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The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents

Spring 2017



Leadership Learning: Promising Practices for Inclusive Education, Part 2



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Alberta School Superintendents
Spring 2017

Published for:
**The College of Alberta School
Superintendents**
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Edmonton AB T5K 2J8
Phone: (780) 451-7126
Fax: (780) 482-5659
admin@cass.ab.ca
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Published by:
Matrix Group Publishing Inc.
Return Undeliverable Addresses to:
309 Youville Street
Winnipeg, MB R2H 2S9
Toll free Phone: (866) 999-1299
Toll free Fax: (866) 244-2544
www.matrixgroupinc.net
**Publications Agreement
Number 40609661**

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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... LEADERSHIP LEARNING: PROMISING PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, PART 2

Features:

- 13** Windows to the World: Embracing Diverse Texts in Schools and Public Libraries
- 15** Building a Sense of Belonging: Honouring Cultural Wisdom to Build Solidarity in Our School Communities
- 18** Learning for All: A Community of Practice for Jurisdictional Leaders
- 21** An Assessment for Student Success
- 23** Inclusion through Personalized Programming
- 26** TRIBES: A Journey to Inclusion

Department:

- 28** ASEBP's Healthy People, Healthy Workplace:
Leading the Way to Workplace Health

30 Buyer's Guide



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Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable David Eggen

It is important that every child and student in Alberta receives a high-quality education that prepares them for success. We know that good jobs begin with a good education and that the skills and tools students gain in the classroom will allow them to carry on and be positive role models in their own communities.

The goal of inclusive education is to ensure that every student is being set up for success—no matter their ability, language, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. When we are inclusive, we embrace the diversity and differences among students.

We know teachers are one of the most valuable supports a student can have. That is why Alberta Education supports teacher professional development through funding to the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (ARPD). The consortia offer a variety of professional development opportunities on topics such as inclusive education, differentiated instruction, early learning and assessment (see the sidebar on this page).

Inclusive education can be achieved when all areas of the education system work together toward a shared goal. That is why Alberta Education has been engaging in discussions with our education partners for feedback on how to improve the inclusive education system.

Alberta Education leads an Advisory Committee for Building an Inclusive Education System, where we discuss how we can continue to improve inclusive education throughout Alberta.

We have a great deal of work to do in this area but some progress has been made. We are currently developing competencies

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needed by teachers and leaders to build inclusive learning environments.

In June 2016, I also announced a new approach to developing curriculum that will be done simultaneously in six subject areas: Arts, Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Sciences and Wellness. The future curriculum will provide learning opportunities that are equitable, inclusive and accessible to all Alberta students. We will continue to engage with education partners as our work on curriculum moves forward.

In addition to working with partners within the education system, Alberta Education collaborates with other ministries across government on areas related to inclusive education. This includes early learning and care programs; Regional Collaborative Service Delivery; mental health supports; and welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments.

We are actively considering how best to review and further develop these programs to ensure that as much money as possible is flowing into our classrooms to benefit students. I am keen to hear any ideas you have for improving inclusion in our schools. You are welcome to write me or contact Alberta Education at anytime.

We will rely on CASS and our other education partners as we continue to work in this important area. Together, we will ensure that each and every Albertan student is supported in their learning. ■

Online Tools to Support Inclusive Education

The Alberta Education website (education.alberta.ca) also offers online tools and resources to support school authorities in meeting the diverse learning needs of students. These include:

- The Inclusive Education Library and an inclusive education video series;
- The Walk Around Tool for teachers and school leaders;
- A whole-school approach to support inclusion;
- Resources to support positive mental health; and
- Evidence-informed strategies to assist educators in creating welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments. These strategies include mentoring, trauma-informed practices, peer support networks and restorative practices.

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Message from the President

Colleen Symyrozum-Watt | College of Alberta School Superintendents

“How do we ensure ALL students are included, engaged and succeed?”

Few questions in education are more pressing than this. Following up on the Fall 2016 *CASS Connection* magazine, this edition showcases more made-in Alberta answers to this question. These promising practices for inclusive education represent our collaborative work and speak to our deepening learning.

These stories celebrate what is possible in classrooms, school communities and school systems when learning for leaders, teachers and students is transformed.

Advice from our colleagues

Our colleagues tell us that to achieve our goal we need talented personnel and committed leaders; we need to leverage learning resources and supports; we need to learn together; we must listen to and learn about diverse learning experiences; we must involve parents, students, staff and our community; we must establish communities of practice; and we must adopt inclusive assessment practices.

How do we approach this challenge?

Do we need to think inside out? Backwards? Bottom up? Do we need to think big? Small? Sally Helgesen, author, speaker and consultant, encourages us to, “practice tolerance at

the margins”—to find fresh sources of energy, inspiration and commitment. Having tolerance at the margins gives us the ability to align people with different values, perceptions and life experience around the pursuit of a common goal.

I would suggest that we need to think very big...and very small. As leaders, we must take time to work with our staff to reflect and to develop tolerance at the margins so that we can be beacons of resiliency, hope and courage in our schools. As leaders, we are called on to simultaneously paint the picture of the change we seek and to walk beside—if not in front of—our staff, clearing the path for them.

At CASS Zone and provincial events, I hear leaders sharing and searching for ways to define the margins, and I see leaders bridging and connecting the margins of jurisdiction work and research to strengthen our findings and future.

Your CASS Board of Directors is committed to supporting the work of system leaders at the margins and everywhere in between. Collectively, you told us to focus on two goals in our 2016-2019 strategic plan:

1. Effective advocacy in promoting success for all students; and
2. Leadership capacity is built and supported.

A commitment to embracing diversity and learner differences is woven into our work.

According to Daniel Sobel, the founder of the UK's Inclusion Expert, “our weapon of choice should be the metaphorical laser, not the shotgun.” We are committed to supporting and promoting the work of system leaders so that they are able to create equal opportunities for ALL learners. We know that this work is complex, as complex as each of the students who walk through our doors. Sobel urges us to use soft data and individualized responses because, “there is always something personal behind the wall of numbers.”

Leaders know that our students' best hope is grounded in our ability to create learning environments where ALL kids succeed. The power and potential will be unleashed by our ability to develop shared meaning, capacity and a commitment to action.

As Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn remind us in their book *Coherence*, we must adopt a mindset for action. To do this we must shift from overload and fragmentation to focus and coherence.

I am confident we have the leaders we need to create the right drivers for action to optimize learning for all students.

Congratulations on making our schools leaders in inclusion and engagement to support success for Alberta students! ■

CASS Board of Directors

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Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

In the previous edition of *The CASS Connection*, I shared two personal experiences, one from my childhood and one from my early years as an educator, that shaped my understanding of Inclusive Education, the theme that was identified by the CASS Board of Directors for both editions of this publication for 2016/17. In this message, I want to share my observations about the journey most people have taken in becoming a system leader for a school jurisdiction, and attempt to relate those journeys to the theme of this issue of the magazine.

I expect that if the following was asked of a room full of CASS members—"put

up your hand if you felt that you would be a system leader when you entered a B. Ed program or when you began teaching,"—there would be very few hands, if any, that would be raised.

If the same question was asked, substituting "principal" or "vice principal" for "system leader," I believe that a few hands would be raised, but likely only a small number.

The path to becoming a school or system leader is not one that is often contemplated at the outset of a career as an educator; more often the path evolves after the person has been teaching for some time. The impetus to consider positions in administration may come from a supervisor, encouraging a

teacher to consider such opportunities, or it may develop from within. The decision to pursue a school leadership or system leadership position is, however, virtually always based on a belief that such positions provide for opportunity to have a wider influence and the ability to make a positive difference for a greater number of students.

This motivation is congruent with the reason that virtually every educator enrolls in an Education faculty in the first place, wanting to have a positive impact upon the ability of young people to reach his or her potential. That desire inevitably leads to the question every teacher considering a position in administration must answer;

SECOND ANNUAL FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS & INUIT EDUCATION GATHERING April 26 (evening) to April 28, 2017 | Fantasyland Hotel, Edmonton

This will be the second annual gathering that will bring together all the education partners in Alberta. The target audience represents the diverse planning committee and includes system leaders and trustees from the public, separate, Francophone, charter, First Nations and Métis education authorities, school leaders, teachers, parents, as well as staff from the Government of Alberta. Additionally, elders and community leaders from the First Nations, Métis and Inuit community will be invited and encouraged to attend, as will representatives from advanced education, business and industry.

This is a gathering at which there will be an interchange of ideas. The planning committee is committed to providing an opportunity to learn from each other and develop action orientated plans moving forward to support learning by First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in our province. We hope that this gathering will result in increased understanding, cooperation and trust.

The continuing theme of this *Gathering is Listening, Understanding and Moving Forward Together*. Besides the many Alberta presenters that will provide thought-provoking breakout sessions we are pleased to present four notable keynote speakers:

- Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada will speak during the Wednesday evening program (April 26).
- The Right Honourable Paul Martin, founder of the Martin Family Initiative, will speak Thursday morning (April 27) and will also participate in a moderated Q&A session.
- The Right Honourable Joe Clark, a Director with Canadians for a New Partnership, will speak at the Thursday evening banquet.
- Charlene Bearhead, Education Lead at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, will speak Friday morning (April 28).

Please join us for this exciting event! System leaders, school leaders, teachers, post-secondary instructors, parents and elders are invited and encouraged to attend.

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The decision to pursue a school leadership or system leadership position is virtually always based on a belief that such positions provide for opportunity to have a wider influence and the ability to make a positive difference for a greater number of students.




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will being removed from direct day to day contact with a large number of students, either one level as a school leader or two levels as a system leader, dampen the reason that one became a teacher in the first place?

Alberta's education system is fortunate that many outstanding educators have, and will answer that question positively. I believe that a deep understanding of the responsibilities of, and the opportunities afforded, positions of school and system leadership is the reason Alberta is blessed to have so many dedicated individuals providing leadership in our schools and school jurisdictions. That leadership will be highlighted in the articles in this publication of *The CASS Connection*. The stories shared will provide insight into the commitment by teachers, and by school and system leaders, ensuring those students who are:

- Least advantaged;
- Least able to speak up for themselves; and
- Least able to defend themselves against biases and prejudices,

are provided the opportunities to succeed that is the inherent right of every student in a publicly funded education system within a truly democratic society.

Goal number one of the CASS 2016 – 2019 Strategic Plan is, "Effective advocacy in promoting success for all students." An identified strategy for achieving this goal is to "Advocate that all students in Alberta have access to quality education programs." The efforts of CASS members highlighted in this magazine provide evidence that the Strategic Plan is indeed a "living document."

Thank you to all the writers who have contributed to this edition of *The CASS Connection*. Your stories demonstrate how Inclusive Education can, and is successfully supporting all students.

Finally, on behalf of all CASS members, I extend sincere appreciation to the sponsors that advertise in *The CASS Connection*. Your support enables us to publish the magazine, which is shared with all education partners in the province as well as all the parallel organizations of system leaders across Canada. ■

Windows to the World: Embracing Diverse Texts in Schools and Public Libraries

By Divya Devender-Kraft,
Rachel MacDonald, Heather
McKay, and Karen Pegler,
Calgary Board of Education

Education is freedom.

– Paulo Freire

At the heart of human existence is a deep desire to tell and share stories. Stories strengthen and sustain, allowing us to experience life vicariously through characters and worlds that may be far removed from our own existence. Through stories, we learn to empathize, critique, and understand ourselves and others. Stories give voice to the human experience and allow us to find our own voice among the narratives.

As educators, we have a responsibility to ensure that students in our classes are provided with opportunities to experience diversity through texts. Rich and diverse texts provide mirrors into self-understanding and windows to build empathy and background knowledge of the world for readers. When students' educational landscapes are filled with multiple narratives they are able to use texts as mirrors to learn more about themselves, and as windows to learn more about the world. While "children from dominant social groups have always found mirrors in books..." (Cunningham, 2015), we know that not all students have this same experience; some students do not find mirrors in books. Stories teach us about the world, our values and the universal themes of human existence. What might happen, we wondered, when we offer stories that act as both windows and mirrors for all students?



Windows to the world

With this question in mind, the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) and the Calgary Public Library (CPL) acted upon their shared passion and commitment to nurture the love of reading in children and youth. CBE and CPL designed *Windows to the World*, two evenings framed by panel discussions, to gather as a community to explore the power of stories and delve deeply into the importance of offering diverse texts.

These evenings connected educators, students, librarians and community members around the idea of offering diverse texts towards building inclusive learning environments. Each event began with panel discussions followed by opportunities for small group conversations. The panelists shared their own stories about particular texts that had impacted and shaped their lives. One panel member offered "once you can find yourself in print, you feel empowered. You are able to create your own story." Through the sharing of individual stories and resources, we were all reminded that the right book at the right time, provides hope and builds empathy. Diverse texts support students to

construct their personal identities as readers, writers and community members.

Conversations among participants led to inspiring examples of stories that provided mirrors and windows for each of us. The conversations were supported by book displays that both reflected and expanded how we might include today's students within our literature choices. Students, teachers and librarians picked up favourite reads, spoke about passages that had impacted their lives and began to suggest next reads to each other. Talking about texts led to the emergence of resource lists and new connections with each other.

Together, we examined the means and ways to support all of our students to find themselves in story. Through table discussions we came to understand that "we all have stories to tell, and when asked the right questions we may be brave enough to share them with the world" (Cunningham, 2015, p. 21). We determined as teachers that we need to offer our students diverse stories and ask questions that make their own stories visible. Participants who attended *Windows to the World* reported leaving with a renewed

commitment to offering diverse texts not as an end but as the beginning of welcoming all learners and their experiences.

What we learned

Building a community dedicated to inclusivity through elevating diverse texts and their place in our schools was important to both CBE and the Calgary Public Library. Together, we have committed to ensuring our learners have access to texts in which they see themselves reflected and through which they can discover the world. Together, the CBE and the CPL are committed to creating/offering curated book lists and sharing online spaces, which allow for the continued exploration of diverse texts. We hope that children and youth will be able to find and tell their stories as they progress through their schooling and beyond.

Intentional actions—such as choosing diverse books for new CBE school collections, selecting books for classroom libraries that provide many mirrors and windows for our students and talking to students about the books they love—were all affirmed through *Windows to the World*. However,

we understand that *Windows to the World* is just the beginning of fully realizing the opportunities and responsibilities in this work.

Next steps

The work continues. Following *Windows to the World*, teachers shared that they were committed to becoming even more intentional about considering who their learners are when choosing texts. When we choose texts intentionally as part of inclusive learning environments, we are telling our students that their stories matter in our classrooms and in the world. Participants from *Windows to the World* shared that they were inspired to identify stories that lift children out of the margins and into the narrative of the world.

What has surfaced from the many pages and stories explored in *Windows to the World* is an ongoing commitment to explore ideas. We have been left with a number of questions. What are the diverse texts that offer mirrors and windows for our students to find their voices in the world? How do we deepen our commitment to creating

inclusive learning environments through offering diverse texts?

We will continue to explore these topics through a second *Windows to the World* series where we will examine how readers and texts together can restory the world and broaden who and what we see within each text. ■

Divya Devender-Kraft, Rachel MacDonald, Heather McKay, and Karen Pegler are Specialists in Learning with the Calgary Board of Education.

For a more detailed accounting of the *Windows to the World* events we invite you to read the Storify from the evenings: <https://storify.com/HeatherMMcKay/windows-to-the-world>.

Reference

Cunningham, K. E. (2015). *Story: still the heart of literacy learning*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

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Building a Sense of Belonging:

Honouring Cultural Wisdom to Build Solidarity in Our School Communities

By Ryan Ledene, with assistance from Tracy Meneen, and Valerie Norman-Organ, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools



"Can I be Blackfoot!"

"Today, I want to be Cree!"

"Can somebody be Inuit, Mrs. Norman?"

As I walked with our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Support Team Lead Teacher down the hallway to the Grade 3 classroom, these were the enthusiastic salutations offered by the students who recognized my central office colleague as she returned to their class for another visit. Having not been there on previous visits, I was surprised by the comments being made by a class of non-Aboriginal students.

This was a far cry from the attitudes of many of my peers at a similar age. The only thing considered worse than having to play the role of "Indian" in a game of "Cowboys and Indians," was getting picked last for a game of

TOP LEFT: Students and staff gather in solidarity for Orange Shirt Day to acknowledge that "every child matters."

BOTTOM LEFT: A sombre staff step into the roles of Indigenous people during a blanket exercise, as part of a professional development session.

RIGHT: Grade 7 students celebrate Mass at Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples in Edmonton.

shiny on the outdoor rink. How could negative stereotypes have changed so drastically? Could sharing the teachings, traditions and legends of Indigenous people be promoting diversity and breaking down barriers to inclusive environments?

Our program vision is simple. Through experiential practice and pedagogy, we aspire to build an appreciation for Indigenous culture in *both* our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and staff. Once the richness is revealed, our First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and staff begin to feel safe to embrace, celebrate and share their culture in our school communities.

When it comes to implementing this vision of First Nations, Métis and Inuit programming within our division, we have chosen two fundamental frameworks to promote positive understandings, namely the medicine wheel and Catholic social teachings. Used as a traditional teaching tool for First Nations societies, the medicine wheel is an all-encompassing idea that reflects the balance of all natural things. The circular design emulates the world and how we are all connected. With this vision in mind, the approach is to deliver programming in a holistic manner, while honouring the four elements of our being: the spiritual, mental, physical and emotional.

This personalized approach is then folded into the primary ingredient offered by the Catholic Church to ensure a just society. "The foundation of all Catholic social teachings is the inherent dignity of the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God" ("Development and Peace Caritas Canada," 2016). These two concepts work in harmony—one examining the four defining characteristics of our humanity while the other forms our moral precept to treat each person as a unique and precious gift from our Creator.

Much has been said about an "achievement gap" that exists with our First Nations, Metis and Inuit students despite the academic interventions that have been consistently applied across our division. It is only through exploration of medicine wheel teachings that we discovered one of the critical but missing elements. Many students had not yet actualized the feeling of *belonging* necessary to assure their academic progress. We already had a successful intervention pyramid for students in need of support, but lack of belonging due to continued racial stereotyping and marginalization ensured that the gap persisted. To truly move forward, we needed to counter the negative generalizations being promulgated in our current culture with a new appreciation for the

traditional teachings of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters.

An equally important but second missing element in our model was a measure of empathy and compassion born out of the recognition of Canadian injustices. The dark shadow following our Indigenous people has been cast by historical exploitation and loss. *All* of our community needs to hear the story of our Aboriginal people. Thoughtful reflection on injustices of the past can lead to a new, intrinsic understanding of self for those who were negatively affected, while for others, it is a desire to seek the good and facilitate reconciliation.

The blanket exercise is an activity we have shared with students, staff and trustees. It allows participants to take on an Aboriginal identity and walk through our local history. It is a powerful role play that conjures up many emotions and even stirs a desire in participants to seek justice and reconciliation. "Reconciliation" in the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls for "a conversion of the heart" and this exercise softens our hearts to that possibility. Our goal is to create an environment where everyone accepts responsibility for past behaviours, but most importantly, fosters the appreciation of peers as equals, deserving of love and support. If we are able to create a desire

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for reconciliation in our school communities, then the Calls to Action outlined by The Truth and Reconciliation Commission become *targets* rather than *directives*.

Our First Nations, Métis and Inuit Support Team strives to create an inclusive environment... one attitude at a time. As we walk with our students, we are constantly seeking understanding of those who share our journey. Each person in our community has gifts to reveal, practices to replicate and wisdom to distribute. What better way to improve our world than to empower our youth with the unwavering belief that everyone has something to offer and every child belongs. We may not be as successful at changing the attitudes and misconceptions outside of our school walls, but a greater opportunity exists if a foundation of solidarity pervades on the inside.

Earlier in the year, while sitting at the back of a classroom and observing a lesson on the construction of a tipi, I could feel the excitement for the story being told. Each tipi pole represented a value or truth. The covering was described as the shawl of a grandmother. The imagery created was an old woman standing with her arms out and embracing all her children and grandchildren with the supportive values represented in the poles providing the stability. The students were enthralled, waiting on each word and cleverly disguised teaching within the story.

I could not contain my smile, but my personal learning wasn't done. A young boy sitting at the back of the room who I had unsuccessfully tried to engage in a conversation before class began, leaned over to me and proudly proclaimed, "Did you know... I'm Cree." ■

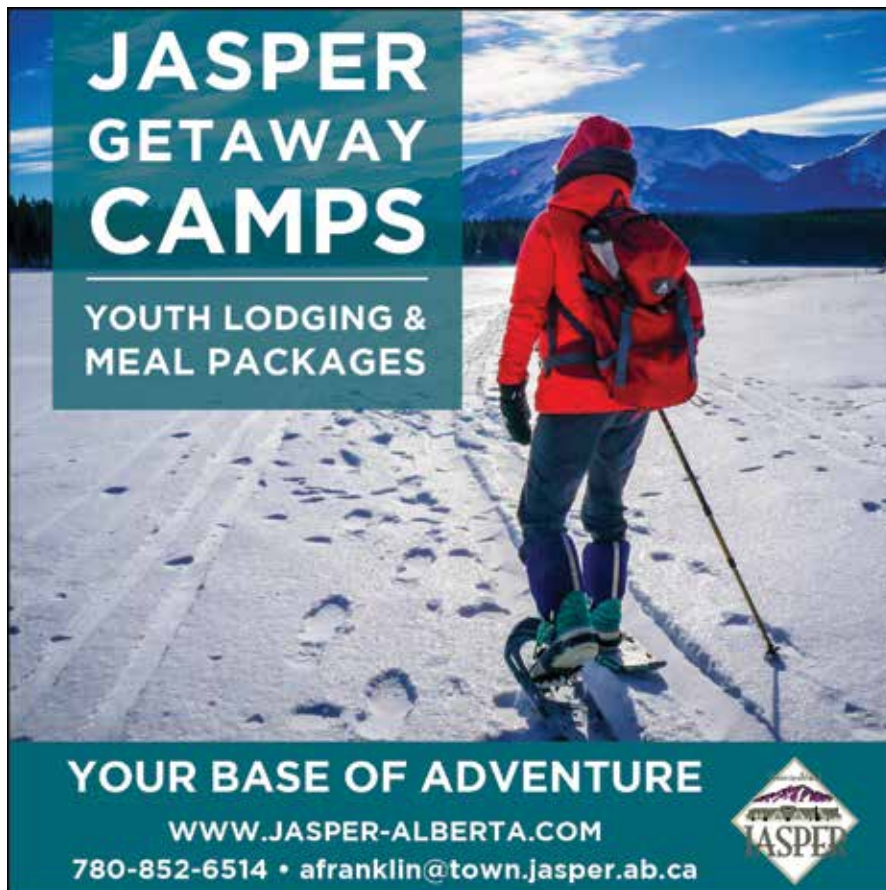
Ryan Ledene is Associate Superintendent of Faith Development & Division Support, with Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools. Tracy Meneen is the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Support Team Coordinator, and Valerie Norman-Organ is the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Support Team Lead Teacher, with Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools.

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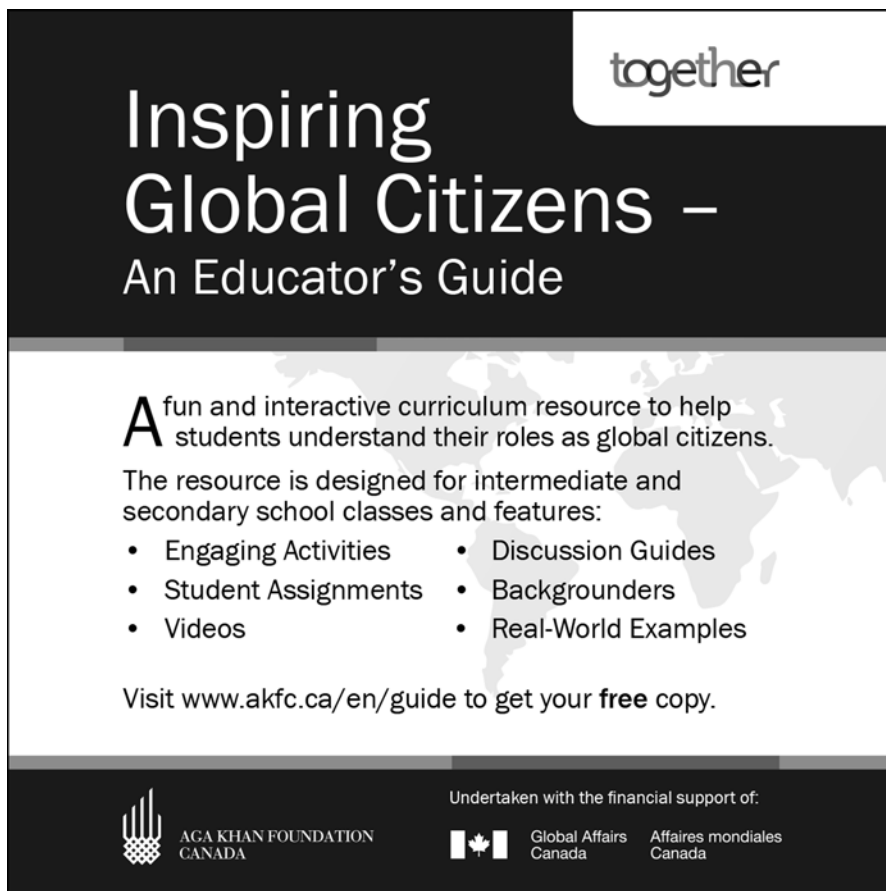
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Learning for All:

A Community of Practice for Jurisdictional Leaders



Submitted By Thérèse deChamplain-Good,
Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium

An important factor driving change in Alberta schools is the growing recognition that, with the right supports and opportunities, all learners can be successful. As a result, many school jurisdictions are rethinking the kind of programming they are offering students with significant disabilities. These jurisdictions are actively committing to finding new ways to ensure this group of students has the instruction and supports they need to be more meaningfully engaged in literacy, numeracy and the program of studies.

Creating an education system that has the capacity to respond to all learners, including learners with significant disabilities, calls for new professional learning strategies that are robust, responsive and transformative. Communities of practice offer a strategy that meets these challenges.

Launching communities of practice in Alberta

Beginning in 2011, the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium and the Central Alberta

Regional Consortium, on behalf of the Alberta Regional Professional Learning Consortia, and in collaboration with Alberta Education, hosted a number of communities of practice. Three of these professional learning initiatives focused on building teacher capacity to respond to the diverse, and often complex, learning needs of students with significant disabilities. (For more information, see www.literacyforallab.ca and www.numeracyforallab.ca)

The success of these specific communities of practices captured the attention of leaders in a number of school jurisdictions. As a result, the 2014-2015 *Learning for All* community of practice for leaders and consultants was born.

This one-year initiative focused on building jurisdictional capacity to support teachers of students with significant disabilities. It built on the previous work of the three communities of practice for teachers and incorporated learning from related consortia-sponsored professional development sessions with international experts Erik Carter, Caroline Muselwhite and Karen Erickson.

The goals of the *Learning for All* community of practice were to:

- Collaboratively develop, collect and share information and strategies for building jurisdictional capacity to better support students with significant disabilities.
- Explore and share best practices related to creating meaningful learning opportunities and effective supports for these students.
- Explore ways in which learning opportunities and supports can better address diverse learning needs, including how technology can enable individual students to be more engaged in their learning.

Targeting jurisdictional leaders and consultants

The key to transforming schools begins with school and jurisdictional leaders. As Michael Fullan notes, “Leadership for change requires a bias for action, a sense of urgency and a mix of pressure and support.”

Successful schools are organized around learning. Their leaders are knowledgeable about effective pedagogy and about what works for the individual needs of different students in their particular contexts. While teachers are responsible for ensuring that all students achieve to the best of their ability, they will be supported in their work by school and jurisdictional leaders’ deep knowledge about teaching and learning. This knowledge enables leaders to discuss changes with teachers and helps them to make informed decisions about instructional organization, resources and practices.

What is a community of practice?

A community of practice is a group of people who share a common concern and come together to fulfill both individual and group goals. Communities of practice often focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance a domain of professional practice. Interaction on an ongoing basis is a

key component. Communities of practice typically use a combination of face-to-face meetings and an online collaborative environment to communicate, connect and share information.

Built on solid research and sound adult learning pedagogy, communities of practice offer a powerful and personalized professional learning strategy that leverages technology to create robust opportunities for participation and collaboration. Communities of practice provide a new model for connecting educators in the spirit of learning, knowledge sharing, and collaboration—all necessary ingredients for inclusive education.

How the *Learning for All* community of practice was organized

Learning for All focused on identifying and sharing best practices to better support the learning of students with significant disabilities, with an emphasis on evidence-informed practice that enables the participation and success of all learners.

Key to the success of this community of practice was a facilitator. A dedicated person taking care of logistics acknowledged the time

constraints and competing priorities of participants, and ensured “high value for time” for all those who invested themselves. The facilitator managed communications and the collaborative online site, coordinated face-to-face days and webinars, and curated the online resources that would live on after the project was completed.

Joining the community meant committing to participation in a two-day face-to-face orientation session in the fall, a one-day follow-up session in the spring, and four one-hour webinars throughout the year. The webinars were an opportunity to discuss topics in-depth, examine research, share experiences, learn new strategies, and network with other participants. Participants also committed to contributing to the co-development of content on the dedicated project website.

Thirty leaders and consultants from nine school jurisdictions participated in this one-year initiative.



Data collected throughout the year included:

- Surveys;
- Participant reflections;
- Artifacts; and
- Success stories.

Creating a legacy so others will benefit

The community of practice shared their learning beyond the immediate community in three ways.

First, each participating school jurisdiction committed to use what they were learning to create at least one professional learning



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opportunity for their jurisdiction at the completion of the initiative.

Second, content generated from activities during the face-to-face days and the interactive webinars was repurposed and used to create a curated online resource that all Alberta educators could access through the ARPDC PD Resources website (arpdcresources.ca). This resource, available at www.learningforallab.ca, offers a robust description of students with significant disabilities, as well as information, strategies and resource recommendations related to:

- Instructional planning;
- Peer supports;
- Rethinking the role of educational assistants; and
- Transition planning (with a focus on post school, self-determination, assistive technologies, and communication).

Third, tools, strategies and exemplars developed for this community of practice were repurposed to provide context and examples in an online resource, *Creating Communities of Practice*. The goal of this resource, available through the ARPDC PD resources website

at www.communityofpractice.ca, is to support the development, implementation and evaluation of current and future communities of practice at the school, jurisdiction and provincial level.

Communities of practice and inclusive education

Inclusive education is a continuous search to find new and better ways of supporting diversity and learner differences. Communities of practice are powerful tools for supporting inclusion because they introduce collaborative processes that encourage the free flow of ideas and exchange of information. Capacity building is accelerated when professional learning is collaborative work, rather than an individual effort. Collaboration shifts whole schools and systems.

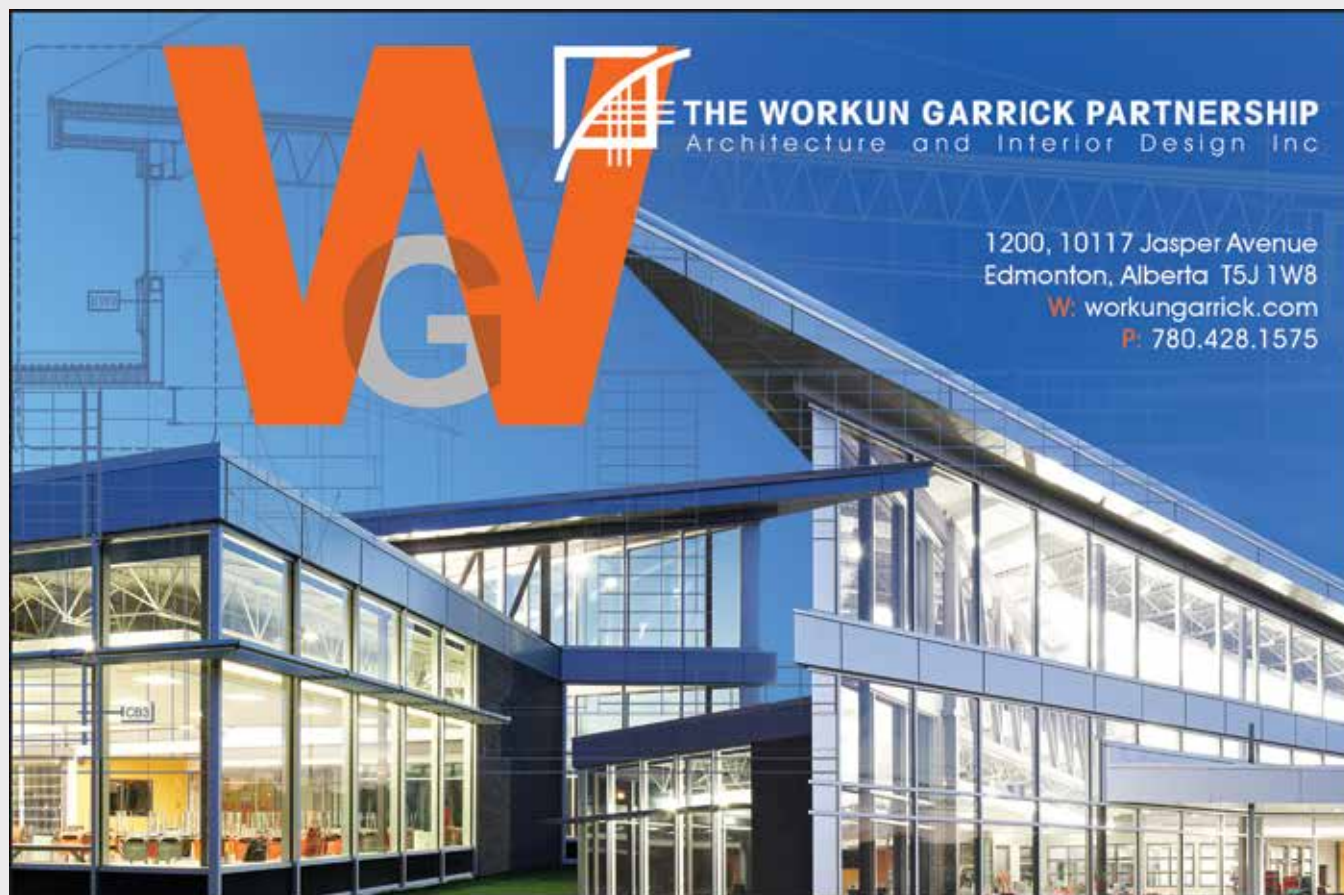
Communities of practice help educators improve their practice by providing a forum to identify solutions to common challenges and a process to identify and evaluate best practices.

The final survey from *Learning for All* indicated that participants valued the supportive context for sharing information,

stories and personal experiences. They offer tangible examples of how participating in this community built their understanding and insight. They also agreed that the community of practice model creates rich opportunities for exploring beliefs, unpacking research and identifying what is important—all important tasks on the inclusive education journey. ■

Submitted by Thérèse deChamplain-Good, who is Executive Director of The Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium.

Evidence-informed practice means using evidence from research and systematic data-gathering to identify the potential benefits, limits and essential components of instructional strategies and interventions. It also acknowledges that what works in one context may not be appropriate or feasible in another. Evidence-informed practice brings together local experience and expertise with the best available evidence from research.



An Assessment for Student SUCCESS

By Bryan Szumlas, Ed.D., and Daniel Danis, Calgary Catholic School District

The Calgary Catholic School District's academic theme is, "Success for all Students," but what does this mean? For a diverse needs student in physical education, success could be having a great jump in a volleyball game but not connecting for the spike. For a gifted student in art, success could be mixing colours just right to show the beauty of a fall landscape in a painting. For an average student in math, success could be solving the first part of a problem or it could mean solving the entire mathematical equation. Whatever the case, success is determined in relation to meeting criteria which is connected to curriculum and the individual's needs.

It's difficult to assess curriculum without considering the needs of the individual learner as they influence each other. Deeply rooted in determining success is having inclusive assessment practices which allow all students (those who are gifted; those who are average; and those with diverse needs) to demonstrate their achievement.

This article outlines part of the Calgary Catholic School District's assessment journey and some of the inclusive assessment practices used by its teachers, such as relationship building, differentiating and reassessments.

Calgary Catholic is the largest Catholic school district in Alberta, with over 55,000 students. The district's assessment focus was amplified two years ago with the creation of a district assessment committee. The purpose of the committee, which consisted of district teachers and leaders from all levels, was to identify the key principles of assessment and to outline inclusive practices for both summative and formative assessment. The practices for summative and formative assessment can be the same. The difference is that formative assessments are used by teacher and student to determine the next

step in learning. Formative assessments are not used for grade determination.

After researching many articles, books and magazines on assessment the committee created three simple documents outlining the key principles of assessment (one for teachers, one for parents and one for students). These visuals have been used extensively for conversation starters with parents at meetings as-well-as with teachers during professional development opportunities. The visual for teachers to consider is shown in this layout.

Many topics are covered in the Calgary Catholic Assessment Guidelines, but three topics which are paramount for inclusive assessment practices are: Building Positive Relationships, Differentiating and Opportunities for Reassessment.

Building positive relationships

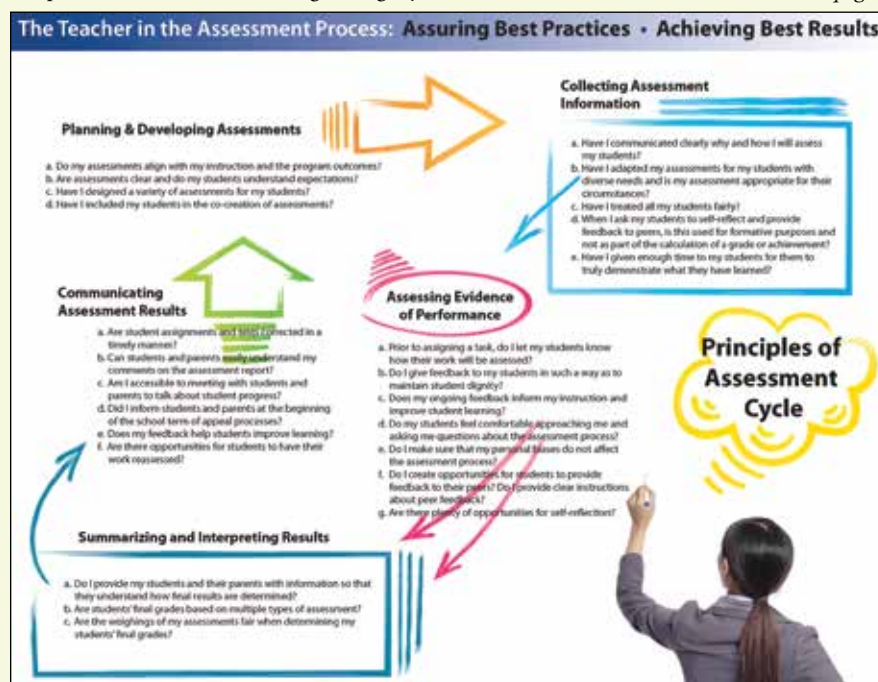
Calgary Catholic believes all students are made in the image and likeness of God. We accept and treat all students with great dignity

and respect. The foundation for this is the concept of relationship building. The relationship between teacher and student is paramount. The teacher's role can be similar to that of a coach, and coaches need to have strong relationships with their players. Think of hockey coaches. They need to know the game and their players. They need to know who is strong at shooting the puck, who are the fast skaters and who needs extra support, like additional coverage on defence, if their team is to improve.

This analogy rings true in the classroom. Like coaches, teachers need to know the curriculum and their students' needs. Teachers need to know the strengths and areas for growth for their students. They also need to know which students require additional support for success. Teachers know their students by building relationships through spending time caring and listening to their core stories.

When it comes to assessment, it is really important that the teacher establishes

Continued on next page...



relationships with parents. Parents can be beneficial in outlining assessment practices that have been used successfully by past teachers. They can also share which assessment practices work best for their child(ren).

In a strong relationship, feedback between teacher, student and parents can be shared and received with great benefit. In a weak relationship, some feedback between the teacher, student and family can be hurtful no matter how delicately it is delivered.

Differentiating assessments

Inclusive assessment practices require teachers to break out of the mold of treating all students the same. A single test for all students in the same class may not be appropriate. In Calgary Catholic, teachers are being encouraged to differentiate their assessments. For example, teachers are now looking at their assessments and reducing questions for some students or they are changing their assessments entirely from tests to performance tasks or conversations.

When thinking about differentiating assessments teachers must ensure that supports for

success are in place. For example, Brittany Britten, a teacher at Holy Cross School in Calgary Catholic, shared, “many students are coming to school with severe barriers to learning, for example not eating breakfast, not knowing English, lack of supports outside of school. Some days they just aren’t ready to learn.” Inclusive practices use all available resources. In this case, many students at Holy Cross benefit from the use of extra time, frequent breaks, the use of interpreters, scribes and/or readers.

Opportunities for reassessment

When we speak of reassessment and inclusion, Calgary Catholic has encouraged an ongoing district wide initiative on formative assessment that assesses the learning of all pupils including those with special needs. It has been in the best interest of our students to create educational environments where there are a variety of assessment opportunities based on student choice. Reassessments are not always automatic in our district but are determined in conversation with the student and teacher to identify their needs. This could include filling in post assessment slips or asking questions such as, “What went wrong the first time?” or “How will things be different now?”.

Many times the student does not have to redo the assignment but rather show their work in a different way or redo a portion of the assignment. Finally, we have noticed a strong correlation of student success with reassessment when teachers receive adequate training and or professional development in intentionally responding to the needs of the students.

Conclusion

The incorporation of inclusive assessment practices is an ongoing journey. It requires strong leadership for assessment at all levels. It also requires a “never give-up” attitude by all involved. The Calgary Catholic Assessment committee continues to meet regularly to incorporate feedback received from administrators, teachers, parents and student leaders. The *CCSD Assessment Guidelines Document* is alive and updated on an ongoing basis. ■

Dr. Bryan Szumlas is an Area Director, and Daniel Danis is a Director in Instructional Services, for the Calgary Catholic School District.

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Inclusion through Personalized Programming

By Teresa Di Ninno, CAPE Public Charter School

CAPE Public Charter School is a Kindergarten to Grade 9 public charter school in Medicine Hat, Alberta. It opened its door in September 1994 as a private school and received its charter in September 1995. Its mission is to foster the development of academic and personal skills through the provision of a personalized, integrated program so that each child or student may achieve success in the pursuit of personal and academic goals, strive for personal excellence, become an engaged thinker and ethical citizen with an entrepreneurial spirit, an independent learner and a world citizen.

The program is grounded in the belief that each student presents with individual academic and personal needs and is best served through a personalized, integrated program that is flexible, innovative and responsive. Each student is supported by school, parents and community. The school creates a shared learning atmosphere for all members to develop and maintain a student-centred learning environment. Parents provide valuable perspectives and support for their children. The community provides the domain for opportunities and experiences

which expand beyond the school, including leadership, collaboration, diversity and resourcefulness.

CAPE tends to attract a high percentage of students with identified issues: mild-moderate, gifted, twice-exceptional, multiple concerns, high-functioning autism, and a conglomerate of challenges. There is an increasing number of students who require emotional supports and/or overt social skill development in addition to “schooling.” Other students, who do not present with diagnosed concerns, still have unique learning profiles. By acknowledging the individual learner profile, CAPE strives to provide the program best suited to each student. This personalization is not only responsive to cognitive, emotional and psychological needs, but is also respectful of culture, ethnicity, beliefs, family structure, and “the personal story.” It is inclusive.

CAPE’s personalized program has evolved in response to identified needs within its population. In its current iteration, CAPE’s program is grounded in research, is data-driven, provides Individualized



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The goal is to demonstrate one's knowledge in multiple, yet personal, ways.

Program Plans for every child and student, benefits from the expertise of a full time psychologist and external services, responds quickly to student needs, and supports the whole person.

Providing for each of these students requires an increasing understanding of assessment procedures, recommended supports from research, implementation, impacts on learning, tracking and reassessment. Our collaborative team

approach is integral to our ability to support our students. We strive to respond efficiently and effectively. Our ability to respond and, as one evaluator once said, "turn on a dime," is facilitated by our small size, school-based decision-making, capped classes and extensive use of educational assistants.

Classes are capped at 18+/-1 for Kindergarten to Grade 3, at 22+/-1 for Grades 4 and 5, and at 24+/- 1 for Grades 6 to 9. This allows greater time for personalized supports and reasonable, responsive implementation of accommodations and recommendations. Support from educational assistants allows for the implementation of a greater variety of accommodations and recommendations in a timely manner and for tracking effectiveness.

Our personalized program is a research-based, data-driven, purposeful, collaborative and cyclical process through which each student's program is developed, implemented, monitored and re-evaluated to maximize the achievement of personal goals.





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Data collection

- Assessment of student current competencies and capacity. Assessment can be cognitive, academic, social, emotional, behavioural and/or sensory. Valid standardized assessment tools are used to "drill down" as needed. Assessments from outside services are acquired as needed to gain understanding.
- Anecdotal and survey data are collected from students, parents and teachers, past student files, current classroom assessments, standardized tests and current diagnostic assessment results.
- Individual learner profiles are developed.



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CAPE Graduation Rate to November 2016	
Graduated in 3 Years	90%
Graduated in 4 Years	7%
Did Not Graduate	3%

CAPE Students Post High School November 2016	
University	32%
College	25%
College and then University	13%
Time Off/Worked-College/University	20%
Work	9%

Development of an individual program plan

- Teachers, support staff, administration, school psychologist, parents, students and community agencies collaborate in the development of the Individual Program Plan.
- The Individual Program Plan and the individual profile are used to establish effective learning groups.

Implementation and tracking of individual achievement

- Responsive re-assessment of student competencies and capacity facilitate modifications to the plan.
- The frequency of tracking and assessment depends upon severity of student needs and strategies implemented.

Examination of viable options as the individual support plan evolves

- The Individual Program Plan is a living document that evolves as the student needs change.

Personalization for student success

Students have a voice and are empowered to participate in the decision-making. Parents are invited and expected to be active partners in the student learning. Parents and students participate in goal setting meetings at the beginning of the year and in student-parent-teacher conferences near the end of each term. Class websites, blogs, planners, e-mails, and face-to-face meetings keep parents informed and involved.

Student assessment is also tailored to the child/student. Assessment tools range from whole class to individual, from hands-on to formal tests, and take the form of individual or group projects, presentations, demonstrations, and art pieces or animations, to name only a few. The goal is to demonstrate one's knowledge in multiple, yet personal, ways. Reporting of student learning and achievement is focused on the student. It provides traditional, numerical achievement indicators and looks at movement over time. The report includes reporting on curriculum as well as academic objectives, using a scale. An integral component of our reporting process is the inclusion of Individual Program Plan updates.

CAPE's personalized program requires commitment at multiple levels, Board of Directors, administration, staff, parents and community. It is financially taxing, requiring extremely careful allocation of funds and resulting in extremely tight budgets. The learning community strives towards continuous improvement, investigating innovative practices, reviewing the most current research, establishing new partnerships. New students joining our community bring new challenges and new learnings. However, facing these challenges is validated when we look at the future success of our students.

Our students' post-CAPE educational efforts are tracked. Our students acquire the personal and academic skills they need to achieve success in the pursuit of personal and academic goals, strive for personal excellence, become engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit, independent learners and world citizens. ■

Teresa Di Ninno is Superintendent of CAPE Public Charter School, located in Medicine Hat, Alberta.



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TRIBES: A Journey to Inclusion

*"Due to a deep respect for the teachings and wisdom of native cultures around the world, the name came into use as the name for the developmental learning process developed by Jeanne Gibbs. This process is a way of being together, helping each other teach our children to live a life based on time honoured values in caring, safe and supportive environments."*¹

By Terry Freeman, Medicine Hat Public School Division

Alberta Education states, "Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance and promotes a sense of belonging for all learners."² Many may wonder how to attempt to achieve this. Medicine Hat Public School Division provides all its teachers with a road map as to how this might be achieved. The method is the Tribes Learning Community, often called TRIBES.

TRIBES is a process, not a curriculum. You do not do TRIBES on Wednesday afternoon. By using the TRIBES process, teachers are developing classroom safety, collaborative skills and community.

The TRIBES process is built around the Four Agreements. Students are taught what Attentive Listening looks, sounds and feels like. Appreciations are taught and modelled. When not feeling safe, students can evoke the Right to Pass. Finally, students and staff live Mutual Respect. These Four Agreements become the common language for classrooms, hallways, playgrounds and schools. Parents are offered courses so that they speak the same language.

To get a class, or school, to the stage of Community two other stages must be realized. The first stage on the TRIBES Trail (see picture) is Inclusion. The TRIBES Process models Inclusion and provides strategies for this to be developed. Your class, or school, has Inclusion when each person is able to introduce themselves, express one's hopes and expectation, and is positively acknowledged by the group.

One of the most effective strategies for Inclusion is the Community Circle. Community Circle is a step towards building resiliency, care, empathy and a positive environment. The beauty of Community Circle, and other TRIBES activities, is that it can be used for both Inclusion and Academics. I have witnessed a teacher using Community Circle by asking this question, "Is there anything that is going to interrupt your learning today?" You knew this classroom had Community by several of the answers, which included "mum and dad had a fight last night and I did not get much sleep." Community Circle can also be used for academic discussions. An example could include asking participants to share their

thoughts around the main character's actions in Chapter 3 of our novel.

The second stage of the TRIBES Trail is Influence. Your students are there if they can freely express feelings, diverse attitudes and opinions. Judgements are withheld and participatory decision-making strategies are in place. The final stage of the Trail is Community. This does not just happen, it needs to be nurtured. This happens during the Inclusion and Influence stages. You know you have Community when participants are dedicated to resolving rather than avoiding conflict, strategies are in place that enable collaboration, the Four Agreements are lived and the students are reflective learners.



So, how did Medicine Hat Public School Division make TRIBES a part of its instructional toolkit? It all started with Barrie Bennett. Our division worked with Dr. Bennett for several years on Instructional Intelligence. Barrie kept mentioning TRIBES so Elm Street School staff decided to take the 24-hour course and offered the remaining openings to interested division staff. Thus started our work with TRIBES. Division staff were asked what should be the focus of our Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)? Cooperative Learning was the overwhelming choice. TRIBES was identified as the tool for developing cooperative learning.

During the summer of 2011, 22 division teachers travelled to Calgary to take a week-long Train the Trainer session. We now had a cadre of TRIBES Trainers. That fall, two days in October, and two in November, saw all teaching staff gather to receive the 24-hour course. By the end of the fourth day, we had over 400 teachers trained in the TRIBES process. Each year, teachers new to our division are brought in at the end of August to receive the TRIBES course. Most schools have a TRIBES Trainer. They serve as resources for the teachers and parents. At the division level, Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) funds were used to provide teacher release time so that TRIBES Trainers at the school level could work with their administrative team on incorporating TRIBES into staff meetings and school culture.

The Alberta Principles of Inclusion mention valuing and supporting learner differences. That happens in a TRIBES community. High

expectations are encouraged for all members. Student strengths and needs can be understood by the teacher if the students are comfortable being themselves. Capacity is built in the students as we move down the TRIBES trail. They take on more responsibility for their learning. This journey is shared by students, staff and parents.

The Province of Alberta issues the Accountability Pillar Report every year. Parents and students are surveyed about many school-related issues. Medicine Hat School Division

consistently scores high in Safe and Caring Schools. Both groups rate the district high in that area. The skills, attitudes and safety built in TRIBES classrooms must be a contributor to these results. Kindergarten through Grade 12 classrooms can be seen living the TRIBES philosophy and Inclusion in Medicine Hat. ■

Terry Freeman is the Director of Programs and Instruction for Medicine Hat Public School Division. He is also the District TRIBES Trainer for those new to the division.

CONNECTING ALBERTA'S K-12 SCHOOLS

Cybera is a not-for-profit technology accelerator that helps K-12 schools in all corners of the province obtain more efficient technology services.

Cybera connects members to Alberta's Research and Education Network, which directly links to international networks and content providers. It also provides access to shared IT tools and services.

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Tribes Community Agreements

- Attentive Listening
- Appreciation – No Put-Downs
- The Right to Pass
- Mutual Respect

Learn more about the Tribes Learning Community at www.tribes.com.

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Healthy People, Healthy Workplace

SUPPORTING YOUR
health journey



Leading the Way to Workplace Health

The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is a health and welfare trust governed by 10 Trustees. It offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for over 56,000 covered members and their dependants in 58 school jurisdictions and 11 associations across the province. ASEBP is pleased to contribute a regular column in The CASS Connection.

By Jennifer Carson, BBA

As humans interacting with this busy world of ours, it's natural that you'll hit bumps in the road from time to time. When we need a little extra support to make it over that bump, it's helpful to know that with your ASEBP benefits, the vast majority of you will also have access to Homewood Health's Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP). Your EFAP gives you access to confidential, round-the-clock assistance and support for a myriad of life's bumps, from stress and depression to elder care, financial counseling and everything in between.

As leaders, the bumps we face in the workplace can put us in situations that leave us unsure of what to do next. We've all been there but I suspect most of us often feel alone in our efforts to deconstruct and address these challenges. Thankfully, Homewood Health knows that this can be one of the biggest challenges facing workplace leaders and has addressed this through the EFAP. So aside from sitting down with your skilled Human Resources team, know that you have dedicated support for the kinds of bumps you'll face as a leader.

You are invited

Included in the resources and services available to you as a leader through



If your school jurisdiction is enrolled in the EFAP program with ASEBP, you can simply access these free, management-focused resources—and so much more—in both English and French by creating an account at www.homeweb.ca or calling 1-800-663-1142.

your EFAP are a Key Person Advice Line (KPAL), a dedicated Manager/Supervisor EFAP Handbook and a number of e-courses designed specifically for leadership skill development.

Let's introduce these through an example. Say you have an employee, we'll call her Laura, who you notice has started showing up to work later and later each day, shying away from having conversations with her colleagues and returning projects late, incomplete or not at all.

A book of guidance

You have been monitoring Laura's performance over the last month, using the Performance Indicators for the Troubled Worker pages from the Manager/Supervisor EFAP Handbook, as her behaviour and work performance have begun to deteriorate and you decide that it's time to speak with her. The resources within the Handbook provide you with monitoring tools that can help to document concrete examples of her behaviours in the workplace. When you meet with Laura, you'll be better prepared to talk about your concerns with her work performance.



The line to leadership city

If Laura's performance and mood towards others have reached a boiling point, consider calling the confidential Key Person Advice Line (KPAL) available to you as a manager or senior leader through the EFAP. A phone call to the KPAL gives you the opportunity to contact a senior-level clinician with Homewood Health for immediate consultation when a situation surfaces in the workplace that could benefit from professional input. Use the KPAL as a complement to the support you receive through your Human Resources team for anything from a workplace conflict, employee problems, unusual employee behaviour or providing assistance to employees and strategies for assisted referrals.

In your situation with Laura, your clinician would provide advice over the phone and direct you to online resources to help you prepare for your discussion. Following your conversation with Laura, you could call your Homewood clinician back to discuss how things went, evaluate

your use of the skills and tips provided, and get some additional information to help you refine your skills for future.

EFAP for everyone

You're now prepared to meet with Laura, discuss the concerns at hand and work with her to create an action plan to move forward. With the help of Homewood Health's brochures and promotional resources, you're also prepared to provide her—or any employee on your team facing challenges—information on your school jurisdiction's EFAP to support her through any additional challenges she may be facing.

Professional development at your pace

Professional development is a great way to do some leadership fine-tuning to help us better manage all the "Laura's" in our work lives. The EFAP offers 15 e-courses—five specifically for leaders—that you can access anytime on Homewood's website to learn applicable skills like the fundamentals of effective supervision,

leading through change, managing sensitive employees and values-based leadership styles.

Investing in your health

As a system leader, you know that fostering a culture of health and wellness within your school jurisdiction is a necessary and worthwhile—yet challenging—task. The EFAP program is there to assist you through your leadership role. Explore the resources and services available to you and make a commitment to invest in your professional health and well-being—the returns will be well worth the investment. ■

Jennifer Carson is the Chief Executive Officer of ASEBP and has worked in the health and benefits industry for over 25 years. During her 11 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 2016.

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U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL MEMBER

ARCHITECTS

The Workun Garrick Partnership20

ASSESSMENT TOOLS FOR TEACHERS

Alberta Assessment Consortium.....25

ATTORNEYS

Brownlee LLP.....10

McLennan Ross LLP23

AUDIO/VISUAL

Comtec Associates Ltd.8

BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTION AND AUTISM TRAINING PROGRAMS

University of New Brunswick -

College of Extended

Learning.....12

DISTANCE LEARNING

Alberta Distance Learning Centre3

EASY GRAMMAR SYSTEMS

Easy Grammar Systems.....22

EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING

Solution Tree..... IBC

FINE ART MATERIALS

The Paint Shop25

FOUNDATION

Aga Khan Foundation17

HOTELS AND CONFERENCE CENTRES

Comfort Inn & Suites Downtown

Edmonton23

Chateau Lacombe Hotel10

JASPER ACTIVITY, FITNESS AND AQUATIC CENTRE

Municipality of Jasper Culture &

Recreation Department17

MARINE LIFE EDUCATION

West Edmonton Mall..... OBC

MASTERS AND DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

University of Calgary, Werklund

School Education.....4

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE EDUCATION

HeLa Ventures24

OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRE

Kuriakos Outdoor School30

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROVIDER

Edmonton Regional Learning

Consortium22

ROOFING ASSOCIATION

Alberta Roofing Contractor

Association6

RUBBER FITNESS TILES

SOF Surfaces 16, 29

SCHOOL AND COMMERCIAL BUSES

The Bus Centre.....19

SCHOOL MUSEUM TOURS

Royall Tyrrell Museum6

SCHOOL SIGN SPECIALISTS

Image Signs IFC

SCHOOL TOURS / SCHOOL TRIPS

Alberta Aviation Museum.....6

Great Canadian Barn Dance24

Pisces Pet Emporium14

SPECIAL NEEDS PROGRAMS

Renfrew Educational Services30

TECHNOLOGY

Cybera Inc.27

WEDDINGS AND RETREATS

Al-Azhar Shrine Centre.....10



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—Anita Richardson, principal, H.W. Pickup Jr. High School, Alberta



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