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Fall 2014

The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents



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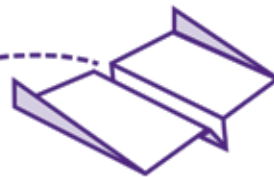
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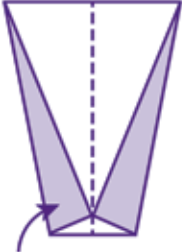





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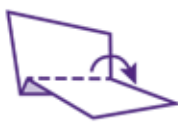
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Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable Gordon Dirks | Minister of Education

I am driven to provide students with all the tools they need to thrive in their futures.

The start of another new school year always holds so much promise for children and adults alike. Fall is an annual opportunity to refocus our energy—to set new goals, learn new skills, hone our talents, discover new ideas and rekindle the passion for learning, for ourselves and for students.

A fresh start certainly rings true for me. I am honoured to have the opportunity to serve Albertans as the minister of education. While I may be new to this position, my passion for education is deep-rooted. As a former educator, school administrator and public school board representative, I am driven to provide students with all the tools they need to thrive in their futures. This includes:

- Ensuring Alberta's school curriculum focuses on foundational elements—reading, writing and arithmetic—while incorporating essential 21st century skills, such as innovation and critical thinking;
- Promptly addressing the need for new schools throughout the province; and
- Providing students with safe and respectful education environments.

I am looking forward to getting to work—in co-operation with all of our provincial education partners—on these initiatives and others. As a group, it is up to all of us to embrace the opportunity for a fresh start and renew our commitment to putting the best interests of students first. Our students must be at the heart of every decision we make if we are to help them reach their full potential.

Alberta Education joined our partners across the province to help students get a positive and healthy start to the new year. Our 2014 Back to School online toolkits feature resources for children and parents. The toolkits also have links for teachers



and administrators to use as they support students, from updates on various education initiatives and upcoming workshops, to tips on building inclusive and bully-free settings. Alberta Education is committed to updating these toolkits throughout the year so they can be used for the benefit of students whenever the need may arise.

One of the best ways to secure a bright future for our children is through our teachers. After parents, teachers are at the heart of a student's success in learning, which is why we work to ensure teachers have the tools and support they need to do their very best in the classroom.

Support for the difficult, but rewarding jobs of Alberta's teachers does not begin and end with the school year. Alberta Education's efforts to work with teachers and other key stakeholders like CASS continue year-round. We remain focused on investing in our growing education system, learning from research and best practices and building on our success.

As Alberta's population continues to grow, we have embarked on the largest school construction project in Canadian

history to immediately address our school shortage. In October, Government committed to the third-phase of a 10-year capital build-out of new schools, expansions and modernizations. We are moving quickly to provide school boards with the predictability they need for longer-term infrastructure planning.

It is important to respect and celebrate the achievements of Alberta's education system. But it is also important to recognize that we need to evolve to keep pace with an ever changing world. It is not a matter of disregarding or abandoning our successes, but rather a matter of building on our achievements to accomplish even more.

Ultimately, it all comes back to our common goal—putting the best interests of students first. And while our approach may change over time, our commitment to doing what is best for our children and their teachers will never change.

I look forward to the 2014-15 school year and the progress we will make together in building an even stronger education system for Albertans. ■

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President's Message

Karl Germann

President | College of Alberta School Superintendents

**Our international results are excellent.
Why change?**

Answer: Braydon

An individual at the most recent CASS / Alberta Education Annual conference made one of the most brilliant speeches I have heard in a long time. He had the courage to challenge everyone to define the problem in Alberta, namely why we would embark on a radical overhaul of the education system.

For years, through hard work and dedication, Albertans have achieved unparalleled success on the national and international stage. Countries use our curriculum to establish international schools and delegations tour our schools attempting to replicate our success. Yet, when I came from Saskatchewan in 2001, we too were working hard. So what was the difference between the two provinces? Why did Alberta students achieve at a significantly higher level than students in Saskatchewan?

...through hard work and dedication, Albertans have achieved unparalleled success...

I believe Alberta educators achieve because we are research-based and we monitor and react to the data. In the late 1990s, I remember travelling to Northern Lights School Division to gain a better understanding of their early literacy intervention programs.

At the time I worked in central office in the Meadow Lake School Division. The two districts are approximately an hour's drive apart and have a similar student demographic profile. Yet even though we mirrored the Northern Lights model, we were not as successful.

Our gaps did not improve and statistically our students did not achieve at the level of the students in Alberta. We even brought in experts, followed the Reading Recovery model and had specialists from Regina Catholic Schools assist us in our work.

In conversations years later I now realize that the emphasis on researched-based strategies and accepting the data, no matter how brutal it is, allows Alberta's educators to make the necessary changes.

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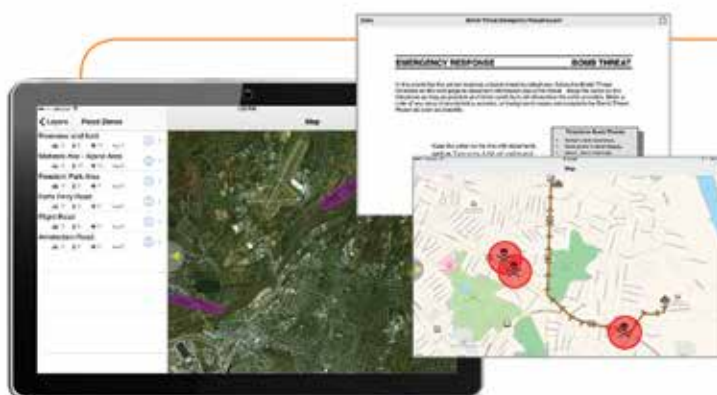




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Continued from page 9

Fast forward to 2014-15. Dr. John Hattie notes that approximately 70 per cent of Alberta's educators are already high performing, adapting and changing to meet the needs of students. But more needs to be done. Why? Because of young people like Braydon.

You see, Braydon is my 18-year-old son who graduated this year. He is highly verbal and a very successful elementary/junior high French Immersion student. His mom and dad are both teachers but they missed understanding that Braydon learns in a completely different way than the average academic student.

He is a verbal processor with extremely high language skills. Ask him to decode print and he falls off the education test wagon. Until we personally paid for an educational psychology assessment at the end of Grade 10, we missed understanding how Braydon learns and how he can demonstrate his learning in different ways.

Why do we need to change an excellent system? Braydon. Many of us have a similar

story; a story about a child we taught or a child who is one of our own. We need to tell that story and explain why we need to do a better job educating more Alberta students at the highest possible level we can.

Society is demanding a lot from our youth and we need more graduates who can

perform at a higher level. Teaching to the test is not the answer. In the future, if we can adapt to the learning styles of more students we will have provided every Albertan with a quality education they need and deserve.

Tell your story about your Braydon. You just might change the world. ■

Back to School Toolkit

Alberta Education's Back to School toolkit is packed full of information and resources to help students, parents, teachers and administrators as they prepare for the 2014-2015 school year.

Highlights of the toolkit include the following topics:

- Inspiring Education;
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For more information, visit www.education.alberta.ca/backtoschool.aspx.

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Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

Denise McCluggage, born in the 1920s, was a pioneer female race car driver, journalist and author. She once stated, “Change is the only constant. Hanging on is the only sin.”

In Alberta, we are certainly in a period of change. New premier Jim Prentice has appointed Gordon Dirks as the education minister and Gene Williams is the new acting deputy minister. With the changes, it is understood that there will be a period of time for the new minister to be briefed and become familiarized with the activities, directions and initiatives within education in our province. On behalf of the board of directors for CASS, I can assure Mr. Dirks and Mr. Williams that system leaders in Alberta will continue to work with all the staff of Alberta Education in order to continue to provide outstanding learning opportunities for all students.

I do want to take this opportunity to thank outgoing minister Jeff Johnson and deputy minister Greg Bass for their contributions to education during their tenures in their respective positions. Their commitment to serve in order to provide for the best interests of students is unquestioned, and both have made a positive difference in our province. The Ministerial Order on Student Learning (#001/2013), guided through the legislative process by Mr. Johnson, outlines that the “fundamental goal of education in Alberta is to inspire all students to achieve success and fulfillment, and reach their full potential.”

I also want to extend thanks to former minister of education Dave Hancock, who served as acting premier through the spring and summer of this past year. As Mr. Hancock leaves public life, he should be proud

How students learn today is clearly different from how I learned or how my parents learned.

that his legacy will be the positive changes in education. These positive changes have occurred and will continue to occur as a result of the response by all education partners to the unprecedented levels of public consultations that took place during Inspiring Education.

As we move forward, I know that you will enjoy reading the stories from the contributors of this edition of *The CASS Connection* about the impact that teachers have on student learning. How teacher practices support gains in student learning was the focus of the presentations this past summer by Dr. John Hattie, a world renowned education researcher, to more than 1,400 system leaders, school leaders, teachers, Alberta Education staff, post-secondary educators, parents and members of the public in Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton and Grande Prairie.

Jointly sponsored by CASS, the Grande Prairie Public School District and the Professional Development Consortia in the four cities, Dr. Hattie shared his work of the past twenty years. In his book, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*, Dr. Hattie reviewed research studies that involved approximately half a billion students. For me, the most striking comment made by Dr. Hattie in his presentation was that almost all actions or initiatives undertaken by teachers have some positive impact upon student learning.

The key, in his opinion, is to determine from the research available, which strategies have the most significant impact upon the learning of all students and then ensure that the environments and supports are in place so that these strategies are universally implemented.

As stated in the opening quote, change is the only constant. I believe this is even truer today than when Ms. McCluggage originally put those words to paper. How students learn today is clearly different from how I learned or how my parents learned. It is essential that we take the research available and combine that research with examples of effective practices to shape the educational experiences of our students of this generation and generations of the future.

In closing, I want to thank all the sponsors who have supported this edition of *The CASS Connection*. Their support enables us to publish this magazine which is shared with all education partners in the province as well as the parallel organizations to CASS across Canada.

Finally, a sincere thank you to all the contributors for this edition of *The CASS Connection*. While the world around us may be constantly changing, one way that we will always be able to learn is from each other. Your willingness to share the stories from your respective jurisdictions is sincerely appreciated. ■

Teacher Efficacy: Capacity Over Context

By John Waterhouse

The relatively recent infusion of the term “teacher efficacy” into the Alberta context of teacher negotiations, professional learning and especially the C2 committees has been both interesting and alarming.

Given that efficacy is a psychological construct, a perception or a feeling, and that it is highly dependent on the actual ability, skill level or capacity of an individual teacher to accomplish what they set out to do, it is interesting that any profession, school or school system would not immediately attribute high levels of efficacy to high levels of skill and with a passionate and singular focus pursue teacher capacity building to improve efficacy.

What is alarming in the area of teacher efficacy is the tendency of many to attribute teacher efficacy to external factors rather than internal factors, such as teacher capacity. Some people focus on lowering class sizes rather than increasing teacher instructional capacity. Some people advocate for more support for students they do not have the skills to teach, as opposed to advocating for more skills to teach the students who need their support.

Some people ask for less teaching time rather than for more professional learning time. In aggregate, there is a preponderance to ask for the demands on educators to be lowered to meet the current skill set as opposed to asking that the skill sets be raised to meet the learning demands of the students they teach. None of these are exclusive but they are very seductive maxims in the teaching culture.

This tendency is highly problematic because it too often allows the focus to be



on something that beguiles and provides emotional relief from a symptom, rather than being something that edifies through a focus of developing the skills and capacity to successfully meet the real challenges inherent in the teaching and learning process—the very things that result in successful learning and therefore confidence and efficacy.

The most widely accepted definition of teacher efficacy is, “The confidence teachers have about their individual and

collective capability to influence student learning¹.”

The research over time is quite consistent in attributing high levels of efficacy to high levels of skill on the part of the teacher. The more highly skilled the teacher, the more confidence they have in their ability to successfully influence student learning.

In examining the research, it is quite obvious that teacher efficacy is highest in teachers who, because of their own drive,

“...efficacy begins with the intrinsic attitude of a passionate professional learner...”



passion and commitment to attain mastery of a repertoire of professional skills, actually become master teachers.

In other words, efficacy is the natural result of internal attitudes and actions that lead to the development of high levels of skill, which then lead to successful teaching and learning, and to high levels of confidence in one's capacity as a teacher.

As one researcher put it, “Teachers who set high goals, who persist, who try

another approach when one is found wanting—in other words, teachers who have a high sense of efficacy and act on it—are more likely to have students who learn². In this sense, efficacy begins with the intrinsic attitude of a passionate professional learner who continually increases their skill set and culminates at the point of having achieved a level of confidence that they can and do in fact have the capacity to influence student learning, and at high levels.

This characteristic of professionalism attributes efficacy to internal factors that focus on increasing people's capacity to meet the demands of their context. This is in sharp contrast to those who attribute teacher efficacy to external factors that they demand be modified to meet their current level of teaching skill or ability.

Henson³ asserted that there were “powerful effects from the simple idea that a teacher's belief in his or her ability

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to positively impact student learning is critical to actual success or failure in a teacher's behavior."

One must recognize that high quality professional behavior on the part of a teacher both stems from and results in high levels of teacher efficacy and is an essential professional characteristic.

The research has further indicated that teachers with a strong sense of efficacy:

1. Tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization;
2. Are more open to new ideas and more willing to experiment with methods to better meet student needs;
3. Are more persistent and resilient when things do not go smoothly;
4. Are less critical of students when they make errors; and
5. Are less likely to refer a difficult student to special education.

These behaviours on the part of teachers, when coupled with their actual impact on student learning, are discriminating indicators of teacher quality. This again

punctuates the essential need for teachers to be personally and professionally responsible for their own high levels of efficacy. Responsibility is a significant correlate, if not a significant causal factor, leading to high quality teaching practice.

The reality of a significant variance in both efficacy and quality in teacher capacity has a profound impact on the levels of student learning. Dylan Wiliam illustrated the impact of the variance in teacher capacity or quality in the following statement:

“Another way of thinking about the effects of teacher quality is in terms of the rate of learning. Take a group of fifty teachers. Students who are fortunate enough to be taught in the most effective teachers in that group will learn in six months what those taught by the average teacher will take a year to learn. And those taught by the least effective teacher in that group of fifty teachers are likely to take two years to learn the same material. In other words, the most effective teachers generate learning at four times the rate of the least effective teachers⁴.”

The most effective teachers have the greatest skill sets. They also have the greatest impact on student learning, and as a result of their impact on student learning, have the highest level of teacher efficacy.

Furthermore, “Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching, have greater commitment to teaching and are more likely to stay in teaching⁵.”

The unhelpful distraction of focusing on external factors in an effort to increase teacher efficacy is analogous to the concept of target fixation, which sometimes plagues less skillful vehicle operators. In tests where drivers are specifically tasked with avoiding the pop-up pedestrian at a fork in the road, those with target fixation invariably veer into, rather than away from, the very thing that impedes their progress.

In similar fashion, those who exhibit the target fixation of focusing on external factors rather than on the internal factors of developing and increasing teacher capacity, will never achieve the level of

Continued on page 18

“Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching, have greater commitment to teaching and are more likely to stay in teaching.”



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teacher quality and capacity that result in the highest levels of teacher efficacy.

One example that can be used to illustrate this concept relates to the discussion about class size that has taken place over the past decade. Following the release of the Alberta Commission on Learning in 2003, significant financial investments were made to reduce class sizes across the province. Statistical evidence from Alberta over the past 10 years shows the decrease of class size had little, if any, impact on student learning and objective measures of a teacher's ability to impact student learning.

This mirrors results of many studies about the impact of class size from around the world. It can be argued that if the investments had been focused on increasing teacher skills, teacher capacity or teacher quality, the results on student learning would have been more positive. It is not that external factors have no impact, it is just that the research concludes time and time again that high-quality teachers have

the most significant impact of any of the factors that we can influence and should therefore be our primary focus.

In general terms, perhaps the best way to increase both individual and collective teacher efficacy is to do the very things that improve teacher quality through a level of professionalism that so many teachers in this province identify with and is advocated for by very respected educators and authors Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves:

"To teach like a professional or teach like a pro, as they say in the language of sports, is a personal commitment to rigorous training, continuous learning, collegial feedback, respect for evidence, responsiveness to parents, striving for excellence and going far beyond the requirements of any written contract. But teaching like a pro, day in, day out, cannot be sustained unless your colleagues teach like pros too...Professional capital is about collective responsibility, not individual autonomy; about scientific evidence

as well as personal judgment; about being open to one's clients rather than sitting on a pedestal above them; and ultimately about being tough on those colleagues who, after every effort and encouragement, fall short of their professional mission and let their peers as well as their students down⁶."

We live in a dynamic and changing world that effects all professions and facets of our lives. We live in a time when efficacy could easily be re-framed to be seen as being inherently connected to passion. Efficacy could be the very key to an entrepreneurial spirit that problem-solves its way to success through action research and professional practice, regardless of context.

We live in a time where the context or stimulus is value-neutral and it is the professional alone that determines people's sense of efficacy.

According to a *Bloomberg Weekly* article, engaged professionals are defined as those who have "the passion of the explorer—those who view new challenges



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as opportunities to learn additional skills” and “are driven to develop new skills at an ever rapid pace and are thrilled by it⁷.”

Teachers, schools and school divisions that invest in developing teacher capacity with a determined professional passion will achieve individual and collective teacher efficacy at higher levels and in nearer timelines than any efforts or resources expended on external factors. The truest sense of efficacy is attained as the result of possessing the passion that leads to mastery in any facet of life. ■

John Waterhouse is the deputy superintendent of the Westwind School Division and first vice-president of CASS. He is also a member of Alberta's Teacher Development and Practice Advisory Committee.

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Quantum's GPS/AVL integrated solution offers full range of software features:

By Rebecca Peters

Quantum XXI Inc. has developed GOLDBus, a computer tablet technology for school buses and other fleets that is vastly improved over the old GPS/AVL firmware approach. The supplier worked directly with school districts to determine features that enhance student safety and driver accountability and bring savings to districts.

The tablet solution for school buses is unique in the flexibility it offers. Applications are all-inclusive in the initial software package pricing. All features are built into the software; school districts can implement them with no "add-on" cost.

Because GOLDBus is software-based, it can be used on any tablet or computer with a Microsoft-based platform. Quantum XXI recommends the sturdy Fujitsu tablet for school buses.

The Loudoun County (Va.) Public Schools transportation department tested several tablets with the GOLDBus software and found that it worked flawlessly on all of them, but that the Fujitsu tablet, built to military standards, proved to be the sturdiest for withstanding temperature changes, bumpy roads, dust, etc.

GOLDBus includes all the basic GPS/AVL features and many others that integrate seamlessly within the system, as well as with other software used in school districts, such as routing, fleet management, payroll, human resources and student information.

GPS/AVL is built into the hardware (tablet) and includes features such as real-time and historical data, including bus locations, speed, and departure and arrival times; length of time spent at locations; comparative analysis of actual versus planned times; and standard and customized reports of events.

The following features are included in the software and require no additional hardware or software.

- **Report Wizard:** Creates customized reports.
- **Time and attendance:** Connects with payroll systems, allowing for paperless timesheets; for drivers/ attendants to view hours; and for managers to view employee hours.
- **Two-way communication:** Data can be transmitted to and from the buses directly without other buses receiving or hearing the exchange.
- **Real-time downloading of routes:** Route changes can be sent directly to the tablet in real time, even during a route.



- **Audio and visual directions:** Includes district directions used for routing. Any last-minute changes can be sent with routes and up-to-date audio/visual directions.
- **Real-time video streaming:** Can be utilized with the built-in camera. The tablet can also connect to other inside and outside cameras.
- **Customizable pre- and post-trip inspection checklists.**
- **Student boarding/deboarding:** Includes ridership identification. Photo or icon boarding (touch picture) fits the needs for accountability of ridership for special-needs students.
- **Medicaid reimbursement reporting:** Included in the standard reports and can be customized and sent electronically to administration for inclusion in district reporting.
- **Engine diagnostics.**
- **Parent portal:** Connection can be made through the transportation department or accessed through the district's parent portal. Levels of access can be determined by the school district with parental password protection.

Initially, the tablet may be more expensive to purchase than simple GPS tracking hardware. However, the many advantages, including the ruggedness of the tablet, the software-based system that accommodates other tablets and upgrades, and the fact that all software components that most companies sell separately are included in the price without needing to install additional hardware, firmware or software, make it a practical choice for a long-term investment.

For more information about Quantum XXI, visit www.quantumxxi.com.

Rebecca Peters of Education Consulting LLC is a retired superintendent of schools from Virginia. She served as superintendent of schools in the city of Alexandria [Va.] and as superintendent of schools in Mecklenburg County, Va. She has also served in many other administrative positions in education, including director of technology and director of career and technical education in Fauquier County, Va.

Enhancing Teacher Efficacy Through **TRANSFORM** in Edmonton Catholic Schools

By Sue Chevalier and Rhonda Nixon

A story of teacher efficacy

"My grade partner's students use QR-codes to share their work. My students point to paper assignments stapled to our bulletin board. I know I'm lagging behind with using technology for learning, but I'm not confident. Could you help me to make this shift towards multi-modal learning?"

David* (Educational Technology Consultant) responded, "Absolutely! We will start with BoardBuilder, a digital portfolio tool." David taught the first lesson as Anne* observed. Her students easily accessed and explored the digital tools on the Discovery Education website, and soon were engaged in creating their unique digital representations of the concepts in their science unit. At one point while David had students demonstrating BoardBuilder on the Smartboard, one boy, Brayden*, turned to Anne, "Hey, Mrs. Murphy*, you should try!"

Anne blushed, "Oh, I'm not very good at this." Brayden grabbed her hand. Together they clicked in and out of menus eventually finding, 'Create Portfolio.' When she finished, Brayden said, "I told you, you could do it, Mrs. M!" Anne beamed. For the first time she began to feel that being a '21C teacher' was possible for her.

Teacher efficacy and four sources of support

Bandura¹ defined self-efficacy as believing in one's ability to perform a task to achieve positive outcomes. Anne is a 10-year veteran teacher who later acknowledged she discovered that she

had more technological skills than she thought. Bandura explained, "Skills can easily be overruled by self-doubts" (p.37). To erase self-doubt, individuals require four supports:

1. Mastery experiences (opportunities to experience success);
2. Vicarious experiences (opportunities to watch someone else do a task successfully);
3. Verbal persuasion (positive feedback while trying a task); and
4. Inspiration and accountability (enough support and pressure to try a task).

TRANSFORM is a professional development (PD) model that involves lead teachers and consultants in a sustained coaching cycle of planning, teaching, documenting, reflecting and sharing. While coaching, the consultants draw upon the four identified supports to enhance teacher efficacy throughout the process.

TRANSFORM

Each of our 88 schools invites two teacher volunteers to be TRANSFORM lead learners who work with one district consultant-coach over five months. The teacher chooses one pedagogical shift (Figure 1) to move towards more student-centered teaching.

Anne and David engaged in ongoing cycles of planning, teaching, documenting, reflecting and sharing changes in classroom practice over five months. Such coaching is job-embedded because each school receives teacher release time for coaching and for inter-visitation to mobilize knowledge within and between schools.

The district's TRANSFORM Manager matches consultants with particular school communities based on a consultant's background and relationship with the school community, as well as a principal's PD goals. David was an educational

TRANSFORM = 10 Pedagogical Shifts	
Less student-centred	More student-centred
Content-based	Competency-based
Student as recipient	Students as inquirer & creator
Topic-driven	Cross-curricular themes
Short-term assignments	Project-based learning
Memorization	Higher-level thinking
Summative assessment	Formative assessment
Competitive	Collaborative learning
Single grades	Multi-grades
One-size-fits-all	Differentiated & personalized
Print-based	Multimodal (print, visual, digital)

Figure 1: TRANSFORM's 10 pedagogical shifts.

Continued from page 23

helpful feedback on their learning. In addition, Anne received a lot of reinforcement from her students in this example because student-centred teaching requires teachers to take on roles of co-learner at times.

4. Inspiration & accountability

Bandura¹ noted that positive arousal or inspiration to change comes from feeling control over one's social, physical,

intellectual and emotional resources. Lead teachers have social resources (their coach, principal and often their peers); physical resources (access to sub money and teaching resources); intellectual resources (expertise from colleagues and access to PD); and emotional resources (encouragement and support from the consultant and the Transform teammate).

Bandura explained that along with positive arousal, human beings need enough pressure/accountability to

change their habits. TRANSFORM builds in accountability because all lead teachers are expected to share with other lead teachers from different schools.

Conclusion

TRANSFORM enhances teacher efficacy through coaching relationships that foster mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and inspiration and accountability to empower teachers to move towards more student-centered practices.

**These are fictitious people.* ■

Rhonda Nixon has been a K-12 teacher and administrator for 17 years and is currently the Manager of TRANSFORM, a professional development model involving more than 2,000 teachers in Edmonton Catholic Schools.

Susan Chevalier has been an educator for more than 30 years, and is currently the Assistant Superintendent of Learning Services Innovation with Edmonton Catholic Schools.



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Central Alberta Partnership Helps Catholic Educators EXCEL



By Kent Dixon

Established in January 2011, the Excellence in Catholic Educational Leadership (EXCEL Academy) began as a partnership between St. Thomas Aquinas Roman (STAR) Catholic School Division, Evergreen Catholic Separate Regional Division (ECSRD) and Newman Theological College. Including Newman Theological College as a partner right from the start made it possible to provide the post-secondary academic foundation to make the EXCEL Academy project a reality.

EXCEL Academy began as a conversation between the assistant superintendent of St. Thomas Aquinas Roman (STAR) Catholic School Division and the deputy superintendent of Evergreen Catholic Schools. It stemmed from a shared belief that professional learning and teacher leadership could be powerful tools that could benefit students.

There was also a spirit of collaboration that was driven with the conviction that school divisions are stronger when their

staff collaborate around a common purpose. Many meetings followed that initial conversation and, gradually, the shape and design of EXCEL Academy began to emerge. Over time, the religious education directors of the two divisions and the president of Newman Theological College were included in the process.

EXCEL Academy exists to provide faith-based leadership development for teachers who are interested in becoming leaders, enabling them to explore their faith and develop their leadership gifts and talents. The EXCEL Academy curriculum is geared towards teachers who have a service orientation and wish to assume leadership roles in their school or division.

A new cohort of approximately 24 teachers is chosen every two years from across the partner divisions to participate in sessions held at Newman Theological College. Over the course of their studies, teachers meet for 10 full-day sessions to focus on a challenging, custom-designed curriculum.

The EXCEL Academy is an in-depth study of topics related to Catholic school leadership. Examples include leadership and supervision; school law; interactive relationships between home, school, and parish; peace education; strategic planning; and inclusive communities. Students are required to keep a weekly leadership reflection journal and complete various book responses.

Between classes, it is expected that participants engage in online moderated discussions with other members of their cohort. Each participant is assigned to a journey group consisting of members from all three school divisions. Group members share in each other's leadership journey for the two year program. Finally, each participant is required to complete an action research project each year that will have a direct benefit on their school and students and prepare a 12- to 15-page project analysis.

Each curriculum module had been designed to deliberately focus on one of the

four words that comprise the EXCEL acronym. For example, two sessions focus exclusively on what it means to pursue excellence and another two sessions focus on what it means to be absorbed in leadership.

In addition to academic and reflective work, participants are required to engage in various leadership projects at their workplace that allow them to translate their learning into action. The entire program is infused with a Catholic perspective and even meal times include faith formation as Newman faculty join participants during meals to provide additional theological teaching.

Tara Malloy, vice principal of Notre Dame School with STAR Catholic School Division, was a member of the first cohort of EXCEL Academy students and looks fondly back on her experience.

Malloy enjoyed the unique opportunity to experience the first year of the EXCEL Academy curriculum as a teacher, then as an administrator in her second year.

"I will always cherish and appreciate the connections I made with colleagues, both in our division and our colleagues at Evergreen," says Malloy.

"We shared our experiences, passions and aspirations for both our schools and our divisions, and our experience with EXCEL Academy inspired us to become shepherd leaders, with Christ as our ultimate example."

Malloy's perspective is very much that, no matter where someone is in their career with a Catholic division, and no matter what their role or experience is, when they begin the program, the EXCEL Academy experience is invaluable.

The EXCEL Academy program continues to grow and make an impact on the lives of participants who experience the curriculum firsthand. In February 2013, Excel Academy founding partners STAR Catholic School Division, Evergreen Catholic School Division and Newman Theological College welcomed Elk Island Catholic School Division as a new partner.

Expanding the partnership has helped to expand the resources to meet the increasing demands as more Catholic educational leaders look to deepen their faith and expand their leadership skills.

Committed to building strong, faith-filled leaders for the future, the EXCEL Academy partners continue to develop their curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of both current and

future participants. The program has been successful so far and the partners look forward to the continued growth and development of the program in the future. In the end, the students of our jurisdictions benefit most from this program. With well-trained leaders, everyone wins! ■

Kent Dixon is the manager of communications with St. Thomas Aquinas Roman (STAR) Catholic School Division. Dixon has more than 20 years of experience in marketing, communications and media relations, and has worked for property management companies, federal and provincial ministries, and a provincial not-for-profit organization. He holds an honours BA in English and a two-year public relations diploma.



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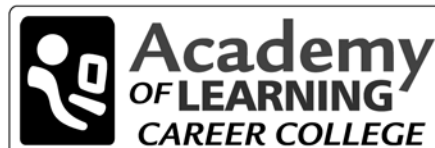
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Building a Collaborative Network

By Lorelie Lenaour and
Chris Smeaton

Teaching, for far too long, has been a solitary profession. The archaic system of bells, time constraints and individual classrooms has been well ingrained in our understanding of school. Fortunately, better research has provided educators with an understanding that the world of private practice is insufficient to meet the needs to all students.

Although learning communities and communities of practice must exist in schools, school divisions must make a concentrated effort to establish opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice within collaborative cultures. It is through reflective practice within a collaborative culture that teachers increase their own and, more importantly, a collective efficacy.

Teacher efficacy has been defined as, “the confidence teachers hold about their individual and collective capability to influence student learning.”¹ This confidence is a critical component to ensuring that teachers stay in the profession and experience positive job satisfaction.

The ability to build efficacy within oneself requires a desire to seek continuous improvement and hone one’s professional practice. While this can be accomplished in solitude, it is far more



Rhonda Brosz, Shelley Kirkvold and Gay Lagler participating in the Collaborative Peer Mentor Program.

beneficial to be done in a collaborative and safe environment where discomfort is expected and risk taking is encouraged.

The Collaborative Peer Mentor Program was initiated in Holy Spirit Catholic School Division in 2012-13. Its purpose is to build a collaborative educator network that allows teachers to grow in their understanding of exemplary instructional practice. The program is based on content designed to improve educators’ skills in

observing, reflecting and providing feedback to peers.

Over a six month period, program participants attend five face-to-face sessions, as well as engage in five classroom observations. In the publication, *A Great School for All – Transforming Education in Alberta*, autonomy in professional development and teacher leadership are two of the 12 dimensions for transforming education in Alberta.²



Factors such as teacher professional judgement, self-efficacy, collaborative professional autonomy, flexibility and innovation are identified as necessary for the successful transformation of education. Our Collaborative Peer Mentor Program provides participants with professional autonomy over the four essentials identified by Daniel Pink in his book, *Drive*.³

Participants have autonomy over task through self-selecting to engage in the program. They have autonomy over time and team through selecting who they will work with and scheduling the best times for partner classroom visits. They also have autonomy over technique through exposure to and individual choice in how classroom observations are conducted and feedback provided. This allows for a program that is tailored to the needs and interests of the group.

Participants have expressed interest in learning more about effective instructional strategies. Through examining the work of Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves, teachers were able to distinguish between a business capital view and a professional capital view.⁴

While the business view assumes that good teaching is technically simple, can be

easily mastered, should be performance data driven and is easily replaceable by online instruction, Fullan and Hargreaves assert that, "Teaching like a Pro...is about undertaking difficult, inspiring work; constantly trying to improve practices and working with all the collective might and ingenuity of professional colleagues to do so."⁵ In other words, good teaching is much bigger than a toolbox of tidy little strategies.

Another part of the program considered the perspective of cognitive coaching. Participants learned that coaching (or mentoring) peers was really not at all about coming to the rescue of a colleague with the perfect strategy that would improve the other's teaching. Cognitive coaching is much more about helping the other to look inward to find solutions and strategies to their questions.

In this model, one of the main outcomes is to modify teachers' capacities to modify themselves.⁶ Time was spent examining and discussing the importance of what Jim Knight refers to as the partnership approach.⁷ Key elements include equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis and reciprocity. The underlying idea is that the coach or mentor is on equal ground with the person on the receiving end.

Continued on page 30

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Continued from page 29

David Rock, in his book *Your Brain at Work*, raises an understanding about feedback that was important for us to consider. "Giving others feedback is often the first strategy people use to facilitate change. Yet, surprisingly, giving feedback is rarely the right way to create real change." In fact, "most feedback conversations revolve around people defending themselves."⁸ The real flaw of giving suggestions is that it impacts relative status.

When a person can come up with their own solutions, it enhances their own status as well as autonomy and certainty. With these foundational ideas in mind, participants became better prepared to explore and share effective instructional strategies and to engage in sensitive, professional and growth oriented observations, reflections and feedback to peers.

The relationship between professional learning and teacher efficacy is complex. Efficacy beliefs are both a product of experiences and a constructor of experiences since teachers with high self-efficacy approach professional learning experiences more positively and confidently.⁹

The sessions were designed to help the participants reflect deeply on their own professional practice as well as to form a strong trusting environment where participants could speak candidly with one another about their observations, and hopes and dreams for their students and classrooms.

With this focus on the building of a collaborative educator network, teachers were allowed to grow in their understanding of exemplary instruction. Informed by various models of coaching, teachers engaged in reflective practice and applied their learning

through peer to peer observations. The result was a highly motivated and efficacious group of teachers who demonstrated improved instructional practice which led to higher levels of student engagement and learning. ■

Lorelie Lemaour is the director of learning for Holy Spirit Catholic Schools.

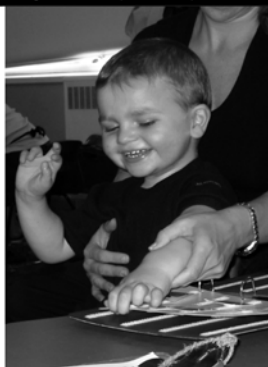
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Improving Instructional Leadership Builds Teacher Efficacy

By Greg Miller



Strong and vibrant instructional leadership helps develop a sense of efficacy for individual teachers and the entire school.

Today's school principals have a considerable workload. The following list includes (but is certainly not limited to) the vast array of responsibilities that compete for a principal's time every day:

1. Leadership and climate;
2. Programming;
3. School organization and staffing;
4. Professional development;
5. Staff supervision, growth and evaluation;
6. Student safety and supervision;
7. Student evaluation and reporting;
8. Communication and public relations;
9. Budgeting and buying; and
10. Health, safety and plant supervision.

The work involved in providing effective leadership in each of these areas has become even more complex as the education landscape continues to change.

How, then, do school principals find the time for instructional leadership? This is a task John Hattie refers to as “the most important work they do.” After all, district leaders expect their principals to supervise instruction and provide teachers with feedback that will allow them to both reflect on and grow in their practice, thus developing a greater sense of efficacy.

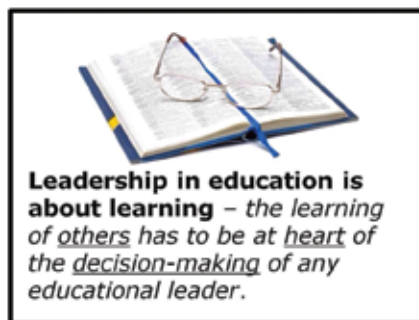
Dimension 4 of Alberta Education's Principal Quality Practice Guide states that principals are asked to “implement effective supervision and evaluation to ensure that

all teachers consistently meet the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard.”

Supporting our teachers in improving practice and strengthening their efficacy is a critical component of our profession and must be done with consistency and authenticity. Instructional supervision should take priority over other needs in the school. However, some principals will make it a priority. Some will not. And of those who do, some will be better at it than others. Hence, a collaborative and transparent approach works best.

At the beginning of the 2013-14 school year, Grande Prairie & District Catholic Schools embarked on a new approach to teacher growth and supervision that allowed school administrators to share and learn from their colleagues. The hope was to provide principals with the support needed to continue their growth in this professional arena. Along with the informal classroom visitations that had been taking place in district classrooms for years, we decided to make instructional supervision more formal and transparent, and in doing so build the capacity of our administrators. We set the following guidelines for ourselves before the start of the school year:

- Every teacher would receive at least 60 minutes of instructional supervision per month. The minutes could be broken up in a way that worked best for each school;
- All administrators, both principals and vice principals, would be involved in the supervision process;
- All visitations would be followed up with a face-to-face professional conversation, providing teachers with specific feedback;
- Completed visitations were noted and recorded to ensure everyone was staying on track;
- All principals were to submit their instructional supervision plans by the end of October;
- All supervision plans would be posted for sharing on our public Wiki at gpscdteachergrowth.wikispaces.com;
- The Wiki would be used as a central location to share resources, videos, articles and walk-through tools;



- Principals would write reflections highlighting challenges and successes in January and again in June, and post them on the Wiki;
- Time was scheduled inside principal meetings to share best practices, receive professional development, bring up concerns and grow capacity in instructional leadership; and
- Central office administration were to visit schools on a regular basis and spend time in classrooms providing quality feedback to teachers.

As the year progressed, three ideas emerged as high yield strategies for improving instructional leadership:

1. What gets scheduled gets done;
2. Professional conversation with fellow administrators that focuses on instructional supervision practices is invaluable; and
3. When ideas, reflections, practices and resources are shared in an open online space, everyone benefits and improves.

Most would agree that placing more focus on instructional supervision is a valuable use of time, but one powerful indicator of our success has come directly from our principals in their year-end reflections:

- “...our hope is to go deeper into the KSAs, with more reflection and deep professional conversations with colleagues as we grow and learn from each other;”
- “Next year I would like to have a two-part approach of principal and vice-principal supervision coupled with teacher-teacher observations;”
- “Teachers became more reflective as the year unfolded and started to invite me into their classrooms to observe a lesson that they were excited about;”
- “I have found that taking short snips

of video or pictures is great to start a discussion;”

- “Asking the students what they were learning and why, and then sharing these responses with the teacher was also a great way to discuss how the objectives are being valued or understood in student language. Changes the conversation from the activity to the objective;”
- “...has allowed us to celebrate the wonderful things that happen in our classrooms each day;”
- “We have found that we have shifted our focus as we moved through the school year. At the beginning of the year, we were focused on what the teacher was doing or teaching. Now, we are more concerned with what the students are learning. We ask the teachers if their students know what they are learning and why they are learning it;”
- “The most beneficial part of this process has been the face-to-face meetings with teachers after a visit. The conversation is crucial in supporting and guiding teacher growth;” and
- “Next year I would like to encourage teachers to visit each other. We have much expertise within our classrooms. We just need to find a way to tap into that resource.”

For the upcoming school year, our plan is to continue with the work we have started. As our administrators continue to grow in the area of instructional leadership, they have identified two future goals:

1. Partner with colleagues and conduct instructional supervision rounds together; and
2. Provide more opportunities for peer observations among teachers.

In Grande Prairie & District Catholic Schools, teacher efficacy is improving because instructional supervision is also improving. ■

Greg Miller is assistant superintendent of human resources for Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools. He holds a master of education (school administration) from Gonzaga University, where he completed action research titled, Shift 2.0 – Moving Toward the 21st Century School Library Media Centre.

Academic Wrap-Around Gives Individual Attention & Support to Student & Teacher

Michelle and
Trinity Savard.



Teacher Mitchell Van Dyk.

By Dawn Sugimoto

When Palliser Regional Schools started its Academic Wrap-Around pilot project 2012-13, teacher Mitchell Van Dyk did not hesitate to volunteer for the opportunity to access central office resources and expertise to support a struggling student.

He also had no hesitation about which student to bring to the table.

“Trinity was a student who, in looking through her file, showed almost no growth in the previous year at a different school in her reading, and was significantly below where her peers were. But she was keen to read and she really wanted to learn,” says Van Dyk. “Being a Grade 6 teacher, teaching early literacy was not my expertise. It really helped me

learn how to teach reading to a beginning reader.”

Van Dyk had adopted a balanced literacy program in his classroom with students reading aloud, in groups or guided by him, in addition to reading silently by themselves.

Trinity took part in this literacy instruction with the rest of the class, but also had access to one-on-one time with her teacher, the principal and an early literacy support worker. Palliser’s literacy specialist, Connie Adserballe, helped Van Dyk identify specific gaps in Trinity’s reading skills using Fountas and Pinnell benchmark and additional assessment tools. They used this information to determine key strategies to improve reading fluency and comprehension. An iPod and apps identified by Palliser’s technology integration specialist, Rocky Wilson, helped Trinity work on her sounding out of words.

“Through the wrap-around services (project), I gained a lot of experience on how to teach somebody like Trinity,” says Van Dyk. “Just knowing that there’s all these different resources available to us and all we need to do is ask, not only did it help last year, but it’s been valuable to me this year as well.”

Trinity described often feeling lost in class when reading was required. She says if she did not understand written instructions,

she’d often just sit quietly, waiting for class to end.

“I didn’t really know what to do,” says Trinity. “I was stuck on words. I didn’t get a lot of big words.”

Her coping mechanism was to ignore the words she got wrong or could not comprehend. That changed when she joined Van Dyk’s class at Dorothy Dalgliesh School in Picture Butte in October 2012.

“I liked having someone help me through, without having just to forget about it, pretend that word doesn’t exist. I actually solved it out and found out the word,” she says. “Mr. Van Dyk always pulled children aside and read with them and if you did a word wrong, he would say it and then he would ask us to say sound it out and say it in our head and then say it out loud, say it in our head and say it out loud again.”

It is all part of the balanced literacy framework. The teacher demonstrates a strategy, gives students opportunity to practice together, then guides them individually, until the student is able to use the strategy independently.

“The tears became a lot less frequent and the smiles came along as the year went,” says Van Dyk. “A lot of what held Trinity back was her reading, and what went along with that was her writing as well.”

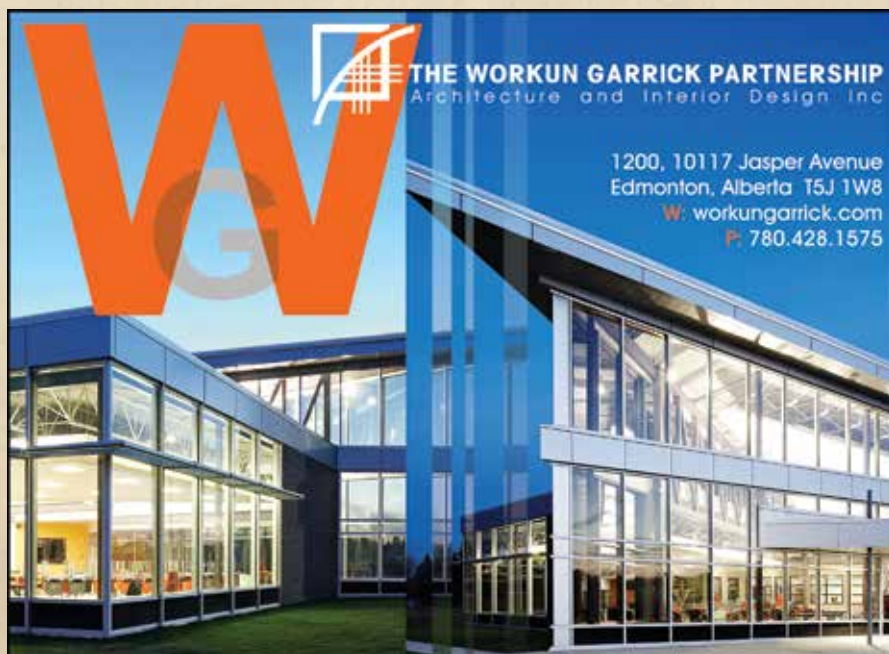
Trinity’s mom, Michelle Savard, says she didn’t know what they were doing at her daughter’s new school, but she knew whatever it was, it was working.


“Her overall confidence, a mom likes to see that,” she says. “She would start talking about the story she was reading. Before, she wouldn’t but I didn’t know she didn’t know the details. She could tell you the main characters and the gist of it, but now she could tell me, ‘In this chapter, this happened.’”

Savard, an avid reader whose home is filled with books, says she knew her daughter had a reading problem but she did not know how to help. She says she kept hoping Trinity would have an epiphany and discover a love of reading others in the family had.

For Palliser literacy specialist, Adserballe, it is a myth that is tough to shake. Reading is not a natural process, like oral speech, that develops in all children over time. Children aren’t born readers or non-readers. It is a learned series of skills. For kids who have not learned how, reading is a painful, frustrating process and that lack of skill is often masked behind a defensive posture of “I don’t like reading.”

In 2013-2014, the Academic Wrap-Around team worked with and assessed the reading levels of 19 students. All but one of





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the students improved by at least one reading level. Two of the students leapt up by five reading levels with the team's support.

Palliser Superintendent Kevin Gietz says that in addition to helping those individual students, the team's work has a domino effect by giving the teacher strategies and tools that are beneficial to other students and can be shared with other teachers in the school. It's building capacity across the system to support learning.

Adserballe said Trinity's story underscores the importance of building expertise in teachers across Palliser in literacy instruction to ensure students who are struggling get the help they need. Palliser has added a second full-time literacy specialist, Bev Smith, to the team this year to continue the division's literacy improvement efforts.

Reading assessments show Trinity improved by five reading levels in a matter of months, progress typically achieved over the course of nearly two years. While this success story was a team effort, for Trinity, it was her classroom teacher who made the difference.

"He took time with me and he had patience," says Trinity. "It was like going on a field trip. He showed me the way there. My other teachers they brought me a little bit and went back without me. So I kind of got stuck."

Trinity says that at one point, she thanked Van Dyk "for not giving up on me because all my other teachers did."

"She was so happy that people believed in her and that she'd never really seen that before," Van Dyk recalls, noting there's still work for Trinity to do. "That was really exciting. I think that's what teaching is all about."

"It was more than just me, even though she didn't even realize the effect our literacy coach or other people had on her...It was all part of the bigger picture and we were all working together."

"It was a pretty special moment." ■

Dawn Sugimoto is the communications officer for Palliser Regional Schools, a division serving about 7,000 students in southern Alberta.



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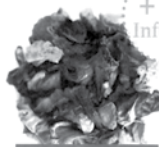


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Healthy People, Healthy Workplace News



The Happy Factor

The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is a health and welfare trust governed by ten Trustees—five from the Alberta Teachers' Association and five from the Alberta School Boards Association. ASEBP offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for over 54,000 covered members in almost 60 school jurisdictions across the province. Working with the education sector has provided many insights and opportunities for growth that they are pleased to share in their regular column in The CASS Connection.

By Jennifer Carson, BBA

We may think the saying, “laughter is the best medicine” is simply an old cliché, but before you read one more line of this article, pause and ask yourself: “Am I happy in my job?”

Now, read on.

It was noted in a recent *About Health* article that there is “ample evidence that unhappiness—depression, anxiety, and stress, for example—are also linked to poorer health outcomes.”¹

“A vast scientific literature has detailed how negative emotions harm the body. Serious, sustained stress or fear can alter biological systems in a way that, over time, adds up to ‘wear and tear’ and, eventually, illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.”²

Although many believe the health and happiness of employees is the individual’s responsibility, it is in fact a shared responsibility between the employee and employer. And since the impact of employee health in the school system is so far-reaching, we must address it.



ASEBP's Health Continuum.

Health is a complex subject. We know there are many facets of health—physical, mental, financial, workplace and situational—to consider. And, in turn, there are many factors that can affect an individual’s health, such as a physical injury, unexpected costs that put a strain on personal finances, marital trouble or even too many deadlines to meet at work.

This may seem overwhelming, but it really comes down to whether an individual is happy or not. To help define

what happiness is, we can just take a look at popular culture’s recent past.

The song “Happy” by Pharrell Williams was nominated for an Academy Award in the best original song category this year. We are all familiar with this jazzy tune—the bouncy music and positive lyrics bring a smile to most, and maybe even gets you dancing in your seat. You cannot help but feel a bit of delight, a spark of joy—in other words, you feel happy!



If we translate this happy feeling to your workplace, your employees and even your role, where would each rank on a scale of one (unhappy) to ten (happy)?

Happier employees lead to a more effective school system. If employees are happy, they are more likely to be in good physical health. Since student, teacher, school and school jurisdiction health are all intertwined, focusing on employee health and happiness really does lead to comprehensive school health.

I recently attended Benefits Canada's "Healthy Outcomes" conference where this concept of happy employees was discussed. A happy employee—one who has autonomy, mastery and purpose—is a motivated employee. And motivated, happy employees contribute to a healthy workplace.

ASEBP's Health Continuum (see page 36) shows the range of health that an individual, or an organization, can experience. The factors we have discussed all impact where an individual may be on this continuum at a point in time.

The Sanofi Canada Healthcare Survey 2014, a well-respected annual national survey, polled both plan sponsors and members. It showed some interesting trends regarding health in the workplace.

"More plan sponsors are also recognizing that a healthy workforce is a more productive workforce," and "Plan sponsors may be overestimating the quality of their work environment: while 90 per cent believe that their corporate culture and environment encourage wellness among employees, a relatively modest majority—60 per cent—of employees feel the same way."³

Sanofi's results are consistent with the regular ASEBP customer satisfaction survey; the most recent was in mid-2013 and included questions about leaders and workplace health. According to our members, who are also your employees, the extent to which leaders in the workplace promote healthy individuals and workplaces has declined over the past three years. Scores around 62 per cent signified that efforts promoting healthy individuals and workplaces were far from universal.

These results made us question if there is more emphasis and expectation around

what leaders *should* be doing, given a more public focus on workplace wellness, as opposed to a decline in what they are *currently* doing.

All of this boils down to one simple question that each individual can ask themselves: Am I happy? Like Williams sings, "Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth." I know that I will be clapping. What about you? ■

Jennifer Carson is the Chief Executive Officer of ASEBP and has worked in the health and benefits industry for more than 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. For 2014, ASEBP was named one of Alberta's Top 65 Employers and also won the 2014 Premier's Award of Distinction for Healthy Workplaces.

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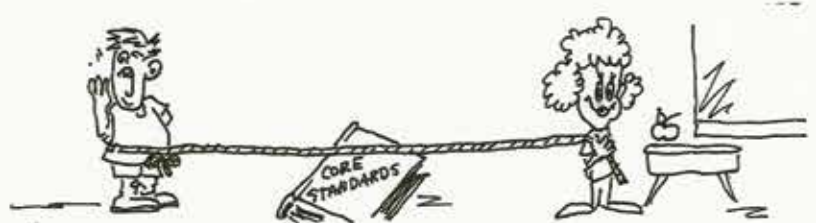
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