

Volume 9, Issue 2

the CASS CONNECTION

Fall 2013

The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents

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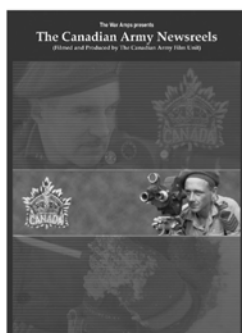
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Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable Jeff Johnson | Minister of Education

Our continued collaboration is also essential as we evaluate the response from our public consultations and finalize the work of the *Education Act*. Our next step is to review and revise the education regulations that correspond with the *Education Act*.

This fall, students and staff returned to school after a summer like no other. I want to thank all Albertans who have done so much and continue to work on behalf of communities recovering from the devastating floods that affected many parts of our province.

While the flood response has been a priority, Alberta Education is also continuing on the path of transformation through the vision of *Inspiring Education*. To this end, your input on a number of initiatives has been significant. This includes your leadership in helping to shape Budget 2013 so that we manage enrolment growth while maintaining our focus on priorities, such as class size and inclusive education, as well as working with Alberta Education and school boards on a negotiated agreement with teachers.

Our continued collaboration is also essential as we evaluate the response from our public consultations and finalize the work of the *Education Act*. Our next step is to review and revise the education regulations that correspond with the *Education Act*. The regulatory review involves consultations to ensure that regulations improve the education system and put students first. To participate, please visit <http://ideas.education.alberta.ca/engage/>.

Alberta Education is also asking Albertans for input on the teaching profession. The Task Force for Teaching Excellence is looking at ways to ensure every teacher continues to improve and evolve their teaching practice to provide kids with the best

learning opportunities possible. They are also examining ways that government can better support excellence in the teaching profession. Please visit: <https://legerweb.com/TeachingExcellence/> to register to participate.

We are also pleased to have made several recent announcements that further reflect our ongoing focus on enabling students to achieve success as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit. During the CASS Summer Conferences, Alberta Education staff further highlighted these and other initiatives as tangible steps we have taken toward realizing the learning outcomes envisioned through *Inspiring Education*.

Beginning this fall, more than 100 high schools removed the 25-hour requirement for face-to-face instruction, allowing students to focus on other curriculum needs and access additional teacher supports during the school day.

The transition to online diploma exams will also provide students with more flexibility by increasing opportunities to write the exams. The new format will allow students to more effectively demonstrate skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking and communication. Piloting of electronic diploma exams is scheduled to begin in fall 2014, with all diploma exam sessions to be offered electronically by fall 2017.

And, Provincial Achievement Tests are being replaced by a series of new computer-based tests known as Student

Learning Assessments (SLAs). The new tests maintain a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, but will also help educators and parents understand how well students demonstrate competencies such as creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving. Once developed, the tests will be administered at the start of Grades 3, 6 and 9, enabling parents and teachers to track a child's strengths or areas needing improvement over the course of the school year to support greater personalized learning.

Alberta Education will continue to work with CASS and other partners to develop and test the SLA process. Grade 3 students will be first to write the new assessments, with pilots starting in September 2014. Full implementation for Grade 3 is expected by September 2015 and pilots for Grades 6 and 9 are scheduled to begin in 2015 and 2016, respectively.

We are also proud of our partnership with CASS in implementing the Provincial Dual Credit Strategy. This \$11 million initiative, supported and funded by the ministries of Education, Enterprise and Advanced Education and Human Services, will serve as a catalyst for schools, publicly funded post-secondary institutions and businesses to grow and expand dual credit opportunities across the province.

Once again, thank you for your continued efforts in helping to ensure our education system is centred on and responsive to the needs of today's learners. ■





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President's Message

Larry W. Jacobs, PhD.

President | College of Alberta School Superintendents

As all of us are aware, the Ministry of Education is seeking to implement the directions contemplated in the *Inspiring Education* document. Part of that process will be a “reaching out” phase that allows all stakeholders to have input into the strategic design that will impact the 21st Century learning environments that are envisioned for all of our students. There is no question that the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) will be recognized as a powerful contributor to that process and direction. Our membership has the research background and the implementation strategies that will ensure that the goals are designed in a workable fashion, sustained throughout

the province and monitored in an appropriate manner.

To that end, the Executive of CASS has engaged in a process that will allow our membership to redefine our central purpose relative to the Ministries’ goal and put us in a position to consider various strategies that will assist the *Inspiring Education* directions. This is no small task. As mentioned, this will require that we analyze the potential impact of the proposed directions for education in the province, develop forums that will build consensus around the most effective strategies for implementation and design accountability frameworks that will ensure the direction is maintained throughout the province.

In accord with that sentiment, our executive is re-devising the Issues Forum to ensure that we allow ourselves the opportunity to consider the directions of the Ministry and the horizon concerns that will impact education in the years ahead. This focus will allow us to work more closely with the Ministry, propose strategic plans, be partners in the implementation phase and play a significant role in the accountability and monitoring phases of our revised educational system.

This will be an exciting new direction for CASS and I trust that all of us will see this as a fulfillment of the core purpose of our organization and validate the skills and expertise that we have developed in our roles as system leaders. ■

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Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

That CASS was invited by the provincial government to coordinate this exciting opportunity for students is a tribute to the work each of the CASS members does in his / her community, gaining the trust and respect of all branches of government.

I am very excited about the opportunity to serve the members of the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) as the new Executive Director. I believe that we are embarking on very exciting times in education and also believe that CASS, as a collective of individual professionals, has the expertise and background to provide guidance and support for all members and to the Ministry.

I want to thank Kath Rhyason, who retired as Executive Director this past July, for the past five years of leadership to CASS and for 40 years of dedication to education in our province. The fact that CASS is so well positioned to lead the positive changes that will be taking place in education in Alberta is a testimony to Kath's vision and guidance. I know that I speak for all CASS members when I wish her a long and fulfilling retirement.

During my career, I have been blessed to work with outstanding people in four different jurisdictions. In addition, as a CASS member for the past 10 years, I have had the opportunity to meet education leaders from across the province and I have always appreciated the willingness to share ideas and provide assistance to colleagues that school system leaders have demonstrated on an ongoing basis; truly the hallmark of servant leadership.

In order for CASS members to know a little about their new Executive Director, I very briefly share my career history. I began my teaching and administration career at Lamont High School, which is now part of Elk Island Public Schools. My first principal's position was at Hilltop High School

in Whitecourt (now Northern Gateways Public Schools) and I subsequently moved to Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School in Red Deer as a vice principal and then principal before serving as Deputy Superintendent with Red Deer Public School District.

The last seven years I had the privilege of being the Superintendent for Lethbridge School District. While I was in Red Deer I had the opportunity to teach a course to beginning Education students at Red Deer College and graduate level courses through City University. I also consider myself fortunate to have had the chance to work in all corners of our province during the summers of my university days; from Fort Vermillion to north of Fort McMurray to the area south of Hanna.

My goal as Executive Director is to provide support for the provincial CASS Board and the executive teams in each of the five zones in the province. Each of the people who step forward to accept such a role, whether it be at a zone or provincial level, are to be commended given the hectic schedules all CASS members have supporting their individual jurisdictions.

As Executive Director I also want to assist CASS Director of Leadership Learning, Paulette Hanna, as much as possible with the work she does coordinating the Professional Learning and Mentorship programs for CASS members. Given that 14 of 61 jurisdictions in Alberta have new Superintendents this year (12 of whom are in their first year as a superintendent in our province), the breadth of the programs that Paulette oversees is immense.

I am excited to work with Debbie Vance, the CASS Coordinator for the Provincial Dual Credit Strategy initiative as well as the Dual Credit Steering Committee and the Dual Credit Tri-Ministry Team. That CASS was invited by the provincial government to coordinate this exciting opportunity for students is a tribute to the work each of the CASS members does in his / her community, gaining the trust and respect of all branches of government.

From my previous roles I know the dedication that each member of Alberta Education's staff brings to the plate every day. CASS is excited to work with and support our new Deputy Minister, Greg Bass, and his entire team.

Finally, and most importantly, I intend to provide whatever service I can to the CASS membership to enable each of you to be as informed and successful in your respective roles as possible.

I close with a thank you to all the sponsors featured in this publication; your support is truly appreciated and valued and enables us to share knowledge across our province and with our sister organizations in Canada.

Finally, a sincere thank you to all the contributors for this edition of *The CASS Connection*. Your willingness to share the stories from your respective jurisdictions enables all of us to learn and to grow as we strive to realize the CASS Mission Statement, to be, "the voice of system education leaders, providing leadership, expertise, and advocacy to improve, promote, and champion student success."



Engaging the Low German-speaking Mennonite Community in Southern Alberta

By Dr. Cheryl Gilmore

Flexibility, cultural sensitivity and community engagement are key strategies employed by four Southern Alberta rural jurisdictions in the provision of educational services to children who are part of a unique culture that traditionally avoids formal public education.

Grasslands Regional Division No 6, Horizon School Division No. 67, Palliser Regional Schools, and Prairie Rose School Division #8 began encouraging families from the Low German-speaking Mennonite population to put their children into school by paying close attention at the grass roots level. Although programs that accommodate the population vary among the four districts, listening to the community and responding positively and sensitively to cultural needs is part of all the jurisdictions making progress in getting the youth into school.

A unique population in rural Southern Alberta, the Low German-speaking Mennonite people have been returning to Canada for a number of years as “Canadian Citizens Born Abroad.” The population, sometimes referred to as “Kandier” Mennonites, left Canada in the 1920s because the *Manitoba School Act* requiring school attendance and mandatory curriculum interfered with what the group believed as their fundamental

right to educate their own children. The children and grandchildren of those who left to Mexico have been returning for approximately 20 years.

The rate of return has increased recently as a reaction to the escalated violence in Mexico as well as need for employment and economic viability. It is estimated that there are over 20,000 members of this population living in rural Southern Alberta, and with large families, the population is expected to increase quickly.

Ingrained in their culture and their history as Canadians, the group is traditionally opposed to formal education. The four jurisdictions have been proactive in developing programs to accommodate their cultural integrity and have made some progress in getting children to come to school. The first step in getting students to school was developing a connection with the community. The connection needed to be one built on trust and genuine desire to listen to what the community felt would be important in the education of their children.

The adult population is approximately 80 per cent illiterate in their first language and very few have reading and writing levels of literacy in English. The idea of formal meetings for input would only serve to chase the parents away.

For the most part, jurisdictions started with informal coffee meetings that were structured to allow for open conversation and input. Availability of child care was important for getting the women to attend and timing before the busy agricultural season was important for getting the men to attend. The parents who attended expressed the importance of keeping their children separate from secular influence, having opportunity for some language and religious instruction, respecting modesty and a non-competitive approach in physical education, and respecting perspectives on certain topics in science and sexual health instruction.

In an effort to build a program that reflected what was expressed as important by the community, Horizon School Division launched a project that provided a “dual tract” structure. The programs were developed within two elementary schools located in communities with a large percentage of the population.

Dual tract meant that the parents could choose to put their children in a multi-graded classroom context that respected the culture and requests of the parents regarding some religious and language instruction, as well as sensitivity to areas of curriculum identified in the meetings. At the same

Secondary programs focus on school to work transitions.



A dual tract structure has been successful in attracting families to public schools.

time, the students are part of a larger school community with the other students and have opportunity to get to know the other children in the school community through school activities and some combined classes.

The dual tract structure has been successful in attracting families to public schools. It was somewhat of a slow start with a number of families enrolling only after the schools provided what was promised. The program expanded to other schools and classrooms once trust was built among the parents.

By 2012, the Low German-speaking Mennonite students comprise approximately 35 per cent of Horizon's grade three population. When combined with the Hutterite Colony numbers, Horizon has over 50 per cent English Second Language students at the Grade 3 level. Schools have worked hard to provide programs that respect culture and provide

exemplary ESL instruction that focuses on literacy development.

Once in school, one of the challenges is the age at which the students traditionally leave to fulfill family obligations or enter the world of work. It is difficult to get students to stay in school past the age of 12 or 13. The traditional family structure is to have the children assist with work and contribute to the family income. Many of the children find employment in the agricultural or service industry.

To encourage school attendance for secondary age students, Horizon established some Outreach programs that accommodate work schedules and demands of home life. The programs have proven to be effective and some students have graduated with high school diplomas. Although few in numbers, the graduates serve as role models to other youth who choose to leave school or stay non-attenders.

The Outreach context also provides the flexibility to address student learning needs regardless of the level of literacy they have when entering the program. For example, the programs have enrolled students at the age of 15 and above who have limited or no education and limited or no level of literacy. The secondary level programs have grown as more youth and their parents recognize the impact secondary education and literacy can have on employment opportunity. The secondary programs also focus heavily on school to work transitions and expose students to opportunities that programs such as the Registered Apprenticeship Program can provide.

Grasslands, Palliser and Prairie Rose offer similar programs with dual tract or combined opportunities where parents can choose to have their children in a context that reflects what is desired with respect to

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culture. Challenges are met with programs that address literacy, variable school experiences among the students and school to work transition.

Palliser Regional Schools structured program delivery in schools opened specifically for the Low German-speaking population. Schools were established in Coaldale, Barons and Carmangay, where there are a large number of students from this population. The schools have been very successful in attracting students and more secondary students are making their way to graduation.

For most of the jurisdictions, the difficult task of connecting with families directly is met by Low German-speaking liaison workers. Having someone who understands the culture, speaks the language and is able to link families with needed services as well as school is a critical piece.

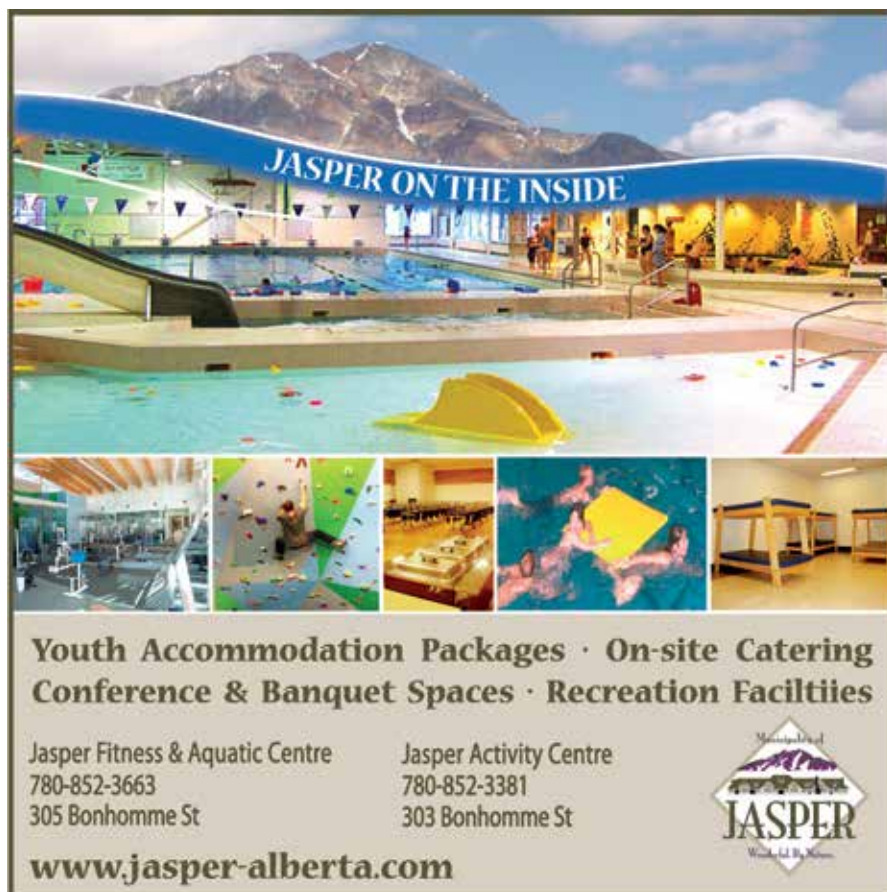
Whatever the innovative and flexible delivery options the jurisdictions have devised, educating the majority of the children and youth from this population remains a challenge. Many children remain out of school or undereducated. Some claim

to be home schooling, others work and avoid school. Although the jurisdictions have been successful in attracting many students over the past number of years, there are hundreds of students who are not engaged in an education program.

As the population increases in rural Southern Alberta, the lack of education for the children is a growing concern. The population is challenged socially and economically, and many youth are starting to run into difficulty. Service agencies, Health, Child and Family Services, and police services are becoming increasingly alarmed, and it is becoming difficult to meet the demands of the growing population.

This past spring, Alberta Education hosted some round table discussions to explore the issues associated with educating the children from this population. A foundation was built for some potential projects that use an integrated approach to meeting the needs of the families and children. The four jurisdictions are hopeful that there will be further development and the ideas will come to fruition with Alberta Education moving forward to work with the jurisdictions and other agencies using a comprehensive, cross-ministry approach. As well, school authorities, local government, and service providers are hopeful that change can be furthered through increased accountability in all education program choices, whether it be public school, private school, or home education. ■

Cheryl Gilmore is the former Superintendent of Horizon School Division, and current Superintendent of Lethbridge School District.



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Making a Commitment to Listen, Learn and Understand:



Engaging Alberta's Hutterite Community

By Ken Sommerfeldt

The Hutterites are diligent determined people who have been key contributors to the agricultural sector of Alberta for nearly a century. The education partnership between the colony and the public school jurisdiction is healthy and of necessity, requires consistent engagement and communication on key educational matters. More recently, efforts by Alberta Education, system leaders and Colony Elder's have brought clarity to the educational landscape provincially as it relates to the future of education "on the colony." The Westwind School Division (at last count) has more colony schools than any other jurisdiction in the province, at 19 of nearly 180 colonies provincially.

The Hutterites, a communal religious

people with roots in Eastern Europe, have been members of Alberta society since 1918 and are an important part of the agricultural foundation to our economy. Many Albertans have likely never visited a Hutterite colony and may not have an understanding of their neighbours, their values, work ethic and productive spirit. Educationally, school begins for Hutterite children typically one hour before public (English) school each day where, beginning at age five, they are taught lessons in their native German by the German teacher, a prestigious position appointed by the colony Elders. English school then begins, where the Alberta curriculum is provided to colony students by certified Alberta teachers who travel to the colony school, which is

provided by the colony. At the end of the school day, Hutterite students then spend another hour in German school before they attend to chores, have supper and attend a nightly religious worship service with all the colony members.

In my role as district administrator, I have visited each of our 19 colonies many times to observe the teaching and learning in the school, and also to communicate and engage in important conversation with the German teacher, who is our liaison with the colony, as well as the Minister, who provides significant spiritual leadership in the colony. It is a heart-warming experience to hear the students sing with passion and to attend Christmas programs where the entire colony comes to celebrate not only the festive

This opportunity for engagement and dialogue forged a partnership that was able to navigate through an important matter that would have far reaching effects to the education of future colony students.


season but the learning and development of their rising generation.

Two years ago, when the new *Education Act* was in its early stages of development, the mandatory age of attendance at school was increased to 17. A long-standing tradition and understanding allowed Hutterite children to be excused from public school at age 15, at which time they began their career training on the colony under the supervision of the experts in the various fields of labour, both agricultural and domestic. The proposed change in legislation was seen as a departure from the unwritten understanding that was in place between the colonies and the local school districts, and was unacceptable to the colony Elders.



On the colony, education did not end for students when they walked out of the school at age 15. In many respects, it was just beginning. This understanding was not clear to policy makers and legislators at the time, and this prompted deep conversation and interest at the district level as it was made clear by the colony Elder's that they were determined to oppose this change to the *Education Act*, and consider other educational options if some concessions were not made by the department.

The education provided on the colony has a rich history and has served both the colony and the province well for nearly 100 years. The support of parents, colony leaders and the children is well known to those who have visited a colony school. There is an excellent rapport and understanding of the purpose of education and Hutterite children are motivated to do well. It has been my experience that Hutterite children consume the local newspapers and other publications that are available to them. They love to read! Learning is very important to them and generating student motivation is not a challenge to colony teachers.

During the growing season, the children are required to work in the garden (often as much as seven acres of irrigated vegetable crops) in addition to their studies. Make no mistake, life for a young adolescent on the colony is not one filled with hanging out at the mall, or the arcade, or spending hours in front of the TV or passing levels on a video game. These kids are engaged



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in the activities that provide self-reliance for themselves and all the members of their colony, which is usually between 80 and 160 people.

At this time of concern, a provincial committee under the leadership of Mr. Larry Albrecht was struck to research and report back to the Minister of Education on the issues surrounding the mandatory age of 17 for colony students. The committee included ministers and leaders representing the Hutterite colonies, district superintendents, Alberta Education personnel, and teachers from colony schools. This opportunity for engagement and dialogue forged a partnership that was able to navigate through an important matter that would have far reaching effects to the education of future colony students.

From these meetings, came the opportunity to visit colonies and see first hand the training and education that 15 to 17 year old boys and girls were receiving in the colony structure of apprenticeship. We visited the milking barns, the machine shop, the carpentry shop, the concrete plant and the chicken and hog barns. In these locations, we could clearly observe the training that the boys were receiving in the work that sustains the colony as well as providing valuable commodities to the economy.

Next we visited the commercial kitchen and the laundry and sewing facilities, where the girls of similar age are taught “on the

job” to understand the efforts of menu planning and preparation for the meals that are served in one place at one time to all colony members, three times each day. The structure and organization of the colony system was made manifest to the visitors in an open and transparent manner. They opened their colonies to us to display the work that, in part, defines these disciplined and dedicated people.

Then a meeting with the colony Elders from about 30 different colonies was held, where deep concerns about the change in mandatory age for attendance were presented to the Alberta Education visitors. It was made clear that the way of life on the colony is not about education or economics, but about religious values and the cultural norms that are perpetuated through the structure and system that has developed among them.

An appeal by the colony Elders was made to the representatives of Alberta Education to acknowledge and recognize the training and work done by students on the colony between age 15 and 17 as being commensurate with the type of training received by students in public schools in the area of career and technology studies.

From this and other meetings that would follow, subsequent visits to colonies occurred and further research was conducted to determine the credentials that could be achieved by colony students and

recognized by Alberta Education to qualify for the educational requirements of the new *Act*.

As a participant in this process, it is clear to me that policy makers and legislators will produce more effective policy and legislation when the time is invested in appropriate engagement with those affected by the legislation. It was a valuable experience to participate in this process for several reasons. Growing up in Southern Alberta, I had meaningful relationships with the Hutterite people, who I respected. Having the opportunity to speak with MLAs and government officials about the potential effect of the new *Education Act* on Hutterite Education was important in connecting the right people in this conversation. The leadership of Alberta Education representative Larry Albrecht was masterful in synthesizing the data and perspectives and communicating effectively between the colonies and the department.

The Hutterites are peaceful, faithful, diligent people. The effective relationship between the colonies and the local jurisdictions in education is positive, generative and fruitful. When we make the commitment to engage with our communities on important matters, effective and purposeful directions come of those efforts. ■

Ken Sommerfeldt is Superintendent of Schools, Westwind School Division # 74.

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Strategies to Welcome Students... All Students

*By Sandy Whitten,
Michelle Britt and
Paul Stewart, EdD*

The classrooms that we see today are becoming more diverse and require educators to redefine expectations and revisit teaching practices. To welcome all students from various cultures and backgrounds with differing beliefs, languages, experiences and capabilities, schools need to adopt a model of inclusion in which all students are provided with the supports that they need to learn and be successful. Families and the community must be included in the education process. As schools strive to establish learning communities based on the belief that all students are capable of learning and valued for their differences, we need to reflect on the structures and processes that currently exist within our schools.

Living Waters Catholic Schools and Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools meet the needs of students by building positive relationships with students and families. The importance of developing an environment, in which every member is accepted,

appreciated and celebrated, is even more critical today as we welcome an increasing number of culturally diverse families into our communities and schools as well as a broader range of student abilities and capabilities. The schools encourage a high level of involvement within the school as well as host information sessions about high interest topics and family fun nights. Parents are an important part of the school family and contribute greatly to a faith-filled, safe and caring, inclusive environment.

Creating inclusive classrooms is a complex task when developing relationships with students and creating an environment where students and families feel like they belong and want to celebrate their differences; it emphasizes the importance of the work of teachers in the classrooms. Building positive relationships within the school community is one of the most important factors in developing an inclusive culture.

Red Deer Catholic schools have worked with community partners, including Red Deer College and Red Deer Public schools, in running a summer reading college for Grade 2 students who are struggling with reading. Students were selected by need and then participated in a four week reading program at Red Deer College. At the other end of the schooling spectrum, Red Deer Catholic is again working with Red Deer College and Careers the Next Generation with a dual credit program so students can get high school credits leading towards high school graduation and credit for college



courses taken so college credentials become more accessible.

Authentic and purposeful instruction is also key to inclusion. Teaching a curriculum that is relevant and rigorous provides students with valuable opportunities for success in school and throughout the future. In addition, using innovative and creative ways of teaching by incorporating differentiation techniques and technology also contribute towards creating inclusive and dynamic classrooms. These methods of instruction allow teachers to reach all students by providing a variety of engaging activities regardless of student abilities.

Project Based Learning (PBL) in Red Deer Catholic classrooms has included working with people in the community and various organizations. Students in Grades 3 to 9 have participated in PBL and a group of middle school students won a provincial award from the Caring For Our Watersheds education program, sponsored by Agrium. Other student projects have involved working with Nova Chemicals Corporation, city businesses, parents and even school administration from other division schools.

To create an inclusive setting in which each student is provided with the supports that they need, teachers must take the time to get to know their students both personally and academically. Being able to identify

individual student strengths, challenges, concerns and interests, allows teachers to discover what is important to the student and their learning. Living Waters teachers feel that learner profiles provide them with valuable information to personalize learning.

In an effort to create inclusive school cultures, Living Waters and Red Deer Catholic teachers ensure that students are engaged in relevant activities based on real-life experiences. Students consider these activities important and are more willing to participate in the learning process. Involving community members, including seniors, people with developmental disabilities (PDD) and others in gardening, reading with elementary students and other volunteer activities, provide students a wider experience in learning.

A volunteer reads with two young students.



Developing a culturally responsive environment is not easy but worth the effort. Both Red Deer Catholic and Living Waters teachers help students see new things. French Immersion students showcase French culture highlighting Franco-phone dancing, singing and foods. Japanese

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interns also share their culture, language and cuisine. Students welcome these events and also celebrate other cultures and languages too. First Nations families in Living Waters are invited into the school to make a traditional dream catcher with the students, perform traditional dances, and show other skills to highlight parts of their culture and activities that other students may not know about. Red Deer Catholic schools take pride in activities that recognize National Aboriginal Day that involves students, families and guests.

Including families is a great way to celebrate diversity but to also cultivate parent support, input and to use the many talents of parents to engage students in their learning and promote collaboration. There is a positive correlation between parent involvement and student achievement, showing active parent involvement leads to increases in student achievement. In order to get to know families, instructional leaders must be active in the community—learning about the various opportunities the community has to offer.

At the beginning of the year, Living Waters school administration teams hold a volunteer night, inviting all families to attend. Information about the school is shared along with volunteer opportunities and the impact parent involvement has on student achievement. The roles and responsibilities of a volunteer are explained to parents and then parents are asked to sign up to volunteer. There is a large bulletin board where parents sign up, with a list of volunteer opportunities that include being a mentor, reading buddy and volunteering for track and field. Getting volunteers is not always easy but when instructional leaders use the right strategies, students and parents see the benefits of parental participation.

In order to create inclusive cultures within schools and classrooms, educators must have access to authentic professional development. If we expect our teachers to use effective strategies to create an environment in which all students can learn at their own level, regardless of their background, we need to provide the supports necessary for such learning. Online learning through webinars and virtual classrooms, and sites such as Twitter, is easily accessible and offers teachers a multitude of opportunities to expand their knowledge of inclusion practices. Many Red Deer Catholic and Living Waters teachers have websites to keep students and parents informed about classroom activities. Both divisions also maintain Facebook pages and issue regular tweets about divisional activities.

In Catholic schools in Alberta, teachers are creating opportunities to help teachers and students interact and use their gifts in a natural way. Educators connect with students and their families in the classroom and outside of school. Teachers in Living Waters and Red Deer Catholic jurisdictions exemplify meeting the needs of individual students and building positive relationships with students, their families and the community. ■

Sandy Whitten is Assistant Principal, Living Waters Catholic Schools. Michelle Britt is Inclusive Education Coordinator, Living Waters Catholic Schools. Paul Stewart, EdD, is Associate Superintendent, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools.



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Engaging First Nation Communities: Moving from “Us and Them” to “We and Our”

By Ellie Elliott and Stephen Harris

Livingstone Range is a rural school division located in the southwest corner of Alberta, spanning communities between Nanton in the north and Crowsnest Pass in the west. Livingstone Range School Division (LRSD) is located in Blackfoot Territory and borders both the Peigan and Blood reserves. Students from both reserves attend Livingstone Range schools in Pincher Creek and Fort Macleod.

During each of the past planning cycles, Livingstone Range trustees, staff and parents reviewed data to determine the division's priorities. Based on the data, First Nation student success and achievement was identified as one of the board's three priorities in its Three Year Education Plan.

The board's goal, *Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students*, includes outcomes, measures and strategies. Following are the seven identified outcomes:

1. FNMI students are engaged in their learning, resulting in improved achievement;
2. FNMI students have a strong sense of belonging and identity;
3. First Nation parents have a strong sense of belonging and are empowered to be involved in decisions regarding their child and their school;
4. Social and emotional supports are in place that meet the unique needs of First Nation students;
5. LRSD staff have a strong understanding of Blackfoot culture and their First Nation students;
6. Teachers and schools communicate effectively with their First Nation students and families; and

7. LRSD, Kainai (KBE) and Piikani (PBOE) School Boards will work collaboratively to ensure student success, achievement and well-being.

As governors of the school division, LRSD trustees developed and supported the implementation of a plan of action to address this priority. Trustees encouraged full participation of parents, students, elders and staff by hosting community meetings on both First Nation reserves through a process of data sharing and consultation.

The plan includes measures, responsibilities, timelines, budget as well as a reporting template. The board receives regularly scheduled progress reports on FNMI student achievement at public board meetings throughout the year.

The board intentionally created structures and processes with a particular focus on working collaboratively with FNMI school boards (Outcome 7).

Structures That Support the Board's Priority

Two FNMI working committees have been established: the KBE/LRSD and PBOE/LRSD working committees. Each committee developed terms of reference that include: purpose, principles, committee membership, roles and responsibilities, as well as the scope of its work. While the terms of reference for each working group were developed separately, several common elements emerged.

The purpose of each working committee clearly states that the boards will work together to support First Nation student success, well-being and achievement. The principles include working together to make recommendations that:

“Let us put our minds and our hearts together and see what good we can do for our children.”

- Chief Sitting Bull



Don't assume that we, as well intentioned and well-meaning educators, understand First Nation culture and worldview. We truly don't understand First Nation perspectives.

- Use the intent of the Memorandum of Understanding to guide collaboration and partnership initiatives;
- Support First Nation students and families;
- Support student achievement;
- Reflect board policies;
- Enhance student, parent and community involvement in education; and
- Demonstrate knowledge of and respect for Blackfoot culture and history.

Committee membership includes three trustees from each board, the superintendent, the associate superintendent, and business services. Meetings of each working group are scheduled three times a year.

The following summarizes the powers and duties:

- To develop and share policies and procedures relating to students;
- To support joint professional development, as well as share best practices and resources; and
- To work together to support and develop initiatives between boards.

Each working committee meets annually to develop a work plan with two or three governance-related outcomes that support student achievement. Some of the outcomes that have been achieved include: administrative procedures related to student transfers, tuition agreements, review of the proposed *Federal First Nation Education Act*, and planning and co-facilitating a Parent Conference hosted by the Peigan Board of Education.

Future plans include the continued sharing of student achievement as well as FNMI parent and student satisfaction data; the development of attendance policies; the delivery of high school courses to students across two boards; and the creation of partnerships to ensure that student needs are met.

Another structure inspired by the board is the First Nation Education Council. Its purpose is to support, enhance and increase school success for First Nation learners. The

council has voting and non-voting members. Voting members include:

- One representative (Chief or education designate) from each of the Blackfoot tribes;
 - One parent representative from each of the Blackfoot tribes;
 - One urban FNMI parent; and
 - Two FNMI student representatives from each of the high schools in Pincher Creek and Fort Macleod.
- Non-voting members include:
- Two elders from each of the Blackfoot communities and one Métis and/or urban elder;
 - Superintendent;
 - Associate superintendent with lead on FNMI goal;
 - Lead First Nation clinical consultant; and
 - One representative from LRSD board of trustees

The Council's powers and duties include advocacy, support and the review of policies and procedures. The Council meets three times a year and provides recommendations to LRSD's Board of Trustees.

One additional structure is the First Nation Staff Working Committee. All First Nation staff from the five schools meet bi-monthly to discuss celebrations and challenges in their work and to share effective strategies to improve First Nation student performance.

Strategies That Support the Board's FNMI Priority

Bi-monthly meetings that include key representatives from Central Office and school staff are held at each school in Pincher Creek and Fort Macleod. Schools collect data pertinent to FNMI student performance and well-being. The meetings are devoted to reviewing this data and discussing what the school has done, what it has learned and what it will do next. Data is then collated and presented to the board in a public board meeting, allowing trustees to review the information and ask

questions to clarify understanding while also keeping the public aware of the work.

The division realizes the importance of students seeing themselves and their culture reflected in their schools. Over the past few years, LRSD has hired several First Nation staff members, including a lead teacher, lead counsellor, primary teacher with learning support responsibilities, family school liaison workers and assistant principals

Each year during the orientation workshop for new teachers and administrators, a half day is dedicated to building awareness of First Nation culture. Further, school staff have the opportunity to participate in at least one annual professional development session dedicated to building knowledge and awareness of First Nation culture.

School staffs gather and share information regularly on First Nation students, including data on attendance, student behavior and well-being, frequency of parental phone calls and cultural programming in schools. This data is summarized and included in the bi-monthly report to the Board.

Results

Over the past three years, the overall percentage of FNMI students who remained in LRSD schools improved from 68 per cent in 2009-10 to 95 per cent in 2012. The percentage of the five LRSD schools with FNMI students offering culturally relevant courses rose from 20 per cent in 2009 to 60 per cent in 2012. The percentage of FNMI students maintaining 80 per cent or greater attendance rose from 43 per cent in 2009-10 to 77 per cent in 2012.

Each year Alberta Education provides school jurisdictions with accountability pillar results. Over the past three years, there has been an improvement in results for FNMI students on the provincial achievement tests Grade 3 math and Grades 3 and 6 language arts. There is continuing concern about the performance of students in junior high and high school. Typically, LRSD loses FNMI students between Grades 9 and 11. However, more of the FNMI students who remain in our school are graduating.

Emergent Themes

Upon reflection of our work over time, the following themes emerged:

Trustee and Central Office commitment and support is imperative in order to address First Nation student success. Schools pay attention to what trustees and senior managers monitor. Their support sends a strong message to schools, parents and communities.

It is important to pay attention to the data and stay curious about it. Ongoing monitoring of data was and continues to be essential and allows us to move from rhetoric *to action*. Clear processes and structures need to be in place for collecting, analyzing and sharing data throughout the school year. This creates an intentional space to reflect and act in a strategic and timely manner. It has allowed us to move from just scheduling cultural events to including structures that impact classroom teaching and student learning.

Don't assume that we, as well intentioned and well-meaning educators, understand First Nation culture and worldview. We truly don't understand First Nation perspectives. Without a critical mass of First Nation administrators, teachers, counselors and support staff in our schools, these perspectives will not emerge and our decisions will not reflect their ways of knowing.

Don't give up. Persevere. It is easy to get discouraged and give up. When we move toward difference—and there are differences—the work gets sluggish and disjointed. We need to push through this confusion by focusing on students and doing what it takes to improve student engagement and performance.

Don't wait. You can't wait until relationships are strong to begin the work. It is through doing the work together that an appreciation and understanding of Blackfoot context and perspective is developed. Working together shifts the focus from "*us and them*" to "*we and our*." It is when we reach *we and our* that relationships are strong and great things can happen for students. ■

Ellie Elliott recently retired as Superintendent of Livingstone Range School Division. Stephen Harris recently retired as Associate Superintendent, Learning Services, Livingstone Range School Division. Elliott and Harris worked together as a leadership team in LRSD for 11 years.




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Iris: Making Learning Visible to Both Students and Parents

By Dr. Ronna Mosher, Alison Boyd and Erica Rae

This article is the second of two parts highlighting work the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) has been engaged in with a custom-built web-based learning application (Iris) over the past year. With Iris as an important enabling resource, the CBE has focused on promoting integrated ways of attending to student learning needs, what and how students are taught and how research can be integrated within these practices.

Developing student and parental agency is a fundamental principle of this work. This article highlights how Iris can support schools in building and strengthening relationships with their parent community. It also discusses CBE school experiences. (For more information about Iris in general, please see *Iris: Transformation in Practice*, *The CASS Connection*, Spring 2013, page 20).

Meaningfully engaging parents in their children's learning is a priority in the CBE and is one of the intended outcomes of Iris. As schools take up the work of Iris, administrators, teachers and parents together consider how to build upon existing connections between school and home, as well as explore the potential of new processes and experiences.

Students share their learning plan with their parents for a variety of purposes. Often, students are enthusiastic about what they are doing at school and through sharing artifacts and reflections in their learning plan, are able to invite their parents into what is going on in their classroom. The student learning plan also offers parents a meaningful point of entry into conversations about learning with their child(ren), teacher(s) and school administration. Students and parents are able to sit together to consider progress a child is making towards their learning goals and effective strategies. Students also often seek parent perspectives, suggestions and/or

feedback about artifacts of learning. Together, students, parents and teachers negotiate paths of success for students based on mutual understanding and multiple perspectives.

Many schools use Iris as a catalyst for conversation during parent-teacher interviews, celebrations of learning or other times throughout the year when parents, students and teachers come together to talk about learning. In these contexts, students may use learning plan artifacts to demonstrate growth and to discuss how teacher feedback, self-understanding and personal goals and strategies have impacted this growth.

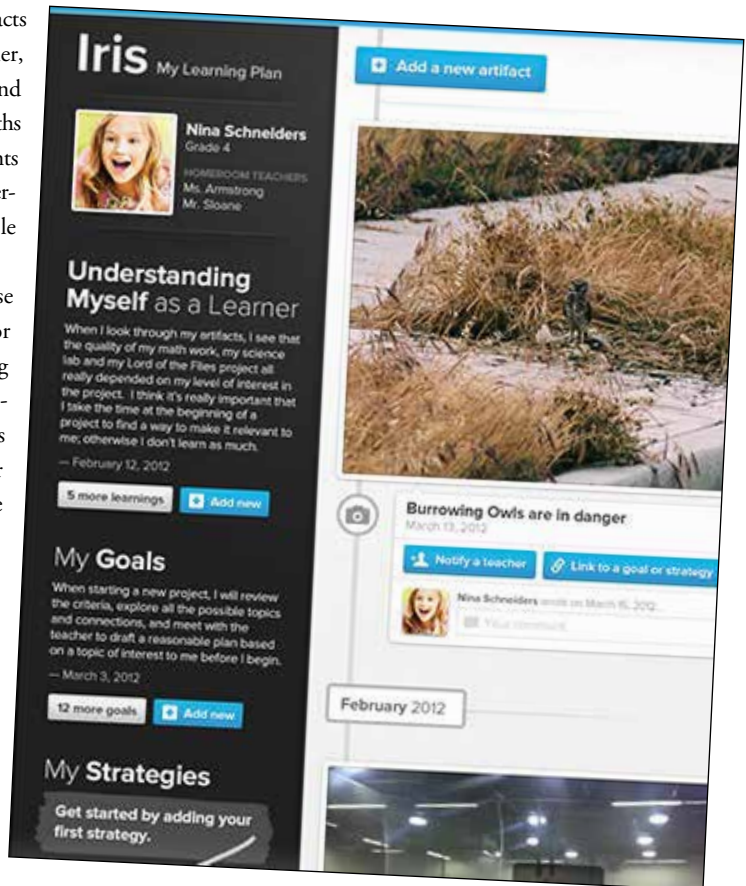
Iris School Stories

Killarney School hosts one of the four Montessori Programs of Choice in the CBE. Children attending Killarney come from many communities within the city of Calgary. One of Killarney's purposes in using Iris was to actively engage parents in their ongoing goal-setting work as well as to create other opportunities for parents to participate in the process of their child's school-based learning.

Killarney teachers began by having students introduce Iris to parents as part of their student-led conferences in November. This facilitated students and teachers

creating the context of why, what and how parents might engage with their child within Iris. Principal Rhonda Choate says, "Once we had done that, the initial intention of involving parents and students in the recursive element of learning-adjusting-learning, it really came to fruition. The process of parents and students using Iris at home became organic."

An unexpected element of using Iris for Killarney was connecting "school learning" to "home learning" for students and parents. Students now use Iris as platform for their learning, breaking the contexts of where and how. Choate says, "Iris allows students to celebrate the learning within our Killarney environment but also that our students are learning all the time, in many places."



Belfast School's commitment to empowering students to understand themselves as learners and to take ownership of their learning also draws families from across the city. A large number of students with learning disabilities and other unique learning needs have found themselves at Belfast, and the parent and school community share important values around student agency. When the school began working with Iris, it was seen as yet another way in which teachers and students could develop shared responsibilities for learning within an environment of deep understanding.

Halfway through their first year with Iris, a group of parents came together to talk about the impact they noticed on their children's learning. Parents commented that they appreciated a great many things about Iris: the ease of access from both school and home; the importance of transitioning of information from one year to the next; and the new insights that came from being able to look at their child's work in progress rather than just waiting for the finished product to come home.

One parent commented that her child, who is very shy, has benefited from having an additional means by which to ask questions and to open conversations with her teacher. Another parent commented that she believed that her daughter has excelled this year and that growth has been in direct relation to the way in which Iris has engaged her more deeply in the process of reflecting upon her own learning. Throughout the conversation, parents expressed a belief that Iris enhanced their children's learning through opportunities for direct feedback on those artifacts of learning they chose to make visible.

For principal Darren Dyck, it all comes together in a sense of common purpose. "At Belfast, we encourage students to take ownership of their own learning, we have ongoing conversations about how students learn best and why students learn the way they do, and we try to make connections between strategies for learning and the students' real lives."

Developing and maintaining open, timely and effective relationships with

parents is critical to the success of students and essential to the learning of the Calgary Board of Education. Last year, administrators, teachers, students and parents worked together to explore the possibilities Iris creates for supporting and strengthening ongoing dialogue about student learning.

Iris allows the Calgary Board of Education to make learning visible to parents and to engage parents in new images of teaching and learning in authentic and meaningful ways. We look forward to continuing to explore the possibilities for parents, teachers and students to connect through this platform. ■

Dr. Ronna Mosher is a Director in the Office of the Chief Superintendent of the Calgary Board of Education and leads the vision, development and integration of Iris. Alison Boyd and Erica Rae are Specialists in Assessment and Instruction within the Calgary Board of Education. Their work centers on supporting schools with the integration of Iris into their teaching and learning practices.



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Community Involvement in Learning: *The Unexpected Outcome*

By Brenda McDonald



Community involvement is bringing the learning community together with key community stakeholders in active and meaningful engagement. Community and school collaboration, shared leadership and meaningful involvement are essential elements for school improvement. Collaboration between community and school is a natural fit yet today, they operate as separate entities.

Over the last two years, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools (RDCRS) has been prototyping a program of studies for Career and Technology Foundations (CTF) in a project based learning (PBL) environment and implementing *Inspiring Education*. The startling discovery that community engagement became part of the initiative was unexpected and not an intentional outcome of the project.

Results to date clearly indicate that RDCRS prototype effectively supports a diversity of people and organizations involved in the CTF program of studies, and in addition, it has enhanced participants' involvement. As the project

progresses, teachers are witnessing a growth in the shared experience, one that offers new opportunities to involve the greater community, better understand the community, to learn inside and outside of the school, to increase student ownership and celebrate in their greater community.

The increase in the community involved was due mainly to the essential design of PBL and CTF. The fundamental condition and design element was that of public audience. The public audience requirement forced an increased parent and community involvement in the participating schools in a truly authentic way. This public audience manifests itself entirely differently in each project and school.

In some of the projects, the public audience was in entry event into the project, others were mentors and guides throughout the project and some in the culminating events, such as judges or presentations. Many of the public audiences included parents, businesses and community organizations.

In conversations with students, it became evident that the public audience aspect gave credibility to the student's work.

Students felt that their work was authentic and not "just an assignment." One student said, "What I liked most about the project is that it was real life...I could make a difference in the world around me." Community engagement helps students recognize the significance of what they were learning.

Another design element and necessary condition in project based learning and CTF is asking compelling and driving questions. A question that succinctly captures and communicates the purpose of the project creates interest and a feeling of challenge in the project. The driving question engages learners in the examination of authentic complex problems. Students proceed through a variety of activities to frame their understanding of the problem, access resources, develop understanding and recommend solutions.

It is this research where students are looking for external resources to partner and collaborate with, such as businesses or community agencies to solve complex issues and dilemmas. It is in the understanding and recommending solutions where students feel the sense of ownership and the work had relevance. The efficient use of PBL prepares students to be flexible thinkers who can work productively with others to solve problems.

This symbiotic relationship is crucial to the future of Alberta. Students have a great deal to offer the community and the world with their creativity, innovation and view of the world. Equally, community organizations, companies and businesses have the wisdom and expertise to guide these developing minds.

The support of the local practitioners and the extensive hands-on work promotes students to excel. This model of collaboration is one where everyone belongs to a "community of practice," that is held together by shared

One student said, “What I liked most about the project is that it was real life...I could make a difference in the world around me.”

beliefs, skills learned, collective resources and powerful interactions. It should be noted that while benefits are enormous, teachers can feel overwhelmed by the additional time it requires to foster community partnerships.

In a culture of collaboration and interdependence, every member of the community needs to hold the responsibility toward helping others learn and every member of the community knows that he or she can depend on one another for support when needed. PBL communicates to young people the importance of their place in the community. This collaboration and mentorship are apparent in many of the CTF projects.

- Local engineers are coaching students on bridge design throughout the project. The professionals’ involvement improved the final quality of student performance.

- Students working with local watershed environmentalists submitted proposals to their local agency on how to resolve watershed protection and conservation issues. The agency is considering the student proposals as viable solutions.
- In another project, students provided input on land usage for local garden growers. Parents and community members provided constructive feedback to students on their inventions and presentations.

Imagine what it would be like if communities and businesses asked students to submit ideas on how to solve local issues. Involving students at this level potentially increases the students’ willingness to get involved and take responsibility. We believe in learning collaboratively within the community, supporting civic engagement and promoting a better understanding of social justice for all. We seek

student learning environments that respectfully incorporate the community’s unique needs, goals and aspirations.

Red Deer Catholic teachers discovered that CTF and PBL classrooms foster a learning environment that extends far beyond the classroom walls. Students learn and problem solve in the context of their lives and communities. CTF and PBL schools nurture this natural engagement of all stakeholders. Making deep and purposeful connections between schools and stakeholders removes the artificial separation between the real world and the classroom. It nurtures the optimal learning environment.

In theory, community involvement in schools is an opportunity for a more democratic and participatory approach to school functioning. It can serve to enhance students’ achievement and well-being, build stronger schools, assist families and revitalize communities. ■

Brenda MacDonald is Curriculum Coordinator for Red Deer Catholic Regional Division.

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Inspiring Leadership:



Using Assessment in the Service of Community Learning

By Anne Davies and Sandra Herbst

As public education embraces 21st century learning, there is a growing interest in inspiring learners to aim for success and to teach them the skills needed to self-monitor their way there, including a focus on executive functioning and self-regulation. This work is not new, however, it is currently supported in a very public way in Alberta (see, for example, recent Ministerial Order #001/2013).

Together, parents, community members, school faculty members and students are to achieve these goals. In our work with school communities throughout Alberta over the past 18 years, we have collaborated with amazing educators who are already charting this path and are willing to share the lessons they

are learning as they work with others to transform public education.

Research demonstrates that powerful assessment practices can be used to teach students how to picture quality and to learn the language that can be used to communicate successes and challenges to others, as well as ways to self-monitor—self-regulate—their way to success. When educators use classroom assessment *in the service of* learning, they deliberately work with students to:

- Understand the learning destination by showing samples of quality and development over time;
- Co-construct criteria for significant learning processes or products;
- Give themselves and others specific, descriptive feedback using the language of the criteria;

- Select meaningful, realistic goals in support of their learning;
- Collect evidence of learning from multiple sources over time; and
- Share the evidence of learning with others.

A growing body of research shows that these same strategies, when used with intention, also support the learning of adults (James et al, 2007; Davies, Herbst, Parrott Reynolds, 2012). This is where the “bleeding edge” work of transformative leadership currently exists in the intersection of *assessment in the service of* student, adult, school and community learning. To find out more, here are excerpts from interviews with three Alberta school leaders:

Dr. Donald Massey School

“Our school was brand new just three years ago. We’ve paid attention to the

That stance is not one of “I am the teacher and I stand beside the task against you, the student. Try to figure us out.” Rather, the true stance of assessment holds that the teacher “sits beside” the student and together the two try to figure out the task, the work, the outcome.

parents and the greater community from the beginning. Parents were first because there was no school and no teachers. We had focus groups before we even opened. We asked what was going to be important in their school, so we could better understand their values and help them to understand each other’s values.

We asked these questions: What do you want your kids to be excited about? What kinds of qualities do you want to see in your teachers? We received lots of input. The conversations guided us in the building of the school, the kind of staff we hired and the teachers we selected. We shared the results of the conversations with parents and publicly on the website.

We made decisions using the values that had been established. They helped give clarity. The subsequent decisions made, made sense. We also did a values mapping exercise with staff and it was obvious to all that they were in alignment with parents. It made it easier with staff to make decisions; when we wrestled with indecision, we went back to values and found clarity around next steps.

For example, halfway through our first year a question arose: What are we going to do about awards? We returned to our values and saw that, according to what parents and teachers had said, we wanted to honour community—everyone growing and contributing. The decision was soon reached. No awards. Instead, we looked for ways to celebrate growth, competencies and contributions to community. It resonated with our community.

As a result, we needed to have three celebrations—primary, intermediate and

older—to accommodate all the people who wanted to attend. I think the success is directly attributed to those first conversations with parents about what they valued in schools, schooling and education.”

As we reflect on this account, what becomes clear is that as the school was being created and later, as decisions were being made, the criteria that had been established through the visioning exercises provided a definitive picture of what was expected and anticipated by the greater school community. The destination was clearly articulated; they began with the end in mind.

It is similar in our classrooms. When students and teachers co-construct criteria, that is, when they collaboratively identify what quality work or process will be like, clarity emerges. And it is clarity that drives future work and action.

Monterey Park Elementary School

“Since our school opened 12 years ago, we have enjoyed the benefit of being located in a culturally diverse community. To date, there are 42 heritage languages (including English) spoken in the school’s neighbourhood. We have always been interested in co-creating avenues of common ground, understandings and an overall value for diversity. Our school motto, “Celebrating the Colours of the Earth: Honouring Creativity and Diversity,” has inspired teachers, students and parents to discover what is possible when we come together on behalf of learning.

Within each school term, every student has the opportunity to express

interests, curiosities and understandings through multiple languages including drama, visual art, dance, drumming, singing, music composition, musical instruments, language composition, scientific and social science inquiries, structural design, mathematical ideas, photography, digital media and home languages. On our journey to find ways in common to talk about learning destinations as outlined by Provincial Programs of Studies, the staff have refined, shared and developed meaningful assessment practices that strengthen student achievement and improve dialogue among colleagues. Over the last two school years, we have been refining our practice to:

- Co-construct criteria: between students and teachers, as grade communities and as a whole learning community.
- Share triangulated evidence: among colleagues, at school leadership meetings, and at each grade community meeting.

Our current desire is to gather evidence confirming that parents do see themselves as active participants who play a key role in support of student learning. Through the format of Learning Conversations that will occur digitally and in real time at the school, parents become more aware and are able to discuss co-constructing success criteria as well as gathering, sharing and discussing evidence in light of the learning destinations.”

In this second account, we are reminded of the root of the word assessment—*assess*—which means “to sit beside.” Assessment in the service of learning, whether it be student, school, system, or community learning, is a stance. That stance is not one of “I am the teacher and I stand beside the task against you, the student. Try to figure us out.” Rather, the true stance of assessment holds that the teacher “sits beside” the student and together the two try to figure out the task, the work, the outcome.

In classrooms, teachers and students work together to “figure things out.” For example, what does it mean to work as a team? What is important as we solve problems? What counts when we reflect? In a similar way, this school is working alongside its parent community to determine the best way to show evidence of student learning.

As they develop something new together, the voices of all partners are invited to participate in order to create a system that best serves the learning needs of the students and the communication needs of the parents.

George H. Luck Elementary School

“We believe that students must be given the opportunities to own and be meaningfully engaged in their learning. Parents shared that they want their children to be safe, happy, successful learners in school. We also want their children to be confident,

competent learners. To bring these beliefs and wishes together at George H. Luck, we implemented the following steps in support of student learning and parent participation in the process.

- Teachers develop assessment templates that detail the learning outcomes, criteria and variety of assessments to be used to determine learning progress.
- Students choose personal learning goals in literacy, numeracy and learning actions and these are placed in Google docs.
- During the goal/learning conferences

that are held in early fall, students share their goals and plans. Teachers share their assessment templates with parents so they are aware of the learning and the plans that are in place. This process is repeated in February. Progress reports are sent home in December, March and June.

- As students work on their goals, feedback comes from teachers, peers and through self-reflection. Students revise their goals/plans based on that feedback and their progress. This process is dynamic as students share with their parents their progress in achieving these goals using their Google docs site. Evidence of learning is also sent home for students to share with parents.
- Teachers share in their weekly/monthly updates how parents can support their child based on the goal information and evidence of learning received. “Ask Me About” (AMA) conversation starters give parents the opportunity to hear from their child what they are learning about and their understanding of the concepts.

As a result, communication of student learning is student-centred, ongoing and dynamic. Students own and share their learning story. Parents are fully informed of their child’s learning goals/plans, how learning will be assessed and reported and how they can best support them. Teachers’ high quality assessment and instructional practices enable students to be confident and competent learners who are safe and happy too!”

This third account highlights how students can communicate proof of their learning to parents and others. This is possible because they are aware of what they are meant to do, say and create, and of the expected levels of quality. With this understanding, students:

- Consider the learning outcome or expectation;
- Select products, observations and conversations that prove they have met or are working towards those outcomes or expectations; and
- Talk about the ways in which the evidence matches the expected levels of quality.

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This results in powerful dialogue between parents and students. The learners are active; they interact with those significant adults in their lives in ways that respect the family culture and language. In this way, students talk about their learning in terms and in ways that are understood. No longer is it the teacher alone who has sole custody of the progression of learning; parents are engaged because their children are leading the conversation.

What Do These Teach Us?

These three accounts remind us that when students understand what they are learning, why they are learning it and what they need to do next, they become the greatest ambassadors of educational practice in the community. As parents and others see learning through the eyes of their children, they better understand, support and engage with schools and education.

As leaders, we consciously build partnerships with communities so that we not only can inform but that we can *be* informed. This helps us move from a place of relative

sameness to a place of possibilities and innovation. And, more importantly, we can construct understanding together, using the principles of quality classroom assessment as our framework and guide (Davies, Herbst, Parrott Reynolds, 2012).

Focused, guided and collaborative assessment practices, in support of the learning of school community members and students, is possible and is, in fact, well underway in some schools. Yet, many powerful strategies, just like the ones we have shared in this article, are often taken for granted or dismissed because they seem so simple. But what transformational leaders know is that when they are deliberately used, they serve to strengthen relationships and inspire teaching, learning and assessment. ■

Note: The authors would like to thank the Alberta educators who willingly agreed to be interviewed for this article: Jennifer Allan, Theresa Lewis, and Linda Inglis.

Anne Davies, PhD., is a noted author, consultant, and researcher with more

than thirty years of experience in education as a teacher, school administrator, system leader, author, and keynote speaker. Sandra Herbst is a former Assistant Superintendent of River East Transcona School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is a former President of the Manitoba School Superintendents Association, and currently travels broadly in her role as educational consultant and author and CEO of Connect2Learning.

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Communication: The Key to Financial Improvement

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 Alberta. Working with the education sector has provided many insights and opportunities for growth that they are pleased to share in their regular column in CASS Connection.

By Jennifer Carson, B.B.A.

My last *CASS Connection* article focused on medication adherence—or better yet—medication NON-adherence. Well, we still believe this is a critical issue facing the ASEBP Plan. More importantly, it is impacting *your* workplace and not in a positive way. You should care.

Statistics show that over 50 per cent of Canadians with chronic diseases are non-adherent to medications, with an estimated annual cost of \$30 billion to our health care system. They cost benefit plans 3.3 times more than those who are adherent. As well, chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and diabetes, typically require patients to take medication for a long duration, to manage but not eradicate the disease.

Non-adherence is Growing

Data analyses of ASEBP's prescription

medication use have confirmed that the level of non-adherence by members is growing and the health of your employees is suffering. Findings suggest non-adherence of medication for ASEBP members and their families is 42 per cent for diabetes, 44 per cent for depression, 35 per cent for blood pressure and 36 per cent for elevated cholesterol.

What does that mean for you? Costs associated with absenteeism, presentism, accidents, casual illness, hospital admissions, longer term illness and even death can result. Non-adherence can also cause overall poor morale for other employees who are directly impacted by their co-workers' health challenges.

So, the cost of non-adherence is not solely for the plan to bear. In fact, not filling a prescription or taking the medication actually "saves" the plan, but only in the short run.

Information and Communication Breakdowns

The reasons for non-adherence are as numerous and complex as the members themselves. Did you ever notice the copious amounts of information on potential side effects a pharmacist will provide when you first begin to take a new medication? Frightening does not begin to describe it. The chances are very remote that you are at risk for a severe side effect. However, if you are not taking the medication, or taking it inappropriately, there will undoubtedly be a negative health impact. Rarely is that explained. Nor does the information you do receive identify that, for example, it can take up to six weeks in some cases for the medication to start doing its job, as is the case with some depression medications.

From Facts to Action: Diabetes

No one wants to admit they are not adhering to their medication regime.

However, the data is available for ASEBP to identify where there is non-adherence. So, where do we go from there? Certainly members on disability can be counselled by claims facilitators one-on-one to understand and address barriers to adherence. Extended health care case management, say by disease state such as diabetes, is a new frontier that benefit carriers are starting to explore. And ASEBP is well positioned to do just that.

This fall, we are launching a Diabetes Screening Clinic in a few select schools, providing members with the opportunity to complete a nationally recognized (Canadian) risk assessment. The clinic is completely voluntary and through this, the member has the opportunity to participate in a program with us. Diabetes is a disease that is considered “invisible.” You do not know you are at risk or even have it unless you are tested, or until something catastrophic happens to you.

If the results of the risk assessment identify the member is a high risk, a blood screening test is offered (which now does not require fasting overnight). While ASEBP does not diagnosis illnesses, coaching will be provided to the member by our health advisors. A recommendation will also be made to the member to consult with their physician. Support in the way of follow-up counselling, resource materials and tips on adherence are offered.

In addition, ASEBP is exploring various communication mediums to reiterate the message of adherence importance. Our website, mobile app, annual newsletter and teachers’ conventions provide the opportunity to get that message out.

Will that eradicate non adherence? No. But if it has a positive impact on just one member to follow their diabetes treatment plan, the plan will save half a million over a 20 year period. Just one member! Now, how much would that save the school jurisdiction from the costs of sick leave and backfilling the employee’s position for a longer duration in the case of disability?

New Opportunities

Another way ASEBP is able to address non-adherence is by understanding the prescription medication data at a granular level

to identify which pharmacy chains have the best outcomes in adherence. This is currently being studied, and we are very excited to see the results, due this fall.

While ASEBP is committed not to set up a preferred provider atmosphere, if those same pharmacy chains offer clinics themselves (which they do, anywhere from diabetes management to smoking cessation and stress management), we could identify such clinics to the members. Furthermore, should primary care networks be able to support the members in their communities with improved access to comprehensive multidisciplinary clinicians (physicians, dieticians, and nurses to name a few)—AND the government is paying for those services—well, we see nothing but opportunity.

It’s a new (or perhaps re-newed) environment we are in. Opportunities exist to forge new partnerships and rekindle old ones in the health area. Everyone has a stake in this. It is truly a shared responsibility. We are confident we will be successful, then education dollars can be redirected from healthcare back to their original sector—the one you operate in. ■

Jennifer Carson is the Executive Director / Chief Executive Officer of ASEBP. She has worked in the health and benefits sector for 25 years. During her seven

years at ASEBP, she 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 60 Employers for 2013 and awarded the Premier’s Award of Merit for Healthy Workplaces in 2012.

What the numbers say:

Our 2013 covered member research tells us this about communication with ASEBP:

- The percentage of respondents who feel they are informed about their coverage has increased.
- Postal mail has declined significantly while email and website contacts have increased.
- Over half our members still contact ASEBP by phone, followed by the website (which was refreshed late last year).
- Members’ preference toward reading a newsletter online has increased but many still prefer both options.
- Nearly 90 per cent use the internet to access their information, most often to verify their benefit coverage.
- The ASEBP Mobile App is still in its infancy, but downloads increase monthly.
- And finally, respondents indicated an 85 per cent satisfaction rate with ASEBP.

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Chocolate could lower your risk for heart disease!

British Medical Journal Research: The study, involving more than 114,000 people, showed that higher consumption levels of all types of chocolate, was significantly associated with a reduced risk of cardiometabolic disorders. This beneficial association was significant for cardiovascular disease (**37% reduction**), diabetes (**31%**) and stroke (**29%**)³. Chocolate might be a viable instrument in the prevention of cardiometabolic disorders if consumed in moderation.

The launch of a chocolate fundraiser is an opportunity to teach kids about healthy lifestyles and World's Finest® Chocolate can help:



Teaching material to help educate children on the importance of portion control and physical activity. Available with each fundraising campaign.

A chocolate fundraiser supports active lifestyles, not unhealthy eating.

This annual or semi-annual event helps pay for school activities and equipment like playground equipment, sports equipment, bussing and school trips that support healthy, active lifestyles.

For more information call 1.800.461.1957



¹ September 2012 Ipsos Poll of 1200+ adults (including 500 parents of children aged 4-11).
² Survey of Nutritional Professionals: An online survey of 450 registered dietitians (RD) by the University Center for Health & Nutrition.
³ "British Medical Journal", chocolate consumption and cardiometabolic disorders, 7 studies, involving 114,000 people, studies up to Oct. 2010.



Solution Tree
Education Canada

Events

FALL 2013 & SPRING 2014



At Solution Tree, student achievement is at the root of each event we offer. Whether you attend a 2-day workshop or an institute, on topics like 21st century skills and RTI at Work™, you'll discover essential frameworks for maximizing student performance as revealed by some of education's trailblazers. Under their seasoned guidance, you'll discover the latest techniques to carve improved paths to learning.

Building Better Schools Together Institute

Presenters: Wayne Hulley, Anthony Muhammad, Kenneth C. Williams, Karen Branscombe, Tom Hierck, François Massé, and Ainsley B. Rose

October 17–19 Toronto, ON

21st Century Skills 2-Day Workshop

Presenters: William M. Ferriter, Garfield Gini-Newman, Cheryl Lemke, and Will Richardson

October 28–29 Ottawa, ON

Redefining Fair 2-Day Workshop

Presenter: Damian Cooper

November 19–20 Toronto, ON

Pyramid of Behavior Interventions 2-Day Workshop

Presenter: Tom Hierck

November 21–22 Toronto, ON

Transforming School Culture 2-Day Workshop

Presenter: Anthony Muhammad

April 14–15 Montreal, QC

RTI at Work™ Institute

Presenters: Austin Buffum, Mike Mattos, Laurie Robinson, and Chris Weber

April 29–May 1 Toronto, ON

Simplifying Response to Intervention 2-Day Workshop

Presenter: Mike Mattos

May 22–23 Prince George, BC

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