and Waters affirms that the single most influential factor impacting student learning is the effectiveness of the teacher. In the chart above, the predicted achievement gain for a 50th percentile student is shown when teaching, school leadership and school system leadership are deemed average (percentile 50), superior (percentile 84) or excellent (percentile 98).

Not surprisingly it was found that if teaching, school leadership and system leadership were average (percentile 50), there was no achievement gain for a 50th percentile student.

When teaching was superior (percentile 84) or excellent (percentile 98), the positive impact on student achievement was significant, even if school leadership and system leadership were deemed average.

What is of great importance for system leaders is that the research also found that positive impact on student achievement was significant when school and system leadership were superior or excellent, even when teaching was considered average.

This research, and other similar studies, demonstrates the importance of strong system leadership and the positive impact it can have for student learning and achievement.

As stated by Marzano & Waters, “Imagine a school where you become a better educator just by being part of the staff. Imagine a school division where this exists everywhere.”

With this quote in mind, I extend a sincere thank you to all the contributors for this edition of *The CASS Connection*. Your willingness to share your stories and experiences from your school divisions enables all jurisdictions to become stronger and better able to provide excellent learning environments for all students.

Finally, I want to thank all the companies 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. ■

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Reflections

on Living the Ministerial Order on Student Learning

By Lisa Wright

When the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning* (Order) was signed in 2013, the faculty of Michael Strembitsky School¹ (MSS) thought about how we would live the Order so students would be able to reach their full potential as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit (the three Es).

Our story, thus far, illuminates how the values and vision of the Order cannot be realized through traditional practices and leadership models that leave the substantial talents of teachers largely untapped. We place great premium on building the capacity of teachers and harnessing the collective power of networks of teachers to initiate, support and sustain innovation that brings the Order to life.

As a faculty, we continually review the Order to build shared understanding and to consider alignment with other provincial and jurisdiction initiatives. Colleagues from the Ministry of Education, University of Alberta, College of Alberta School Superintendents and Alberta Teachers' Association have helped us garner a more nuanced understanding of the Order and subsequent implications for practice. Our lived experiences provoke many questions that may be applicable to others. These questions and explanations are outlined below.

How might organizational routines and artifacts be reconceptualized?

We often create the very structures that limit new possibilities for learning and teaching. Once cognizant of this, we considered how taken-for-granted practices might be altered, changed or even eliminated.



Teachers from Michael Strembitsky School engaging in collective reflection after a faculty meeting.



The results of a brainstorming session with Michael Strembitsky School faculty, which discussed responses to guiding questions posed in the book *21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times*.

For example, we developed a single common timetable for kindergarten to Grade 9 that allows teachers to work across divisional levels and facilitates cross-grade, cross-disciplinary and cross-class collaboration. Both elementary and junior high students may move from one teacher to another depending on the needs of the student, the task or teacher expertise.

Instead of traditional long-range plans, teachers now develop curriculum design maps that identify the big ideas or questions of the curriculum that allow for learning within and across subject disciplines, as well as in the study of in-depth, real-world problems. Instead of the competencies in the Order being an inadvertent output, we strategically position cross-curricular competencies as an input into planning, instruction and assessment.

How do we honour the nuances of local contexts?

The Order describes the educational journey for all students to become engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an

entrepreneurial spirit as envisioned through *Inspiring Education*. At MSS, implementation of the Order is viewed as highly contextual; our professional judgment determines how the Order is implemented.

Subsequently, our faculty continually engages students and parents in discussions that contextualize the three Es within our school. We created and displayed posters that define the three Es and serve as a basis for building shared understanding. Our student conduct policy has been reframed to describe expectations using language focused on who our students aspire to be (represented by the three Es and competencies required for learning, work and life).

In targeted areas, we also bring teachers together to create understanding about practices related to implementation of the Order. For example, our Project-Based Learning (PBL) Leadership Think Tank is comprised of 15 teachers who review research, discuss various PBL models and resources, and share what is/is not working with projects in an effort to inform and sustain new school-wide practices. Teacher-leaders facilitate meetings

and professional learning, in addition to helping us create our own definition of PBL within the MSS context.

How might collaborative structures strengthen teacher professionalism?

Implementation of the Order is a highly collaborative, knowledge-building process. In addition to our individual professional growth plans, our entire faculty provides input into and signs a collective professional growth plan² focused on authentic student engagement (for student learning as depicted in the Order) and an examination of what professional competencies teachers need to develop the three Es in our students (this is fostering professional capital). This plan reinforces our identity as a collective, frames our decision making, and ultimately shapes school culture.

Relationships, characterized by strong ties of interdependence, are critical to implementation of the Order. Every Thursday after school, we engage in professional learning and collaboration.

Continued on page 14

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Continued from page 13

Additionally, grade level or project teams typically collaborate on a weekly basis or are provided release time during the school day. Products generated through collaborative work are shared among faculty via an internal share site.

As valued school leaders, our teachers belong to design teams that influence our understanding of and work towards the vision of the Order. In addition to engaging in book studies and reviews of educational research through various lenses, teams develop protocols and tools that shape practice. Design teams explore the merits and limitations of a variety of pedagogical approaches and resources to discern what best meets the needs of our students.

How does implementation of the Order require professional learning, relearning and unlearning?

Upon initial review of the Order, we thought that professional learning would be critical; however, lived experience shows us that implementation also requires relearning and unlearning—disrupting prevailing discourses and unlearning taken-for-granted educational practices.

Much of our professional learning has evolved from a focus on content to competencies. When we learned that teachers, students and parents did not have common understanding of what the competencies are and how competencies are developed through learning and in life, our collaborative teacher teams created detailed rubrics for each competency within the new Order.

For us, this work highlighted how competency development is less about knowing something and more about

knowing how. This shift strikes at the core of our identities as teachers—where we once viewed ourselves as experts or disseminators of knowledge, we now learn alongside students and are starting to see ourselves as designers or architects of learning. Subsequently, professional discussions consider the evolving identity of the teacher and changing conceptualizations of school leadership.

Implementation of the Order requires vulnerability and risk taking, more so than just thinking about change in a technical manner. Our story about living the Order is about oscillating on a continuum of shifts on the educational landscape. Over time, we have come to understand that the Order and recent policy shifts³ aren't about wrong/right, less/more, nor are the shifts an either/or.

Our work can't be positioned as binaries; rather, professional judgment is required when implementing the Order. We are intentionally creating a counter-discourse that stresses the benefits of professional risk taking.

We have witnessed, first-hand, that defining and implementing the vision of the Order cannot happen for or to teachers; it must occur with and by teachers. We see potentiality of the Order living within deep professional reflection and sustained opportunities for teacher collaboration. ■

Lisa Wright is the principal of Michael Strembitsky School. Wright has also worked as a teacher, consultant and central office administrator within Edmonton Public Schools.

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Footnotes

1. Michael Strembitsky School is located in southeast Edmonton. The school serves more than 1,070 students, from kindergarten to Grade 9, in an inclusive setting.
2. Michael Strembitsky School used the Alberta Teachers' Association template—"Professional Growth Plan Developed with a Community of Learners," found at www.teachers.ab.ca.
3. Shifts for Alberta's provincial curriculum are located at www.education.alberta.ca.

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Inspiring Hearts & Minds in the Rockies

By Myka Breymann-Piekenbrock & Darin Larson

Nestled among the Rocky Mountains, Canadian Rockies Public Schools (CRPS) offer the ultimate backdrop to inspiring the hearts and minds of our students and teachers. Realizing that it takes more than breathtaking scenery to raise teachers and students to great heights of excellence, CRPS facilitates excellence through empirically supported professional development, personal learning networks and distributed leadership. Inspired, engaged, ethical and entrepreneurial are the key characteristics of the vision of the 21st century CRPS students.

In the fall of 2007, CRPS initiated Inspiring Hearts and Minds, a whole child approach for education that anticipated many current school reforms toward inquiry and 21st century learning. Progressive and ahead of the times, the Inspiring Hearts and Minds framework that was created by local stakeholders aligned with extensive international research. The current Ministerial Order supports this vision by delivering a common language and goal for all stakeholders in education, as well as providing CRPS with a concise directive for shaping professional learning.

Jennifer's story*

At Galileo Educational Network's most recent workshop, Jennifer shared a social studies task along with its assessment. Both her colleagues and Galileo mentors gave her positive feedback on



the design elements of her activity, but when another social studies teacher from a different school shared a project, Jennifer realized she needed to focus on improving her formative assessment.

University of Auckland professor Viviane M. J. Robinson² concludes in *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why* that “leading teacher learning and development” has the largest effect on student-centred leadership, so we are nurturing instructional excellence by emphasizing this quality during professional development with all staff.

Robinson's findings provided one of the foundations at CRPS, embracing a vision of distributed leadership. Our work with the Galileo at the University of Calgary involves a purposeful delegation of lead learners and distributed leadership teams developed to create sustainability within the board. Two educational coaching positions were created to support the professional growth of our teachers by offering time for teachers to collaborate with think partners.

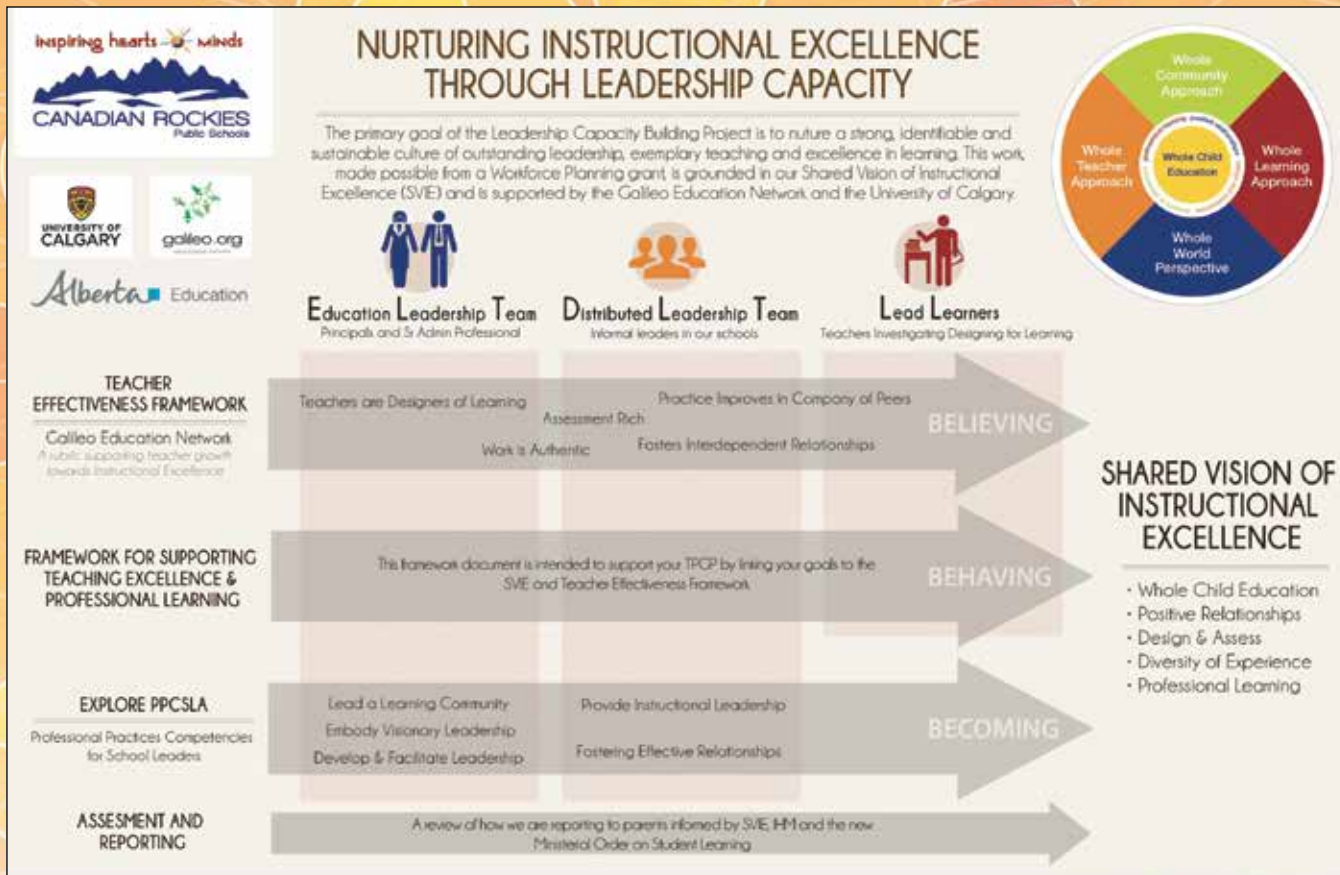
Back in her classroom, Jennifer begins to create an inquiry project to engage her learners.

She reflects on the learning needs of her 26 students including the kinesthetic learners who are counting the minutes until ski training, the gamers zoning out from the lack of multi-sensory stimulation, the over achievers who just can't get enough and the socialites texting under their desks. Feeling overwhelmed about how to incorporate more multiple feedback loops to her learners, she heads to the staff room and looks for support.

Jennifer sits down with Ben, the learning coach. “Can you be my think partner on this new unit I want to create? I really want to focus on assessment for learning,” she asks. They discuss their learning goals and book a session.

In this model of distributed leadership, educators have opportunities to collaborate in the company of their peers. The mentorship with Galileo has introduced the Teacher Effectiveness Framework (TEF) to teachers providing an infrastructure to more efficiently implement the Ministerial Order for teacher and student excellence.

Eliciting a shared vision of instructional excellence has facilitated open communication between teachers from different schools as well as set the foundation for a district-wide



The goals of the Leadership Capacity Building Project.

unification of practice. The two educational coaching positions within the board have drastically increased teachers' opportunities to collaborate with peers. The educational coaches are available to work with educators as well as share information regarding other staff members interested in similar pedagogy.

Using the Teacher Effectiveness Framework (TEF) as an infrastructure, teachers can begin to dissect their practice, examine new ideas and integrate their own pedagogy. Additionally, professional learning network opportunities allow CRPS educators to once again collaborate and focus on improving their own teaching practice in the company of their peers. Educators are given the creative freedom to decide how they wish to inform their practice and who they wish to collaborate with.

The mentorship of Galileo in the 2013-2014 school year resulted in the beginning steps of distributed leadership within the CRPS. This year, the mentorship grew to including grade and subject cohorts, collaborating with Galileo and each other to further inform practice.

Inspired, engaged, ethical and entrepreneurial are the key characteristics of the vision of the 21st century CRPS students.

As a result, in 2014-2015, each school now has a leadership team, designated professional learning time (PLN) and the opportunity to collaborate with educational coaches. Teachers were given the opportunity to further collaborate in professional learning sessions under the specific guidance of Galileo.

Ben knows two other humanities teachers who have similar goals and co-ordinates a team planning session. As they brainstorm on a collaborative Google Doc, the five principles of the TEF guide them, including the following:

1. Teachers as designers;
2. Worthwhile work;
3. Assessment practices;

Continued on page 18

"The goal of this ministerial order is to ensure that all students achieve an extensive list of outcomes that will enable them to be contributing members of 21st century society."

—Greg Miller, assistant superintendent of human resources for Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools

"To increase impact, principals should use their time differently. They should direct their energies to developing the group."

—Andrew Hargreaves, the co-founder of the Lynch School of Education, and Michael Fullan, professor emeritus at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Continued from page 17

4. Learning relationships; and

5. Teachers improve their practice with peers.

“The opportunities for teachers to use the TEF as a framework and inform their practice in the company of their peers are many at CRPS. The sustainability of this level of support is the main focus for our next steps,” says Superintendent Chris MacPhee.

Momentum must be maintained by continuing to provide professional learning opportunities as well as release time to teachers to work with their peers. The challenge will be to ensure that collaborative time remains focused and intentional, producing the desired outcomes in professional practice for all educators. Another challenge will be to resist fragmentation by continuing to align practice with the vision of excellence rather than adding more initiatives.

As a celebration of professional learning time and collaboration, teachers have the opportunity to share their growth and learning in the company of their peers at a yearly district-wide symposium. Teachers are given time to share what they have learned throughout the

year and hear about the professional growth of their colleagues. During this celebration, educators can be inspired and engaged in professional growth making lasting connections resulting in them becoming the definition of teacher excellence.

As Ben asks questions to push forward their thinking, the team identifies essential learnings. Together, they create an inquiry unit which evolves into a cross-curricular project that kicks off with a strong hook to engage students. Before suggesting some experts who could parachute in to bring a real world perspective to the task, they create their assessment plan, focusing on Jennifer's goal of responding quickly to learner needs by providing multiple teacher and peer feedback loops during various sub-tasks throughout the project.

Leaving the planning session, they agree to document their learning as the tasks unfold and collect evidence of student learning to bring to the next Galileo workshop, where they will share, discuss and get more feedback according to the five principles of the TEF.

Surrounded by a backdrop of towering peaks and turbulent rivers, educators in the Rocky Mountains are reminded of their swift

flowing journey in the classroom and the peaks they wish to ascend with their students. Students and teachers are shifting their mindsets and moving swiftly towards a future of inspired, engaged, ethical, and entrepreneurial beliefs and behaviours. ■

Since 2001, Myka Breymann-Piekenbrock has worked with special needs students as well as with educators working with students with special needs. Currently, as an LST and learning coach within the CRPS, Breymann-Piekenbrock is able to collaborate with teachers as designers of learning.

After many years teaching French immersion, Darin Larson moved into a variety of leadership roles focused on technology and teacher coaching in Alberta and internationally. After several years abroad, he has returned to live in the Canadian Rockies and is currently a learning coach with CRPS.

**An anecdotal example.*

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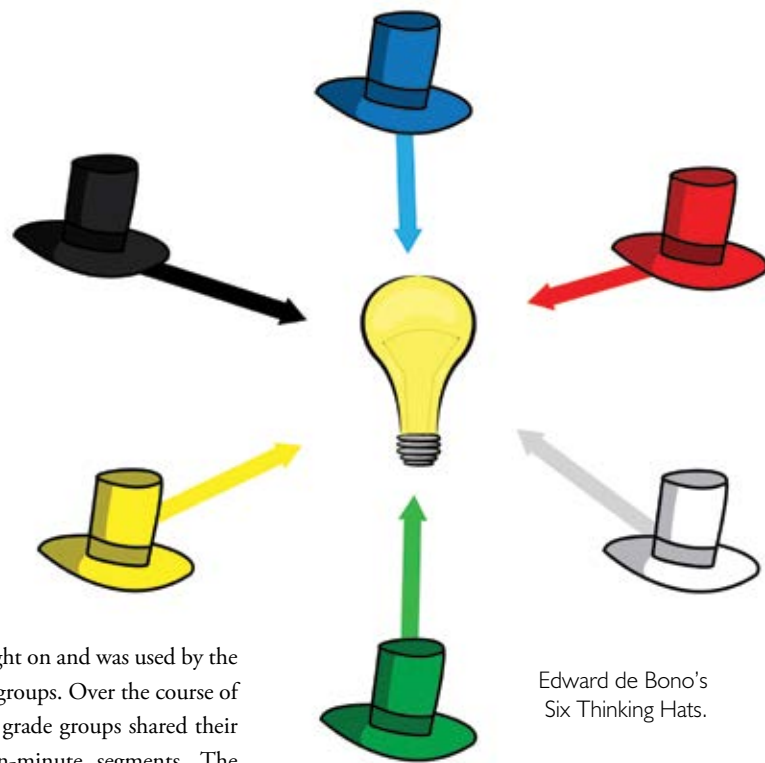
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A School's Learning Journey

By Natosha Mastel and Terry Freeman



Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats.

The Ministerial Order of May 2013 contains 10 “whereas” statements. These statements contain words like learner, competencies, inquiry, reflection, communicate, engagement and excellence in their learning journey. These words help form a vision of what the student of 2030 will look, act and think like. A big question arises, how do we get the students and their parents to that place?

River Heights School School, in Medicine Hat, AB, has a history of innovation, change, engagement and partnerships. What started as a magnet school in 1995 has evolved to a workplace of the Ministerial Order for students, parents, staff and the community. The 10th “whereas” contains a goal to “strive for engagement and personal excellence in their lifelong learning.” Administrators and teachers at River Heights School are doing just that. It all started with the teachers examining where they are in the journey.

Due to the fact that River Heights School had a 20-year history of cross-curricular, thematic connections, the realities of the Ministerial Order of May 2013 did not appear daunting. The challenge for the staff was to align their work and vocabulary with the Order. Principal Natosha Mastel charged the school-based grade PLCs with a simple task: choose a project and cross reference the competencies inherent in the cross-curricular project. The first group to present was the kindergarten teachers.

A poster was chosen as a visual to share the project. Although not mandated, the

poster format caught on and was used by the subsequent grade groups. Over the course of several weeks, the grade groups shared their projects in fifteen-minute segments. The beauty of this approach was that the competencies were kept up front and visited many times over the subsequent weeks.

Each January, the district hosts an Advance for the Administrators and the Board Trustees. The focus for the 2014 meetings was the Ministerial Order. For one activity the group explored and identified school actions that aligned with each of the three Es from the Ministerial Order (engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with entrepreneurial spirit). Ideas were then placed on three different charts. During this process it became evident that these Es were not mutually exclusive. Participants began placing the ideas between the Es. In reality, overlapping Venn Diagrams were evolving.

The next River Heights School staff meeting saw teachers repeat the process. However, this time, the graphic organizer used was a triple Venn Diagram. It soon became evident to the staff that many activities employed at River Heights School aligned perfectly with the three Es. One such example comes from the school's motto: Explore, Create, Reflect.

Reflection, one component of the competency of identifying and applying career and life skills, is used as part of the River Heights School' learning process and is an example of students demonstrating an entrepreneurial spirit. Students reflect on what they have done well within an

activity or project, but also areas in which to improve. The desire and work ethic required to improve their learning takes perseverance as they strive for personal excellence.

To be truly reflective, one must be an engaged thinker and ethical citizen. One strategy for reflection would see students use Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats. The hats would focus the child's thinking and create opportunities for understanding compassion for all people, being able to ask for help and engage with other cultures, religions and languages. Students would do this after exploring multiple perspectives and working as a team member.

At the next scheduled school council meeting, the Grade 1 PLC shared their cross-curricular project competency poster. This sharing reaffirmed in the minds of the parent community that the goals of *Inspiring Education* and the Ministerial Order were well aligned with the current practice of the school. Knowing that not every parent attended council meetings, an attempt was made to reach out to the larger parent community. The hallway became festooned with competency posters grade level projects. These became magnets for discussion.

Recognition occurred that the current school newsletter did not reflect the learning that took place at River Heights School.

Due to the fact that River Heights School had a 20-year history of cross-curricular, thematic connections, the realities of the Ministerial Order of May 2013 did not appear daunting.

The three Es became the format of the communication. Each month either of two approaches was used to share. A project could be featured and the relevant competencies were identified, or a focus on a particular competency could be highlighted and evidence of it within the school was then communicated.

A Grade 2 project with iPads became a tool for sharing with the parent community. The newsletter contained images of the students engaged in the challenge. The newsletter shared that managing information and collaboration were just two of the competencies used in the project. At other times, the newsletter focused on a particular competency and images of it were evidenced in articles.

Knowing how to learn was the focus of the December newsletter. As one of the indicators, reflection was highlighted.

Being part of the mandate of the school, examples were shared.

As River Heights School moves forward, the school faces many challenges. One of those challenges is to keep the journey pertinent for students, parents and staff. The school's independence checklist needs to be aligned with the vocabulary of the Ministerial Order. Student learning portfolios are being constructed in order for students to demonstrate mastery of the competencies.

The annual Education Week is being planned around an activity for each of the competencies and the three Es. A staff reflection provided assurance as to where River Heights School is headed in regards to *Inspiring Education*, the Ministerial Order and the school's continuing learning journey. The future looks inspiring for River Heights School. ■



River Heights School's Grade 2 competency poster.

Natosha Mastel and Terry Freeman started their educational journey together in 1986, when Freeman was Mastel's Grade 5 teacher.

Freeman is the director of programs and instruction in Medicine Hat School District #76.

Mastel is the principal at River Heights School, a kindergarten to Grade 6 school, in Medicine Hat, AB.



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Travelling Along RTI's Principle-Based Route at STAR Catholic Schools

"I can't help thinking of the Venetian Republic in their last half century. Like us, they had once been fabulously lucky. They had become rich, as we did, by accident. They had acquired immense political skill, just as we have... They knew, just as clearly as we know, that the current of history had begun to flow against them. Many of them gave their minds to working out ways to keep going. It would have meant breaking the pattern into which they had crystallized. They were fond of the pattern, just as we are fond of ours. They never found the will to break it." — C.P. Snow

By Dr. Troy A. Davies

The mighty 1,000-year-old Republic of Venice breathed its last breath in the late 18th century in part because of its inability and reluctance to change, reaffirming the Darwinian-inspired notion that it is not necessarily the strongest or most intelligent organizations that survive, but those that are most responsive to adapting to their ever-changing environment and circumstances.

In a similar way, our globalized 21st century context is compelling western systems of education, including Alberta's, to adapt. An education system that places its primary focus on schooling, instead of learning; on operational and bureaucratic structures, instead of students; and on content instead of competencies, no longer provides adequate preparation for the world youngsters will be inheriting.

Systemic change is the "single greatest challenge" facing organizations today, including those in education.¹ While the work of enacting deep educational change can be extremely difficult and demanding, it is made easier if directed by a vision that articulates a desired future. In Alberta, this vision is furnished by the 2013 *Ministerial Order on Student Learning*.

While articulating a common provincial vision, it is inevitable that how the Ministerial Order gets actualized will have



STAR Catholic School Division staff discussing the Response to Intervention (RTI) model.

many iterations as each jurisdiction takes up the document in their own unique and nuanced way.

From the Ministerial Order toward RTI

At STAR Catholic School Division, it was discerned that the best route we could take for realizing the Ministerial Order was to make a steadfast and comprehensive commitment to a Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Successful implementation of a reform agenda built around an RTI framework required a parallel emphasis being placed on both structural and cultural change within our school division.

We know from Fullan² that structural transformations, when not done in tandem with changing practices, attitudes, beliefs and values, lead to little meaningful change. Cutting across structural and cultural changes have been four foundational principles. These principles, articulated by Buffum, Mattos and Webber,³ are known as the "Four Cs" of RTI and they have served as essential guiding lights directing our path: collective responsibility, concentrated instruction, convergent assessment and certain access.

Principle 1: Collective Responsibility

The basic purpose of RTI is to ensure all students get the time and support they need in

order to learn at high levels. This cannot happen unless there is a commonly held belief that all students can indeed learn at high levels. Holding such a belief, it then becomes the responsibility of every adult to do whatever they can to make student learning for all happen—the very purpose of schooling.

To this end, STAR Catholic teachers work interdependently in small professional learning communities (PLCs) in which the discussion is not about the learning of “my” kids or “your” kids, but rather one of “our kids.”

Indeed PLCs, which breakdown classroom silos, are the very engines that propel the rest of the RTI framework forward.

Principle 2: Concentrated Instruction

With a commitment to collective responsibility for student learning in place, staff then turn their attention to methodically identifying what is essential for students to learn in order to be successful. As part of its efforts in this regard, STAR Catholic brought together all teachers at each elementary grade level to dig deep into the program of studies with the aim of organizing and prioritizing essential learning outcomes.

The level of professional conversation that emerged from this exercise of working intimately with one’s curriculum alongside other grade level partners from across the division was truly inspiring.

The process is now being replicated for our secondary teachers. Back at the school site, within PLCs, teachers are able to determine the particular learning needs of specific students relative to these agreed-to outcomes and develop intentional instructional strategies for meeting these needs.

Principle 3: Convergent Assessment

Keeping to an RTI framework implies a commitment to ongoing monitoring of student progress towards achieving the identified outcomes. Skilled use of student assessment data helps teams of teachers know where their students are at, where they need to go next and what might be the most effective pedagogical path to get there.

This laser-like focus on analyzing assessment data is borne of the belief that what matters most is what students have learned, not what teachers have taught. This principle is embodied

in STAR Catholic’s use of the DIBELS reading assessment with its early learners.

DIBELS is used as a screen to establish a benchmark on each child’s ability early in the school year. In turn, ongoing progress monitoring reports generated throughout the balance of the year yield valuable data that is used to determine which targeted interventions are working and which ought to be abandoned or adjusted.

Principle 4: Certain Access

At STAR Catholic Schools, we express our various tiers of increasingly targeted and intensive interventions through the image of a pyramid. The broad base of the pyramid denotes solid core instruction intended for all learners. Narrower subsequent tiers indicate supplemental interventions required only by identified students, while the apex of the pyramid signals the most intensive student supports required by only select students.

The pyramid’s potency is entirely contingent upon a rock-solid guarantee that students will have certain access to the extra time and support, symbolized by the pyramid’s various tiers, when they need it.

If access to interventions is arbitrary, unsystematic and haphazard then RTI is a merely a whimsical fiction. An openness to experimentation with timetables, innovative staff deployment practices and an invigorating attitude of inventiveness have all been critical to STAR Catholic’s success

in safeguarding student access to needed supports.

Conclusion

Our travels along this principles-based route are hardly complete, nor will they ever be. In the end, RTI is not just a set of structures to be implemented; it is a set of principles to be lived. Our road has not been a straight trajectory; it has been circuitous, at times bumpy, and we’ve even slid into the ditch and gotten lost on occasion. It has not been easy but the student success we have found along the way has made it all worthwhile. ■

Troy A. Davies is the Superintendent of St. Thomas Aquinas Roman (STAR) Catholic School Division which serves 3,500 students in central Alberta. He is provincially accredited as a Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP).

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The CAP Framework in High Prairie School Division: Making a Difference

“Through exemplary teaching, leadership, and collaborative partnerships, we prepare students to be socially responsible and to succeed locally and globally.”

—High Prairie School Division Mission Statement

By Michelle Berggren,
Robyn Ord-Boisvert &
Evan Dearden

As for many school jurisdictions in Alberta, the mission statement for High Prairie School Division (HPSD) in northern Alberta sets the stage for implementing Alberta’s *Ministerial Order on Student Learning*. However, HPSD’s unique new homegrown Curriculum, Assessment and Pyramid of Intervention (CAP) Framework, is ramping up strategic implementation of the Ministerial Order competencies.

By adopting a new approach to instructional leadership, HPSD’s CAP Framework is the HPSD vehicle to systematically infuse the Ministerial Order into classrooms.

Supported by CASS’ Moving and Improving initiative in 2012-13, HPSD accepted the challenge to re-think its instructional leadership model. Executive leadership, principals, vice-principals and jurisdictional coaches engaged in strategic planning to identify and address the jurisdiction’s instructional needs. Out of this, HPSD’s CAP Framework was born. Significant resources were directed toward intensive and sustained implementation of professional development (PD) opportunities for school-based leadership coupled with a dedicated system-wide focus on improving instructional outcomes.

Through CAP, all HPSD vice-principals are engaging in collaborative, continual and consistent professional development to enable them to assume the critically important role of instructional leader in their schools. Flexible scheduling enables vice-principals to attend bi-weekly CAP professional development sessions

Training

Knowledge, competencies
professional development
teaching of vocational or practical skills provides the b
• On-the-job training takes
• Off-the-job training aw

led by two internally seconded CAP facilitators. Some might wonder why vice-principals are selected to be the target group in CAP. Why not principals? After all, is it not correct to say the principal should be the instructional leader? Their simple response in HPSD is, yes, in a perfect world, principals *should* be that person.

The truth is, however, that the educational landscape is changing. And, in spite of their best intentions, principals are just not as accessible on a daily basis to classroom teachers as they would like. It may seem to be a radical shift to some, however in HPSD, it just makes sense.

With that said, their principals do remain very much involved as instructional leaders as they co-lead the instructional program in their schools, collaborate with the CAP facilitators, assist with setting the direction for future CAP PD sessions and support all aspects of CAP at their respective schools.

Principals play an integral role in the overarching CAP message, “Developing and

enhancing instructional leadership to support 100 per cent of our teachers to provide quality instruction to 100 per cent of our students.”

The HPSD CAP Framework is designed to intentionally focus on key instructional leadership components enabling vice-principals to spend time immersed in the Ministerial Order document and bridge it to current quality instructional practices taking place in HPSD classrooms.

The components of CAP (curriculum, assessment and pyramid of intervention) spiral and connect back to one another to provide a cyclical structure to the CAP process. As well as collaboratively exploring ideas among colleagues and CAP facilitators, vice-principals return to their schools to support and lead school-based staff growth and development opportunities and engage in strategic conversations with individual teachers.

This leadership initiative, therefore, supports not only the local board’s mission statement and the province’s Ministerial Order,

it also assists the HPSD human resources department by helping to build high-quality instructional leadership capacity among existing staff.

At each CAP PD session, CAP facilitators intentionally model and discuss elements of quality teaching in keeping with the Ministerial Order. CAP facilitators support the vice-principals in embodying the competencies expressed in the Ministerial Order: knowing how to learn, thinking critically, exploring complex problems, using information, innovating, creating opportunities, applying multiple literacies, communicating, demonstrating global and cultural understanding, and applying career and life skills.

The range of conversations and camaraderie expressed in these sessions solidify the common language and understanding necessary to move each school forward. This emphasis on quality teaching gives HPSD staff and students a clear path for quality learning.

As vice-principals leave each CAP PD session, they are tasked by the CAP facilitators to survey their teachers through the lens of the topics covered, to contextualize the next right step and to make connections to build bridges of understanding.

In order to gain an understanding of the needs of their schools, each vice-principal conducts daily walk-throughs and observations in their teachers' classrooms.

By spending time in teachers' classrooms, vice-principals are better able to see what opportunities there are for celebration as well as identify where they need to explore further to enhance student learning.

Only in its second year of implementation in HPSD, CAP is already evolving as

learning support teachers are now included in the framework.

The addition of this influential group of teachers is a natural next step because of their ability to support the work of the vice-principals, by filtering information through an inclusion lens. The areas that this group explores are similar to those of our vice-principals; however, they focus specifically on universal strategies to build teacher capacity. The addition of the learning support teachers to this process further strengthens the development of a common language and understanding in each school around the key aspects of quality teaching and the Ministerial Order.

The CAP Framework includes areas such as technology and new teacher mentorship as we believe that a strong team approach is necessary in moving the division forward. As HPSD strives to develop 21st century learners well versed in technology, it has chosen to pilot the new Alberta Learning Technology Policy Framework and to position it under the CAP banner.

Accordingly, vice-principals and de facto its teachers are further supported in making technology implementation a key component of quality instruction, per the Ministerial Order. Further, HPSD's acclaimed New Teacher Mentor program is gradually being folded into the CAP Framework so that ultimately our vice-principals will be strong members of the new teacher support team. CAP is also well positioned to evolve further such as with the launch of revised provincial curricula.

HPSD's CAP Framework is an organic attempt to meet board level goals and *The Alberta Ministerial Order on Student Learning*.

Only in its second year of implementation in

Continued on page 26

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Continued from page 25

HPSD, the CAP Framework is making a real difference in this jurisdiction. Vice-principals—in collaboration with other school and system administrators—are truly becoming the instructional leaders who support 100 per cent of our teachers to provide quality instruction to 100 per cent of our students. And, ultimately, students are supported in becoming engaged 21st century learners. ■

Michelle Berggren has been an educator for nine years. Her experience as a classroom teacher, special education coordinator, and inclusive education coach serve her well in her current role as High Prairie School Division #48 CAP facilitator.

Robyn Ord-Boisvert has been an educator for 30+ years. Her experience as a classroom teacher, lead learner and school principal serve her well in her current role as High Prairie School Division #48 CAP facilitator.

Evan Dearden has a broad range of teaching experiences in Alberta, Africa and Europe, and also has administrative experiences. Currently, Dearden is the assistant superintendent of curriculum with High Prairie School Division.

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By Jennifer Carson, BBA

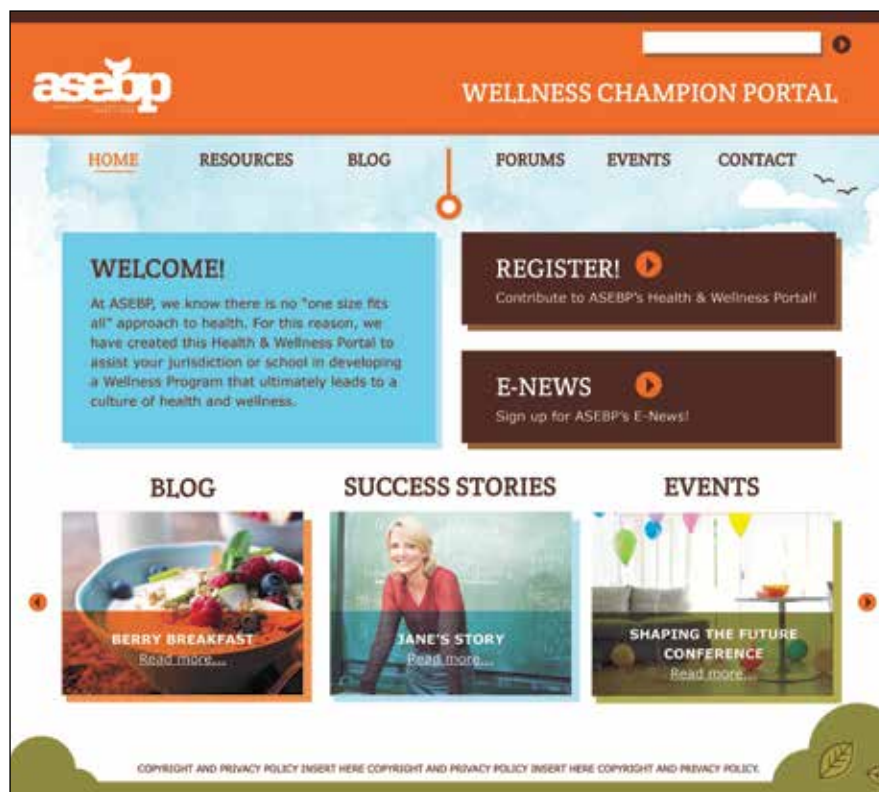
“Eighty percent of all psychiatric disorders emerge in adolescence, and are the single most common illness that onset in the adolescent age group. Unfortunately, only one in five Canadian children who need mental health services currently receives them.”¹

The overall success of students across Alberta begins with good health, and that translates to good health for all involved in the public education sector—trustees, leaders, employees and students.

In addition to ASEBP's general health benefits, ASEBP is offering a new Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) to eligible ASEBP covered members and their dependants, at no cost to the school jurisdictions. Administration of the program at ASEBP decreases the administration burden at the school jurisdiction. In addition, ASEBP has secured an attractive EFAP rate for all other employees not with ASEBP, for those school jurisdictions enrolled in at least one plan with us.

The EFAP program was rolled out on January 1, 2015, with almost 30,000 covered


Continued on page 28



ASEBP's online Wellness Champion Portal. CASS representatives who self-identified as Wellness Champions from each zone have agreed to lend their support to the portal during the development phase.

About Antidepressants

- Fifth top therapeutic drug category (by claim count) used by adolescent dependants (29,000 between the ages of six and 18);
- No. 1 drug category in claim volume and dollars spent for ASEBP members;
- One in five members makes a claim for antidepressants; and
- One-third of disability claimants' primary diagnosis is for mental and emotional health disorders.



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Continued from page 27

members from over 40 school jurisdictions and employer groups enrolled for day one. And interest continues to grow.

So why did we chose to do this now, and how are we helping support both the health of the members and their families, and the financial health of the benefit plan?

It all began a few years ago from a discussion with a school jurisdiction leader collaborating with ASEBP in a Healthy Living Program (HLP). We were asked if we had ever considered offering a plan-wide EFAP. To date, we had not seriously explored the opportunity, but took up the challenge to support the jurisdiction. And so the EFAP pilot began.

We explored several EFAP providers and selected Occupational Health Inc. (OHI, sold to Homewood Health in 2014), a Canadian solution which had a very strong reputation. Indeed, OHI was ASEBP's provider for both the HLP's health risk assessments and Apple-a-Day drug library.

ASEBP employees were soon added to the pilot. Next came school jurisdictions that had suffered from natural disasters, knowing their employees needed support and counselling in their most challenging time.

The pilot grew unexpectedly, and soon there were thousands of members able to receive services. Results from aggregate reporting from OHI demonstrated double-digit uptake, a dream result for any EFAP provider as that demonstrates confidence in the services and confidentiality of the program. Deemed a success, the ASEBP trustees approved the plan design to offer the EFAP to all interested groups and was prepared to pay the EFAP fee for members (in the pilot, school jurisdictions were responsible to pay).

So, why was this approach taken? With an extremely competitive fee negotiated (due to the mass numbers), we knew this would lighten the financial burden for school jurisdictions and determined if just three disability claims were avoided in a year, the program more than paid for itself.

Homewood Health is one of only 11 accredited bodies in North America by the Employee Assistance Trade Association (EASNA). They are a trusted Canadian company specializing in providing employee assistance and workplace solutions and have operated



ASEBP is offering a new Employee and Family Assistance Program, in partnership with Homewood Health.

for over 30 years. Their more than 550 Alberta-based employees and consultants are located throughout the entire province. They are specially selected for their training, expertise and experience, with the minimum requirement being five years' experience for licensed professionals in psychology or social work.

The Homewood Health EFAP provides covered members and dependants with services that include the following:

- **Short-term counselling** on a wide range of topics including marital and family issues, anxiety, depression and many others. Counselling can be conducted face-to-face, over the phone or via e-counselling;
- **Life balance solutions** offer new parent,

childcare and elder care support, as well as financial and legal counselling;

- **Health and career smart coaching services** provide advice and assistance on topics including nutrition, physical fitness, smoking cessation, career counselling, pre-retirement planning and more; and
- **E-learning courses** are also available on Homewood Health's website on a variety of topics including respect in the workplace, embracing workplace change, resolving conflict and many others.

Accessing services is completely confidential, and ASEBP will only receive aggregate reporting on general participation and key themes for services provided. These reports can be shared with employer groups over 300 members (to ensure total confidentiality), as well as plan reporting of the entire group.

For more information about the EFAP, visit Homewood Health's website at www.homewoodhealth.com. If you are already enrolled in the EFAP, you can start exploring valuable online resources by registering for an account on their website or access services by contacting Homewood Health at 1-800-663-1142.

In addition to the EFAP, stay tuned for the roll-out of our multi-year *Mental Health and Wellness Strategy*, starting this year. We are also pleased to announce that ASEBP's Wellness Champion Portal will be coming mid-2015. The portal will provide additional health and wellness strategies, supports, resources and opportunities for Alberta's public education sector. CASS has played an integral role in the portal development and for that, we are grateful. ■

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, Carson 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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1. Leitch, Kellie. "Reaching for the Top: A Report by the Advisor on Healthy Children & Youth." Health Canada. 2007.

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Academy of Learning College 14

ARCHITECTS
The Workun Garrick Partnership, Architecture and Interior Design Inc. 15

ASSESSMENT TOOLS FOR TEACHERS
Alberta Assessment Consortium 23

ATTORNEY
Brownlee LLP 29

CONFERENCE SERVICES
DoubleTree by Hilton West Edmonton 30

DISTANCE LEARNING
Alberta's Distance Learning Centre 3

EDUCATIONAL CHANGE
Partners4EducationalChange 25

EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING
Solution Tree 8

EDUCATIONAL SOFTWARE
Petra's Planet for Schools 29

ERGONOMIC PRODUCTS AND FITNESS PRODUCTS
Fitter International Inc. 18

FENCING SYSTEMS
Innova Fences 21

FERTILIZER
Turffix 10

FUNDRAISING
Sunrise Berry Farms 29

FURNITURE
Moen Woodworks 29

GRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAMS
University of Alberta, Faculty of Education Media 6

HAIR DESIGN SCHOOL
LA School of Hair Design 28

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CLASSROOM RESOURCES
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Rescue the Students IBC

JANITORIAL SUPPLIES
Royal Caretaking Supplies Inc. 14

JASPER ACTIVITY, FITNESS AND AQUATIC CENTRE
Municipality of Jasper Culture and Recreation Department 26

LEARNING RESOURCES
3P Learning 21

MUSEUM
Leduc #1 Energy Discovery Centre 28

MUSIC INSTRUMENTS
St. John's Music 25

NOISE CONTROL, SOUNDPROOFING
Acoustic Solutions, Inc. 21

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT
FranklinCovey IFC

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION
Grande Prairie Regional College 19

ROOFING ASSOCIATION
Alberta Roofing Contractors Association 15

SCHOOL EMPLOYEE BENEFIT PLAN
Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan 19

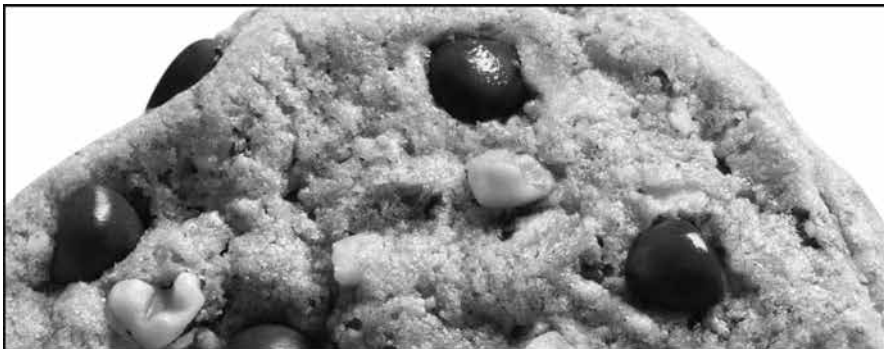
SLAB LIFTING
Ener-Spray Systems Inc. 19

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION ROUTING SOFTWARE
Transfinder Corporation 26

TUTORING FRANCHISES
KUMON Canada 13

UNDERGRAD AND POSIGUARD PROGRAMS
University of Calgary - Werklund School of Education 4

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