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the CASS CONNECTION

The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents

System Leaders & Assurance: Ensuring Student Success





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contents

CASS College of
Alberta School
Superintendents

Messages:

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

FOCUS ON... SYSTEM LEADERS & ASSURANCE: ENSURING STUDENT SUCCESS

Features:

- 10 Five Lessons for Superintendency Teams
- 12 Parkland School Division: Assurance in Education
- 14 From the Buggy to the Automobile: Creating a New Inclusive Model to Support all Learners
- 16 District Diverse Learning Teachers: An Effective Intervention Model
- 18 Building Leadership and Program Capacity: Early Learning Makes a Difference
- 20 Critical Thinking: The Need for a Common Understanding
- 22 Effective Stakeholder Engagement within a Small Rural Charter School
- 24 Building a Trauma-Informed School Culture

Department:

- 26 ASEBP's Healthy People, Healthy Workplace:
Working Together to Lower Dental Fees

30 Buyer's Guide

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Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable David Eggen

Alberta's education system is one of the best in the world thanks to the important working relationships between our government, local school boards, school administrators, families, communities, students, teachers and school staff. We are privileged to be able to support our children's success by working together to improve our education system. Investing in education is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our province and that is why we will continue to fund our education system.

One important component of our education system is assurance, which means far more than just reporting—something superintendents are well acquainted with. Assurance is what makes all the other aspects of our education system work together so well; it is the act of demonstrating to Albertans that we are meeting the needs of students in an open and transparent way.

Alberta Education is in the process of engaging with stakeholders, including superintendents, to review how assurance works in our education system. Our goal with this review is to establish a common understanding and vision with respect to assurance—a foundation from which we will be able to guide more specific decisions and help improve the system in the years to come.

As leaders in the education system, superintendents play an important role in providing leadership and assurance throughout the education system. You provide direction within your jurisdictions to ensure thoughtful administrative decisions, quality teaching and building high quality learning environments for all students. In addition to all the

Assurance is what makes all the other aspects of our education system work together so well; it is the act of demonstrating to Albertans that we are meeting the needs of students in an open and transparent way.

important operational details you manage every day, these leadership responsibilities are felt far and wide in your schools and communities.

Superintendents also support good governance throughout the education system, and act as a bridge between the operations realities of the jurisdiction and the leadership of elected trustees. Providing advice and information ensures that policy decisions are evidence-based and reflect the realities that teachers, staff, parents and students face every day. The work you do to bring our initiatives to life in your schools and classrooms is greatly appreciated.

I value the extraordinary contributions the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) has made to the development of our new and updated set of professional practice standards. I look forward to your continued efforts to support their implementation, which will affect every teacher, principal and school jurisdiction leader in the province. I am hopeful that these new standards will build on

our existing high-quality education system and provide Albertans with an even greater level of trust and confidence in the work we do together to support student success. As we move forward with this initiative, and with the many others we are undertaking to improve student learning and make life better for Albertans, I will continue to support CASS and the ongoing efforts of superintendents. Whether it is through continued work to support the Joint Commitment to Action or improving education outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, or moving forward with curriculum development to ensure we have programs of study that reflect our diversity—I know that superintendents and CASS will continue to provide valuable insight as administrators and leaders.

Your continued efforts, insight and expertise will help us ensure that all parts of the education system, including assurance, will contribute to student success. I look forward to our continued collaboration in strengthening our education system for all Albertans. ■



Message from the President

Christopher MacPhee
College of Alberta School Superintendents

Alberta Education, in collaboration with school systems, is shifting the focus from one of accountability to one of public assurance and as such, is creating new opportunities to think about and talk about education.

Why might this be important to the work of system leaders who are focused on optimizing student learning? I would suggest that the answer lies in understanding what Assurance is. Currently, the school divisions of Parkland, Red Deer Public, Fort Vermillion, Rocky View, Elk Island Catholic and Edmonton Public are piloting a new Assurance Model. As defined by this group, "Assurance is a promise or pledge to our educational community and all stakeholders that a process will be followed that defines system priorities and utilizes nimble and responsive strategic actions to achieve the fundamental outcome of student learning."

Accountability used to be the focus of accepting responsibility for the outcomes but now, as we move to a system of assurance, it also means being responsible for the process. The process includes authentic engagement with students, families, staff and the larger community to develop priorities around the various inputs that make a difference in the education of children. These priorities, along

with results from various measures (outcomes), feed up to Alberta Education as part of their provincial planning and shift focus from top down to bottom up.

Educators and leaders often ask, "What did you learn today," "How are we doing," and other similar questions designed to provoke thinking, engagement and improvement, and assure that learning is taking place. The answers may provide linkage to the process of assurance inviting engagement, consultation and action.

An integral part of this move towards assurance is the introduction of the *Professional Practice Standards*. Identifying distinct expectations for superintendents, system leaders and school leaders is a positive step for education in our province. *The Superintendent Professional Practice Standard* is the first such standard in the world, according to renowned researcher Dr. Michael Fullan. Educators looking to move into leadership roles will now have guiding expectations and competencies to chart their path. Alberta continues to lead the work in its innovative practices with a clear alignment of all *Professional Practice Standards*, ensuring student success for all.

As an organization, CASS has embraced these quality standards and will be providing systems leaders throughout Alberta with the opportunity to engage in professional learning at their summer conference, which is being held in Kananaskis in August 2018.

In a nested model that has student learning as the central domain, we can move outward focusing on the inputs that have the biggest impact on the output. In priority you have:

- Teaching and leadership, which includes the *Professional Practice Standards*, policies and administrative procedures, collaborations, engagement and professional development.
- System supports, which include learning environments, infrastructure, community supports, early learning programs and other initiatives such as wellness programs, Indigenous training, and family support services.
- Governance, including financial and system oversight, guidance and support systems.
- Responding to local societal context. This is a key and foundational domain that brings in local autonomy that recognizes that through engagement and systems measurement that individual schools and school divisions will have priorities and strategies to meet unique needs of the students and the educational communities that they serve.

This is an exciting time in Alberta as we move away from accountability and towards assurance. Working together we can provide a nimble education system that adapts to the changing needs of the students. I am confident that this will make Alberta's education system even greater than it already is. The articles in this current issue demonstrate how we are changing to meet the needs of the students in our province. ■

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Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

February 7, 2017 will forever be a day of immense significance for education in Alberta and for system leaders in our province. On that day, Minister David Eggen signed three Ministerial Orders. The first was to update the *Teaching Quality Standard*, and the other two were to formally introduce two new *Professional Practice Standards*; the *Leadership Quality Standard* and the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard*.

For the first time ever all leaders, at the school and system level, in Alberta's public, separate, Francophone, charter, First Nations and independent school authorities, will be expected to meet a common set of competencies. This level of assurance to the public may not exist anywhere else in the world. This is another example of Alberta Education providing leadership, which contributes to quality learning for all students and one of the best education systems in the world.

The signing of the Ministerial Orders was the culmination of almost three years of collaboration and a "roll up your sleeves and get to work" effort by Ministry staff and representatives of all education partners.

All three *Professional Practice Standards*, available at www.cass.ab.ca, will come into effect on September 1, 2019, allowing 18 months for the monumental task of ensuring approximately 50,000 teachers, school leaders and system leaders in Alberta have an understanding of, and can demonstrate performance of the competencies in the respective standards.

In anticipation of the standards being formally introduced, CASS has been actively developing resources and coordinating professional learning to build

leadership capacity of system leaders so that they understand the standards and can prepare for the implementation in their respective school authorities. Superintendents and their system leadership teams will ultimately be responsible for ensuring all principals and teachers achieve the respective competencies.

The most recent work we've undertaken is an extension of efforts we've made, with the help of our members, dating back to the early 2000s. At that time, CASS developed the *CASS Practice Standard*, a document that outlined the dimensions of practice superintendents and system leaders were expected to meet. While never recognized as an "official" document, many school boards have used the standard to establish the role description and to evaluate superintendents over the past 15+ years.

In 2013, CASS published a book titled, *The Alberta Framework for School System Success*. The book was authored by Dr. Jim Brandon, Dr. Paulette Hanna, Rick Morrow, Kath Rhyason and Sig Schmold, with input from Dr. Ken Leithwood, who wrote, "The framework is a result of carefully synthesizing a comprehensive body of relevant empirical research..."

Given a second comment by Dr. Leithwood, "It (the framework) became the starting point for similar efforts in Ontario, efforts which have provided additional new empirical justification for the account of effective district characteristics and district leaders found in the *Alberta Framework for School System Success*," it is not surprising that when the Ministry approached CASS with the concept of a *Professional Practice Standard for Superintendents* and system leaders, the *CASS Practice Standard* and *The Alberta Framework for School System Success* were used as foundational documents.

The second phase of providing assurance to all Albertans with respect to the high level of leadership that exists in Alberta's education system is currently being developed. CASS is working with Alberta Education and education partners to create a leadership development and certification program, intended for all certificate teachers who are aspiring to leadership positions.

When in place in 2019, the leadership development and certification program will ensure that all leaders in the province complete a common professional learning program focused on demonstrating the competencies within the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* and the *Leadership Quality Standard*. The certification program will enable participants to enhance their professional practice with current, relevant educational research, and continue career-long learning.

I speak with tremendous pride about the efforts of CASS members, past and current, to ensure that every student in Alberta has the opportunity to learn and achieve to the very best of their ability. I conclude with a final quote by Dr. Leithwood, who wrote, "CASS's initiative is a source of important lessons for other provinces and states attempting to support district leaders' efforts to improve the learning of the students they serve."

To close, I want to thank all the authors who have contributed to this edition of *The CASS Connection*. Your stories provide real-life examples of how system leadership provides assurance that every student is important and supported.

Finally, on behalf of all CASS members, I extend sincere appreciation to the sponsors that advertise in this publication. Your support enables us to share important stories with all education partners in the province as well as all the parallel organizations of system leaders across Canada. ■



Five Lessons for Superintendency Teams

By Dr. Jim Brandon, University of Calgary, and Dr. Paulette Hanna, Red Deer College

It is widely acknowledged that the professional practice of the contemporary Canadian school superintendent is increasingly complex and incredibly demanding (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016; Hetherington, 2014; Parsons, 2015, Parsons & Brandon, 2017). Many superintendents devote a high proportion of their time to building, supporting and assuring quality leadership and quality teaching across their systems. In fact, the learning focused leadership of Alberta school superintendents contributes significantly to the success of the provincial school system—a school system that is consistently rated as one of the best in the world (Barber, Whalen, & Clarke, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012a, 2012b; OECD, 2017).

As the Alberta Ministry of Education moves forward with the creation of professional practice standards for teaching, school and system leadership, the attention to learning-focused leadership in the superintendency has never been more prominent. The draft *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* (SLQS) indicates that the professional practice of “jurisdiction leaders and superintendents must be informed by current, relevant educational research, with a focus on career-long improvement” so that

“the superintendent’s decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality school leadership, quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in the school authority,” (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 1).

Parallel in structure to the teaching and leadership standard documents, the SLQS features one standard, seven required competencies and several optional indicators. For the first time in the history of education in this province, there will be a strong through line in the professional practice expectations for teachers, principals and superintendents.

This article highlights five leadership lessons that may be helpful to system leaders as they make their way into the new professional practice requirements. These lessons have been derived from our recent collective case study that illuminated and illustrated many ways that superintendency teams lead learning in highly successful and learning focused Alberta school jurisdictions (Brandon, Hanna, & Negropontes, 2015).

Lesson one: Framing leadership research in action

The practices of superintendency teams who lead learning are action-oriented and research informed.

For superintendency teams, the availability of an easily accessible and understandable leadership standard, grounded in research and steeped in practical wisdom, offers a way to scaffold learning and develop common language to speak with senior leadership colleagues in other settings. Whether directly informed by the *CASS Practice Standard* (Lorenz, 2008), *The Alberta Framework for School System Success* (Brandon, Hanna, Morrow, Rhyason, & Schmold, 2013) or by other tools or models, the system leaders in our study did more than just read and conceptualize research—they thoughtfully and systematically applied what they were learning to implement change and to lead learning in their systems.

Lesson two: Leading through superintendency teams

Superintendents who lead learning share leadership with strong, collaborative and learning-focused senior leadership teams.

Superintendents in these highly successful and learning-focused jurisdictions fully understood the complexities, challenges and dynamics of their unique leadership positions. Contrary to media popularized notions of heroic leadership, the superintendents in our study capitalized on the benefits of collective, shared and distributed

leadership. Their collaborative orientation leveraged collective efforts to support student success at every level—starting with their senior leadership team.

Lesson three: Building purposeful professional relationships

Superintendency teams that lead learning influence educators through purposeful professional relationships.

The relational orientations and interpersonal skills of superintendency team members in our study were foundational contributors to student success in their jurisdictions. Relational trust emanating from senior leadership encouraged educators to work effectively together to support the learning, engagement and well being of all students and staff members. Professional conversations were most often characterized by respect and challenge, summoning the best available pedagogical content and assessment knowledge to keep the interests of the student at the centre.

Lesson four: Accessing external and internal expertise

Superintendency teams that lead learning access external and internal expertise to build adaptive professional capacity through all layers of the system.

Learning focused superintendency teams thoughtfully integrated internal and external expertise to grow professional capacity. Four of the six districts profited from their ongoing connections with external experts who undertook targeted professional learning in such strategically significant areas as instructional leadership, engaging pedagogy and student assessment. The larger purpose of these partnering relationships was to build adaptive professional expertise in teachers, school leaders and central office leaders.

Lesson five: Collaborative leadership learning pathways

Superintendency teams that lead learning employ multiple capacity building approaches to leadership learning in their systems.

The evidence is clear—educational leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student learning. The research is also

definitive about the benefits of collective, shared and distributed leadership. At a time of significant social turbulence and rapid generational turnover in the principalship, it is vitally important that these collaborative orientations guide leadership learning and development. Superintendency teams in all six cases supported a variety of leadership development pathways to better serve the professional learning needs of aspiring and current leaders. Leadership learning in most of these jurisdictions was based on research derived frameworks in engaging professional leadership learning communities that were informed by evidence of impact on teaching and learning.

Conclusion

We offer the five lessons for superintendency teams from the perspective that “most fields informed by the social sciences have imperfect evidence available to inform their practices” and as such, “judgments are rightly based on the best available evidence, along with the practical wisdom of those actually working in the field,” (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 9).

The five major assertions about the ways in which successful superintendency teams lead educator and student learning are based on the research team’s reasoned judgment and observational logic about the extent to which the findings and themes of this study

are transferable and can be used to guide practice in other settings. ■

Jim Brandon is Associate Dean: Professional and Community Engagement at the Werklund School of Education. As a former CASS President and Director of Leadership Capacity Building, Dr. Brandon’s leadership research is complemented by 23 years in the superintendency and 13 years as a school leader. He can be reached at jbrandon@ucalgary.ca.

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This article is dedicated to the memory of Dot Negropontes, co-author and esteemed colleague who passed away in the spring of 2017. As she did in all matters related to her family, her students and her colleagues, Dot worked tirelessly, systematically and joyfully on the report that spawned this article. She was a wonderful educator and a truly outstanding human being.



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Parkland School Division: Assurance in Education



By Scott Johnston, Parkland School Division

Parkland School Division has demonstrated an ongoing curiosity and desire for improving education planning and reporting. Roughly six years ago, Superintendent Tim Monds and the Parkland School Division Board of Trustees gathered stakeholders together with the intent of revisiting the division's vision and mission. In response, a new vision was created: Parkland School Division is a place where exploration, creativity and imagination make learning exciting and where all learners aspire to reach their dreams. With parents, teachers, staff and students at the table, the new vision and mission strengthened collaboration within the division.

A jurisdiction does not exist in absence of its schools and so collaborative vision unification meant that schools no longer created autonomous vision statements. Working toward the same end and with the best people on the right bus, our toes were all now pointed in the same direction. We agreed on our destination, even if our schools would be taking different roads (strategies) to get there.

Unifying our vision also planted a seed for the division's move toward assurance reporting and collaborative planning. Growing forward, we are now at a point of established community engagement with numerous events that focus on seeking to better understand our strengths and challenges. Increased stakeholder engagements enable community building and a culture of trust and transparency. Our stakeholders demonstrate that their involvement has become part of our daily routine—preparing, engaging and inspiring our students to

be their best in a quickly changing global community.

By listening closely to the division's stakeholders and sharing the Parkland School Division (PSD) story—our challenges and our strengths—we are now able to create education plans that are truly living documents. With a strong focus on assurance, Parkland School Division has transformed education planning and information sharing. Our journey continues to evolve and we have learned great key insights along our voyage:

- The timing cycle of planning and reporting matters;
- Planning needs to be flexible, locally driven and succinct; and
- Engagement needs to be authentic and stakeholders need to see themselves in the process.

Key insight: Timing matters

Parkland School Division historically utilized the combined *Education Plan and Annual Education Results Report* document. We have abandoned the combined document in favour of spring planning and fall reporting.

We recognize that a direct perceived benefit of the combined document is that educational outcomes appear linked to performance measures and this potentially simplifies the creation of the plan. In practice, however, the combined *Education Plan and Annual Education Results Report* creates its own challenges:

- As the wording of goals shifts within the *Alberta Education Business Plan*, the jurisdiction's goals may no longer align to results reporting.
- Reporting on previous goals and planning for new goals within the same document presents the possibility for reader confusion and extends the length of the planning document.
- Three-year education plans may actually be one-year plans as needs and resources change.

While the wording and numbering of the goals may shift from year to year, the intent of the goals has remained the same on the plans from 2008 through to 2020:

- Student learning and success remain a primary goal;
- Collaboration in teaching and leadership positively transforms education;
- System supports enable inclusive education; and
- Jurisdictions need to be both responsive and responsible.

In practice, Parkland School Division experienced timing challenges related to the combined *Education Plan and Annual Education Results Report*. Schools amended their planning to reflect their October performance results despite the bulk of planning that occurred in the spring. In practice, this meant that schools were conducting the bulk of education planning in September and October, with the school year already in progress. Metaphorically, this equated to building the airplane while flying it.

The planning and reporting document, over the years, had grown to become a “task-to-complete” rather than an inspirational plan for each school and for the division as a whole. Additionally, the combined document meant that completed plans and results reports were highly detailed and lengthy which, while valuable, reduced the usefulness and readability of the plan. Schools need flexibility in the process of generating strategies to meet planning outcomes and must be able to shift and pivot as new learning occurs.

Key insight: Succinct and flexible planning

Throughout Alberta Education’s Assurance Pilot, Parkland School Division appreciated the opportunity to collaborate strongly with other jurisdictions on the process of planning and reporting. In sharing experiences with other pilot jurisdictions, we recognized that the annual planning documents created by the division and our schools had, over time, become too detailed to be effective. With goals, outcomes and strategies being amended annually, the *Education Plan* had lost its ability to be a visionary guide that directly impacted quality learning in each individual classroom. We needed to clarify our plan.

Parkland School Division set out to provide solutions and generate a streamlined,

living document. At the onset of our current plan, the division established a Strategic Planning Review Committee (SPaRC) that identified the necessity for flexibility. The SPaRC identified the necessity of jurisdictionally shared outcomes, with school-based flexibility throughout the year to amend strategies at both the division and school level to reach those outcomes. To remain flexible, school-based education plans and results reporting were moved entirely online.

The ability to identify assurance measures and implement local goals provided a significant contribution to streamlining the planning process.

Key Insight: Measuring assurance and demonstrating accountability

For the past 20 years, Alberta Education has had an accountability framework in place for school authorities and schools. Parkland School Division appreciated policy shifts toward assurance with respect to a focus on shared responsibility, community engagement, increased local direction and ensuring accountability for learning excellence. As we determined our local priorities, we significantly encouraged increased stakeholder engagement and sought methods to improve our ability to measure our stakeholders’ sense of confidence in the jurisdiction’s ability to provide quality education.

At present, we engage the online service ThoughtExchange to capture the collective

insights of our stakeholder community. The narratives extracted from this process directly impact the board’s education planning. Stakeholder engagement is about ensuring that the ideas and concerns of all relevant stakeholders are represented throughout a more collaborative and transparent decision-making process.

Continuing the voyage

We continue to learn through stakeholder engagements. For more information, please view our online videos or accompanying plans, processes and reports, all available on our website, www.psd70.ab.ca. For more information, please visit us online or contact the Parkland School Division Centre for Education at 1-800-282-3997. ■

Scott Johnston joined the staff of Parkland School Division in 2003. In his most recent school post, Scott served as Principal of Tomahawk School (2010-2014). He completed his Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University in 2013. He began the role of Associate Superintendent in April of 2014 and oversees Divisional Strategic Planning and Implementation, Assessing and Reporting, Assurance and Accountability, Transportation Services and Educational and Information Technology.

To receive a chart that outlines a historical review of Alberta’s education business plan goals, please contact Shannon Savory, Editor-in-Chief, at ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net.

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From the Buggy to the Automobile:

Creating a New Inclusive Model to Support all Learners



By Corine Gannon (B.Ed., M.Ed.), Edmonton Catholic Schools

In the winter of 2016, as we reviewed the way in which we met the needs of our students and school teams, we were both perplexed and frustrated. We were frustrated that our system of allocations took so much time. It was common for students identified with needs to not receive funding approval for supports until mid-year, and formal assessments were required for any funding that was approved. We also had internal caps on funding.

For example, a school could receive approximately \$10,000 for a child with severe behaviours and \$14,000 for a child with autism. We would often hear from schools, “a child is not autistic for just half the day” or “severe behaviours are not just for a small part of the day... we need more funding to meet the functional needs of the students...”

Further to this, the options that schools had were limited. The primary option was to hire an educational assistant with their funding to provide supports and services. Although our educational assistants are certainly valued and have significant roles in providing supports to schools, they don’t always have the expertise

that we need when supporting the targeted needs of our students.

As we tossed around possible options, we were challenged with trying to ensure that we were doing everything we possibly could to nurture and develop the student as well as provide supports for the child, family and teacher. Developing individual plans with personalized programs (informed by data collection), and in collaboration with specialists such as psychologists, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists and behavior specialists, was recognized as ideal. Complex students required multiple disciplines of expertise.

We were fortunate in our district to have a well-established early learning department, with a diverse team of specialists. In early learning we had seen a significant impact on learning, growth and teacher supports in our schools. Although our schools had access to the *Regional Collaborative Service Delivery Model* (RCSD) in Grades 1 to 12, it was not enough to meet the needs and demands in our schools. We were perplexed as to how to proceed. Minor changes happened, but as we

never addressed the systemic structure, nothing really changed.

So, it was three years ago that we decided to call together a group of principals to create a new model for inclusive education. In the spirit of inclusivity, we invited any principal who wanted to participate. About 25 principals met a total of three times over a period of about six weeks. We used a simple process of sharing challenges and ideas to create solutions ... beginning with the individual voice, then collaborating with small groups, and then ultimately the large group.

The new model was shared in early spring with all the principals and training sessions were offered. Every school principal met with two members from the inclusive department to review their inclusive profile, the staffing necessary to meet those student needs and the dollars required. Except for about \$1,000,000 reserved for contingency for new students in the fall, before the staffing cycle began, we allocated all our inclusive envelope for the upcoming year.

The new model was built on collaboration and utilized conversation as a foundational component. The model was based on a simple

inclusive profile that looked at student needs and what was essential to support those needs. Students were listed and it was determined if their needs were mild, moderate or severe. If they met the criteria for a formal special needs code, then a code was also noted. However, a code and diagnosis were not required as functional impact was also considered when determining what supports the student needed.

The model was also better aligned with the Alberta government's changes to inclusive funding (i.e. the inclusive envelope is bulk funded and is not based on a "code = funding" system). Schools are required to distribute the dollars from the inclusive envelope in a way that best meets the needs of all students and that supports the six models of inclusion.

Currently, the areas of need identified on the profile are categorized by: emotional behavior (inappropriate behaviors, aggression, depression, mental health concerns); struggling learners (learning disabilities); and medical (physical, medical or neurological challenges). Once the school team completes the profile, the categories are populated automatically and displayed in visual pie charts as another way in which to illustrate the data.

Following the completion of inputting the data into the profile, schools look at what levels of intervention are required to support the identified needs. Levels of needs and supports required can range from universal designs for learning to targeted interventions in small groups and/or one-on-one intervention. Ultimately, schools look at staffing requests based on the needs and levels of support required.

The final amount of dollars allocated to schools is finalized when the principal meets for a conversation with the inclusive department administration. Past trends are also reviewed. A *Proposed Support Plan* is discussed, and the overall picture of what the school is hoping to achieve. Some dollars may be staffed via the school through their basic grant or other allocations, some through pre-approvals from program unit funding and others through the inclusive envelope (i.e. a Family School Liaison Worker [FSLW] may be part funded through Program Unit Funding, and part funded through the inclusive envelope so that there is only one FSLW serving the school).

Back in the old days, when we travelled with horses, we made the model more

The redesigning process involved many school principals, creative thinking and the element of risk as we empowered ourselves to recreate and implement a new system.

efficient ... by adding horse shoes, a saddle and then even a wagon or buggy. No matter what was tweaked or modified, it was still a horse and saddle. Systemic change occurred in the transportation industry when the automobile was created and a whole new model of transportation began. Similarly, until we created a whole new inclusive system, we were not able to completely change the way in which we viewed the inclusive envelope and funding allocations to meet needs.

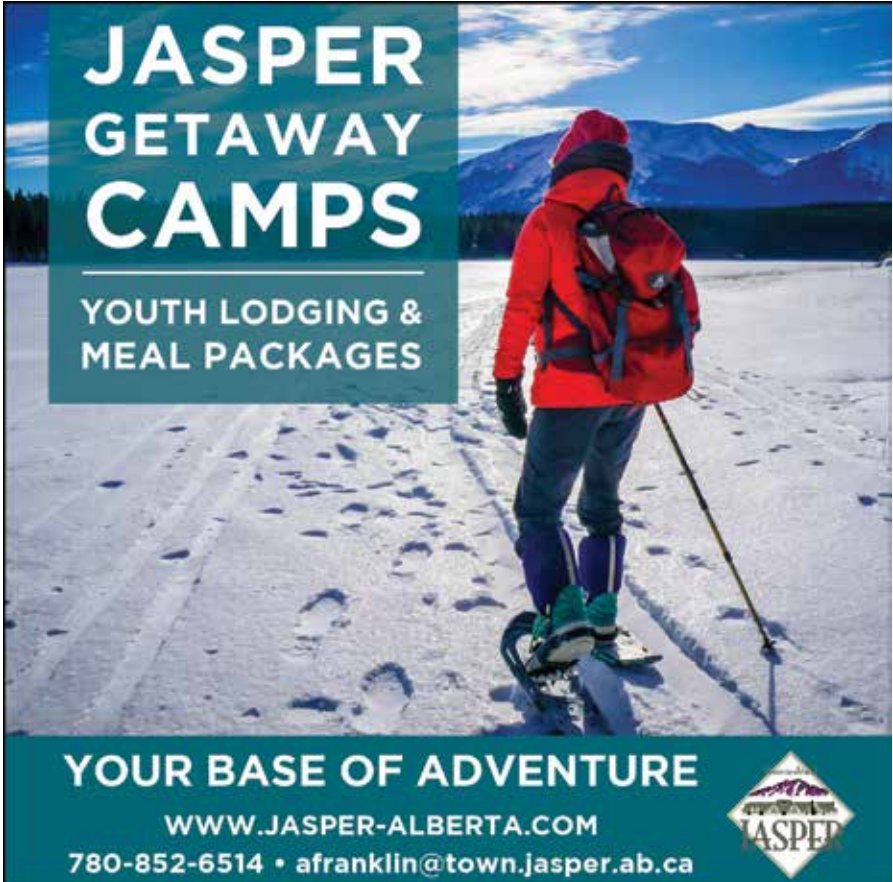
The redesigning process involved many school principals, creative thinking and the element of risk as we empowered ourselves to recreate and implement a new system. Since doing so, feedback from the community and parents shows significantly improved satisfaction with how we are meeting the needs

of children with special needs. Concerns and challenges in meeting the needs of students have decreased as schools are better prepared with the resources that they need to enable student learning.

There is no doubt that our journey is not over and will continue to evolve with new iterations and more challenges that require collective, creative thinking and an element of risk, as we leave behind some of our old ways and embrace the new. ■

Corine Gannon, B.Ed., M.Ed., is Assistant Superintendent, Learning Services Innovation, for Edmonton Catholic Schools.

To see image examples of the model, please contact Shannon Savory, Editor-in-Chief, at ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net.



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District Diverse Learning Teachers: An Effective Intervention Model

By Heather Kane and Tom Brinsmead, Calgary Catholic School District

“We can no longer look at personal development and professional development as two separate entities. Effective professional development must resonate on a personal level if it is going to be sustainable and serve as a catalyst for change in beliefs and practices,” (Sanfelippo, 2016). Using this juncture, the Calgary Catholic School District embarked on an intervention model that provides ongoing sustainable professional development. It offers supports that will resonate with teachers at any grade level or experience who desire to grow in their practice.

This effective system leadership strategy has been the formation of the District Diverse Learning Teacher (DDLT) role. This mentorship model, piloted from January to June 2017, was met with such resounding success that it has continued and been expanded upon this year. The focus is on learning and improved practice. “A teacher learning focus emerges from an investigation of what teachers need to learn to support what students need to learn,” (Katz, 2013).

The initial purpose of the DDLTs was to provide support to teachers in re-engaging students into the learning process. At first, Instructional Services selected the schools and approached them to provide support. Success stories soon began to circulate and schools began to request support based on an identified need with the classroom teacher’s support.

The role of DDLT has gradually evolved to one of empowering the classroom teacher through mentoring, modelling effective instructional and management practices, and championing students. Teachers are now recognizing the benefit of having DDLT support and are requesting support directly rather than waiting to be approached.

For hiring purposes, candidates were selected based on their range of skills and background. Collectively, the team had a wide range of experience in various grade levels, counselling, behavior, special needs and languages. This range of experiences served two purposes; to provide some expertise based on the variety of school requests and to provide professional development within the team, throughout the district and specifically for the schools where they were placed.

In addition, early in the school year, the four DDLTs were provided training that focused on key strategies in supporting diverse learners, working with challenging behaviours and communication protocols. This helped to build their knowledge, understanding and skills so they could confidently support others. To begin their mentorship practice, the DDLTs initially supported first year teachers and teachers new to their grade level, by working alongside them in September to provide support and guidance as they began their journey as new teachers. This has long been recognized as a need for all first-year teachers and the DDLTs were able to position them effectively.

Next came the actual placement in schools. The DDLTs were assigned to specific classrooms for three weeks to work alongside the teacher providing support based on the teacher’s request or identified need. The teacher was required to agree to having the DDLT in their classroom and fully participate in order to be selected. They also had to commit to continuing the strategies or routines established when the DDLT wasn’t there. After three weeks, the DDLT is reassigned to another school, however, they continue to communicate with the previous teacher through emails and follow up in a month by returning to the class to review and reassess.

The following table outlines some of the varied requests for support for the DDLTs:

Assistance with subject differentiation and support of ELL students.	Providing supports for educational assistants as well as specific students who have challenging behaviours.
To implement support strategies in the classroom for students with complex needs.	Social skills/transition times/non-verbal management/reinforcing expectations.
Growth mindset/leveled literacy in the classroom.	Classroom management and planning.
Support literacy program in junior high.	Work on communication skills with non-communicative students.
Work for fast finishers and low-level learners that is engaging and relevant/providing tools for restless and energetic learners.	To implement support strategies like self-regulation, classroom focus, decreasing outside of class time for students with complex needs.

The response from schools has been extremely positive with a 95.3 per cent effective to highly effective response rate as to the success of the DDLT support in their school. One administrator said, “This is an effective and much-appreciated classroom intervention that allows for a focused examination of classroom dynamics to support student success.”

One teacher said, “Another person’s perspective, support and immediate conversation about what was happening in the classroom was what I found to be very valuable.”

In examining the benefits of the DDLT support, the top 10 were:

1. Support for teachers, diverse learners and administration; 88 per cent.
2. Differentiation strategies; 83 per cent.
3. Providing resources; 71 per cent.
4. Professional role-modeling; 69 per cent.
5. Classroom management strategies/modeling; 62 per cent.
6. School resource team (SRT) support and insights; 60 per cent.
7. Coordination of extra and long-lasting supports; 57 per cent.
8. Classroom organization; 52 per cent.
9. Future recommendations; 52 per cent.
10. Relationship building; 48 per cent.

According to Marzano (2009) in *District Leadership that Works*, effective strategies to improve instruction are, “coaching classroom practice, moving teacher training to the classroom, developing stronger school leaders, and enabling teachers to learn from each other.” When a district directs its focus on high quality instruction with ongoing monitoring of that instructional quality, there is a positive correlation with student success. The DDLT mentorship model provides that support to teachers through effective role modeling and improved classroom organization.

One participant receiving DDLT support said, “This is a highly effective way to support student needs. It was a great benefit to have the DDLT working collaboratively in the classroom and to have the time to build a relationship with the teacher as well as the students.”

Another participant said, “Thank you for providing this type of support to teachers. This is a fabulous way to help teachers be successful!”

And yet another wrote, “I appreciate all the work XX put into her time with my class. Having this type of embedded professional development on site was great. XX was very approachable and provided practical strategies and suggestions. It was great to implement a strategy and have her help tweak it if need be.”

When we look at supporting teachers effectively to support student success, the approach needs to be one that meets teachers where they are and to move them forward in their professional journey. It is not about evaluation, it is about growing.

“The aim of professional development is not to make every teacher into a clone of every other teacher, but rather to support each teacher in becoming the best teacher he or she can be,” (William, 2016). As educators, we must be role models of lifelong learning, approaching change from a growth mindset so we can inspire our students in the same way. ■

Heather Kane is a Director of Instructional Services with the Calgary Catholic School District. Overseeing the diverse learning supports in CCSD is a component of her portfolio. She can be reached at heather.kane@ccsd.ab.ca.

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Building Leadership and Program Capacity: Early Learning Makes a Difference

By Cheryl Gilmore, Lethbridge School District No. 51



When does it matter most? In education this question is almost impossible to answer. Driven by the moral imperative to make decisions in the best interest of all students and an unwavering ‘to the core’ belief that all children matter, leaders endeavour to provide support and intervention strategies across all grade levels. It always matters most; it is never “too late” for any given student. System leaders are driven by the desire for all students to flourish. As such, a better question to ask when making difficult decisions regarding resources, time and capacity building is, “When does it make the most difference?”

In Lethbridge School District No. 51, there has been a focused effort on supporting early childhood development programs, including the development of leadership capacity at all levels necessary for sustained success. This purpose driven focus and development of professional leadership capacity has resulted in quality, research-based programs that are making a difference. Kindergarten and Grade 1 entry indicators point to successful growth and increase in overall readiness for school in a number of developmental areas.

I would contend that the early years is when it makes the most difference. The research that supports this premise is substantive in the disciplines of education and psychology, especially within the plethora of brain research in neuroscience, focusing on the connection between early experiences and subsequent development into adulthood.

The influence of this research in Alberta is evidenced by the work that falls under the

umbrella of the *Alberta Family Wellness Initiative* (AFWI). Affiliated with the Frontiers of Innovation and grounded in a major body of research by the Harvard Center on the Developing Child and the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, AFWI has mobilized this knowledge through a framework called the *Core Story of Brain Development*. This core story has served as a foundation for the curriculum and learning within the early education programs in Lethbridge School District No. 51.

Lethbridge School District No. 51 has seen substantial growth in our Early Education programs that serve students from age 32 months to six years, moving from 12 programs in 2012-2013 to 25 programs in the 2017-2018 school year. The program growth reflects the belief that strong brain foundations are critical to support future learning and life success. They provide opportunity for growth at an early age when physical development, brain development and social competencies are optimal for intervention and enhancement.

This belief and foundation for the curriculum is also reflected in our Kindergarten programming. Based on data from the Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap) and Socio-economic Status (SES) data from Alberta Education, Lethbridge School District targeted a school with low SES and ECMap outcomes for full-day Kindergarten program delivery over a three-year period. Partnering with the University of Lethbridge, student outcomes resulting from this program delivery

grounded in research and enhanced staff capacity, are positive.

Using pre and post measures using BRIGANCE (a family of assessment, screening and instructional tools used by educators), the results from the data collated by Dr. Piquette and Dr. Awosoga (2017) showed, “a statistical level of significance when all scales are looked at together: physical development, language, academic/cognitive, self-help, social-emotional skills.” The results of the pre and post measures using BRIEF-P (a behaviour rating inventory for preschool-aged children) found that the full day Kindergarten program, as compared to the half-day control group Kindergarten class from a comparable school with similar SES and ECMap outcomes, benefitted from the additional time as evidenced by positive findings in all areas of executive function.

Overall, the “full day Kindergarten impacted executive function and self-regulation skills, the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions and juggle multiple tasks successfully,” (Piquette & Awosoga, 2017). What is significant here is that research strongly suggests that executive function and self-regulation enable positive behavior and are crucial for learning and development into adulthood (Harvard Center on the Developing Child). In her work with the Lethbridge School District, Dr. Robbin Gibb from the University of Lethbridge, has contributed to knowledge building among our staff in the area of brain research and how it links to early experiences.

Strong early learning programs that make the most difference during early development do not happen by accident. “Building Brains and Futures” serves as the foundation, but the framework for success also considers leadership capacity building within the context of what Fullan & Quinn (2016) would describe as “coherence making.”

Possessing three features identified as essential for coherence, the Early Education Program in Lethbridge School District No. 51 is “about the whole system, zeroes in on pedagogy and examines impact and causal pathways that result in measurable progress for students,” (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 30). The program is also unwavering in purpose with a focused direction that addresses deep learning based on research and is based on capacity building at all levels (Fullan & Quinn).

Similar to the model that Munby & Fullan (2016) have coined as “inside-out and downside-up,” the comprehensive framework of the Early Education Program in Lethbridge School District No. 51 drew from grassroots need, developed a networked system across all schools, and leveraged expertise and resources from post-secondary institutions, provincial and national organizations.

Central to the framework and a crucial factor contributing to program success is the focus on capacity building, or what is described as “building adult capabilities” (Building Brains). All adults connected with children need to be learners and leaders. Capacity among parents is built through learning opportunities that include modeling and sharing of ideas using informal structures such as parent cafes located in the school.

Capacity among professional and support staff is accomplished by linking with experts, such as Dr. Robbin Gibb, and engaging staff in learning a program called Hanen, which focuses on serve and return, one of the four elements of the core story. School and district leaders are also engaged in developing a solid foundation of knowledge so that they can support program delivery within the school and district context.

What is incredibly powerful about the early education program is that capacity building is not isolated to our district. Holy Spirit in Lethbridge is engaged in the Building Brains and Futures project so opportunity for

cross-jurisdiction networking occurs. Capacity building and opportunity for ongoing networking also continues to grow with external partners such as Alberta Health Services, experts from the University of Lethbridge, Parent Link Centres, Parents as Teachers, Lethbridge Early Years Coalition and private day cares.

Lethbridge School District No. 51 has learned a lot over the last five years and continues to learn and grow in the area of early education programs. We are feeling affirmed by the data that suggests that sustained focus on research-based early learning programs makes the most difference at this developmental stage in the areas of executive functioning, self-regulation, social-emotional development and responsive interactions. ■

This is Cheryl Gilmore's fifth year as Superintendent of Lethbridge School District No. 51. Prior to serving staff and students in Lethbridge, she was Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent in Horizon School Division #67 for 13 years. She completed her Master of Education at the University of Lethbridge and Ed. D. at the University of Montana. Cheryl possesses the strong belief that leadership is about vision, structuring a coherent organization with clear priorities and building leadership capacity through learning and inquiry.

For a full list of references, please contact Shannon Savory, Editor-in-Chief, at ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net.

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Critical Thinking

The Need for a Common Understanding

By Dr. Richard Tapajna, University of Calgary

System leaders can ensure student success in critical thinking skills by facilitating a common understanding of key terminology.

Around the world, education systems have developed reform agendas with greater emphasis on developing the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for success in the 21st century (e.g. Gallagher, Hipkins & Zohar, 2012; and Stapleton, 2011). Critical thinking has been established as an essential component of 21st century learning. *The Ministerial Order on Student Learning* (Alberta Education, 2013) described critical thinking as the ability to “conceptualize, apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate to construct knowledge,” (section 2, 4, b).

The Alberta Education (2016) *Streamlined Expression of Competencies* resource elaborated on the attitudes, skills and knowledge: “Students reflect on their thinking to improve it. They challenge assumptions behind thoughts, beliefs or actions. Students value honesty, fairness and open-mindedness,” (p. 2).

In Alberta, teachers are expected to support students in their quest to discover, develop and apply competencies across subject and discipline areas for learning, work and life. This will help enable students to think critically to construct knowledge. However, it has been suggested in the literature that the establishment of policies and programs of study is not sufficient to bring about changes in teacher

beliefs and practices (Sandretto, 2011; and Stapleton, 2011). Education leaders know that the creation of provincial and district policy is not enough. There needs to be support from system leaders to bring critical thinking to life in the classroom and impact student success (Hipkins, 2013; Sandretto, 2011; and Stapleton, 2011).

One way to support policy enactment is through goal setting. School leader engagement in goal setting was supported in Brandon, Hanna and Negroponte’s (2015) study of broad instructional leadership. They found positive outcomes for students in a district where the school’s three-year plan aligned with the jurisdiction’s three-year plan and was focused on student centered learning. The principals in the district from their study were significantly involved in setting the district level priorities and making important direction setting decisions. System leaders may look at the alignment of provincial, district and school goals to support the purposeful link made with fostering critical thinking, bringing policy to life so the potential of all students is nurtured in actual learning contexts (Tapajna, 2017, p.124).

The collaboratively developed *Lethbridge School District Combined Three-Year Plan* for 2016-2019 identified, “With a new vision that focuses on the development of ‘innovative thinkers,’ the district is focusing on

instructional strategies that promote critical thinking,” (p. 13). It is a district priority to support the implementation of initiatives designed to develop innovative thinkers and meet the outcome of “Students demonstrate the attributes of innovation, creativity and critical thinking in a process-based learning environment” and use technology “as creative and critical thinkers capable of accessing, sharing and creating knowledge,” (p. 23).

A Southern Alberta principal commented on critical thinking in noting that she knows critical thinking is “embedded somewhat in our three-year plan, kind of wrapped in a variety of competencies.” She went on to recognize that if you want to really hone in on critical thinking, “you would share that with your staff and create that together and decide how you would measure it and what you would want that to look like.” Another principal added, “We think it’s embedded, right, but we’re not necessarily purposeful about it.” Clarity of the goals and expectations is important to ensure student success in critical thinking (Tapajna, 2017).

At the core of supporting any plan is clearly defining the key construct, in this case, critical thinking. Research by Paul, Elder and Bartell (1997) revealed that many teachers who include promotion of critical thinking skills as a learning outcome for their teaching could not define the construct nor distinguish between critical thinking

and content coverage. This literature is still consistent with the current finding that teachers in Southern Alberta define critical thinking in different ways (Tapajna, 2017).

Given this, a powerful strategy to achieve the related district outcomes has been articulated to:

1. Build a common understanding of the meaning of student success and language for innovation, creativity and critical thinking; and
2. Build instructional capacity to create classrooms characterized by learning opportunities that require critical thinking, creativity and innovation, and align with the Programs of Study,” (p. 24).

Although teachers believe fostering critical thinking is important, until they have a common understanding of what that means, it is difficult to consider that all teachers are expecting similar results from their students (Tapajna, 2017). Continuing implementation of strategies to build common understanding and instructional capacity is essential to creating shared understandings and expectations of critical thinking. Although teachers say they

believe fostering critical thinking is important, until they have a common understanding of what that means, it is difficult to measure expectations for student success (Tapajna, 2017, p.110).

System leaders are in the key position to support the application of education policy and encourage the development of critical thinking to improve student learning outcomes. Just as teachers require support from school leaders, these leaders need the support of system level leaders. Looking at alignment of provincial, district and school goals, the link needs to be purposefully made with teachers’ beliefs and practices in the classroom—bringing policy to life—so the potential of all students is nurtured in actual learning contexts. Communication about supporting critical thinking by students needs to be coordinated among all levels of educational leadership to best affect learner outcomes (Tapajna, 2017, p.127).

Alberta identified the “Engaged Thinker” as one of three key competencies. Lethbridge School District has a vision that focuses on student thinking skills and is concentrating on instructional strategies

that promote critical thinking. One of the strategies the district is employing to ensure positive outcomes for students is to build a common understanding of the meaning of student success and language for innovation, creativity and critical thinking.

Teachers in the district believe fostering critical thinking is important, and they will be better able to share consistent high expectations for student success when they have a common understanding of what that means in practice. System leaders can ensure consistent high expectations for student success by supporting alignment of provincial, district, and school-based goals and by facilitating a common understanding of key terminology. ■

Richard Tapajna has held school leadership positions in Alberta and internationally. He completed his doctoral studies in educational leadership at the University of Calgary with a focus on school leaders supporting teachers to foster critical thinking.

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Effective Stakeholder Engagement within a Small Rural Charter School

By Teresa Di Ninno, CAPE Public Charter School

The Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence, commonly referred to as CAPE, adopted a collaborative decision-making governance model since its inception in 1994 because of the belief that the school, parents and community working together in support of student learning is the optimal structure to meeting student needs. The highly-engaging partnership between these stakeholders was what developed CAPE as one of the first charter schools in the province.

CAPE's population can generally be described as "at risk." Yet, as of November 2017, 88 per cent of our students due to finish high school have graduated within three years and another seven per cent within four years. Past students entered a wide range of professions locally, provincially, nationally and internationally. Some students have been recognized for service to the community, some for excelling academically and some for excelling

in sports, to name only a few. Students have reaped the benefits of the collaborative and distributed decision-making.

This model, a horizontal model of governance, relies on collaboration rather than on top-down adherence to unilaterally imposed structures and rules. Collaboration is anchored in CAPE's bylaws, policies and administrative procedures. The board of directors consists of elected members of the CAPE Society (i.e. parents), at least one elected community member and an appointed or elected school council representative. Everyone has a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities as stated in policy.

Policies are living documents crafted to support the program, those charged with its delivery and ultimately the student. Because policies are regularly reviewed, debated and revised to reflect the emergent needs of our students and research-based best practices, our

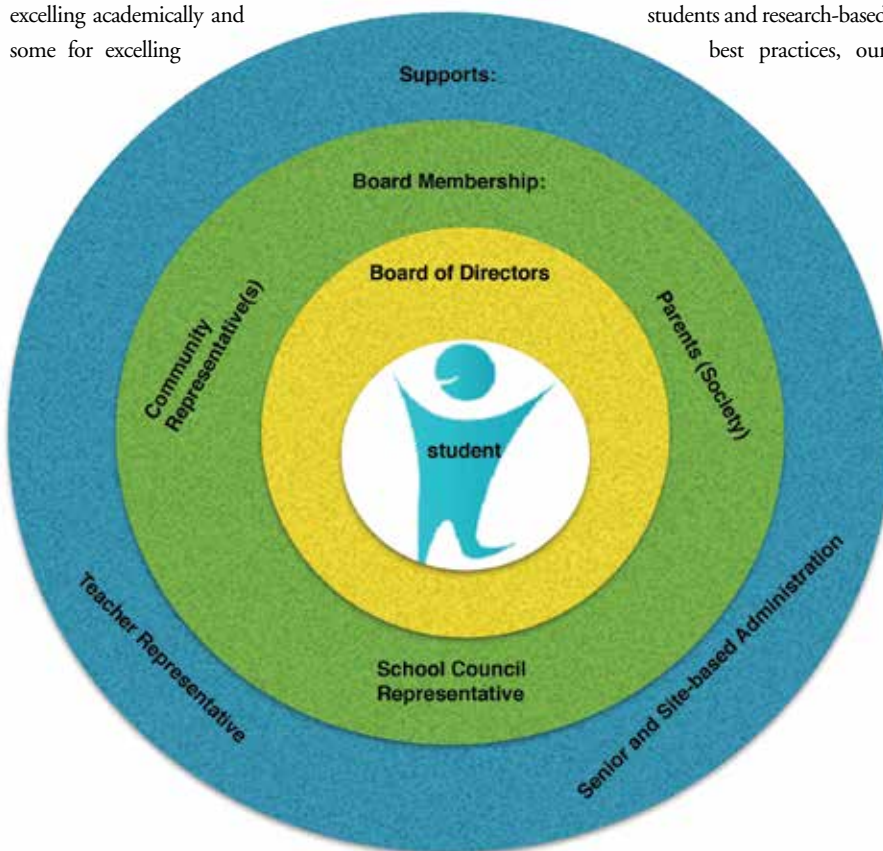
policies address student needs as they evolve. All other levels of responsibility within the school are also grounded in bylaws, policies and administrative procedures.

The board of directors is supported in its decision-making by senior and site administration, as well as a teacher/support staff representative. The student voice is clearly heard as well through surveys, class discussions and the student council. The varied board membership results in open, clear communication among stakeholder groups. Varied view points, divergent areas of expertise and experiences, diverse areas of interest and passions come together and enrich conversations. The common factors are the shared vision and mission; the unwavering focus on the student, on aligning decisions to student needs and interests and on supporting administration and staff.

Respect is what makes collaborative decision-making work; respect for roles and responsibilities, respect for the process of collaborative decision-making, respect for individuals, respect for disparate view points, respect for varied cultural perspectives. Respect is foundational to engagement. Individuals who feel respected and valued are more willing to give their time, efforts, knowledge and skills for the greater good.

Decisions made by engaged board members foster and support an engaged school community. An engaged school community fosters engaged learners. Engaged learners know how they learn and what to learn, complete school, thrive and grow, advocate for themselves and others, and develop into ethical citizens and contributing members of society. These are CAPE's goals.

One of this board's concerns is the early identification of adverse conditions that negatively impact student learning and the development of processes and strategies to address those conditions. The board has established and maintained effective and efficient community partnerships and, as a result, leveraged



local resources to support our learners and their families. These partnerships have fostered parent/community engagement, which, in turn, has provided our students with real world experiences, role models, mentors, opportunities to contribute and be of service to the community, chances to develop social conscience and responsibility, and much more.

Collaboration and distributed responsibility is at the core of each level of decision-making. At the governance level, the finance committee utilizes the skills of its members to review, analyze and investigate financial matters and to then make recommendations to the board of directors.

Knowledgeable representatives from the school parent body and local community and staff comprise the technology committee. They investigate, compare, question and make recommendations to the board on the acquisition, deployment and utilization of technology in our one-on-one computing program and throughout the school.

On site, the administration continues the collaborative and distributed leadership models. Our literacy and numeracy programs

have recently undergone a major review and revision. They are examples of collaborative decision-making at the administrative level. They utilize a three-tier, data-driven response to instruction that relies on the supports of the board, parents and site administration to be responsive and adaptable to student needs.

Support for students would not be possible without the input and efforts of our educational assistants, who also contribute information to assist with decision-making. Educational assistants are instrumental in the delivery of our personalized program. The support from educational assistants allows for a greater variety of accommodations and recommendations to be implemented in a timely manner and tracked for effectiveness. As such, their input is sought, valued and integral to the decision-making.

Our personalized program relies on the knowledge and skills of our educational psychologist, principal, vice-principal, teachers, educational assistants, parents, colleagues in other schools and jurisdictions, health professionals, community members and organizations to develop, deliver, monitor, modify

and assess each student's program as defined in the individual program plan.

CAPE's system leaders play a key role in successfully communicating and demonstrating to stakeholders and the community that CAPE is meeting the needs of its students and that the students are successful. These system leaders are ideally positioned to model and sustain the processes that support effective communication and high engagement. Open, clear communication and the maintenance of effective stakeholder engagement can be evidenced within each stakeholder group. It is this engagement that creates a learning environment that supports student engagement, the pursuit of personal best, capacity and citizenship. ■

Teresa Di Ninno, B.A., B.Ed., M.A., Diploma of Collegial Studies and an alumnus of McGill University and the University of Toronto. Teresa began her teaching career in Alberta in 1982. She is also the founder, past principal and current superintendent of CAPE Public Charter School, one of the first charter schools in Alberta.

Teachers —

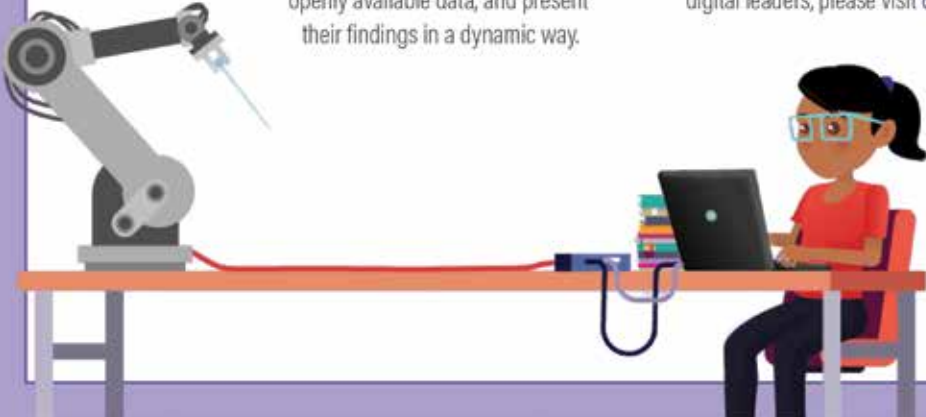
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We are leveraging an open source, web-based platform to bring "computational thinking" into K-12 math, science, social science, and humanities courses, and are looking for teachers to help trial this new technology! Cybera (Alberta's not-for-profit technology accelerator) and the Pacific Institute for Mathematical Sciences (PIMS) are building web-based "interactive textbooks" that will teach students to code, analyze

openly available data, and present their findings in a dynamic way.


This project is part of the new national CanCODE program, which seeks to aid coding and digital skills development among Canadian youth.

We are currently looking for teachers in western Canada to join our program! There is no cost to schools and teacher training is free. If you want to help today's kids become tomorrow's digital leaders, please visit cybera.ca/CanCODE.



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The impact of childhood trauma and chronic stress is one of the most pressing issues facing educators today. Trauma can wreak havoc on a young person's ability to learn and function in a school setting. The effects of trauma can be powerful and profound. Trauma impairs the most essential elements of learning, including thinking, attentiveness, the ability to process information, difficulty regulating emotions and the ability to form healthy relationships.

The good news is that there are things that educators and other caring adults can do to mitigate the effects of trauma and help at-risk youth flourish.

We may expect teachers, administrators and counsellors to understand these issues, but many have never had training in trauma-informed care or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and the impact these factors play in healthy brain development. By helping educators understand the impact of trauma and stress on both students and teachers, we can:

- Reduce stress in the classroom.
- Increase a student's time in class.
- Decrease suspensions and behavioral issues.
- Increase empathy for students and families.

ACES are stressful or traumatic events, which can include but are not limited to abuse and neglect, household dysfunction, domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health issues. These chronic stressful events disrupt neurodevelopment and affect the child's ability to cope with negative or disruptive emotions. Over time, the child may adopt negative coping mechanisms. ACES can lead to a future of lifelong health concerns, risk aversion, passivity and violence. Highly traumatized youth respond to the world as a place of constant danger. With their brains overloaded with stress hormones and unable to function appropriately, they can't focus on learning.

Signs that a child may be impacted by ACES:

- Anger management problems.
- Manipulative.
- Lack of motivation.
- View others as threats.
- Believe bad things happen on purpose.
- Avoid risks at all costs.
- Frustration.

This is why, in a trauma-informed school, every staff member in every role is given information and training about the effects of

trauma. All staff understand the strategies the school has chosen to address trauma, as well as the steps they can take to support students and contribute to a positive school environment.

A trauma-informed school culture is one where staff interact with students in a respectful, caring, empathetic manner, understanding that trauma may have occurred. Strategies in a trauma-informed school:

- Create a safe, respectful, compassionate and positive environment in the school and every classroom. All students benefit from this, but it is especially helpful for young people who have experienced trauma.
- When a staff member witnesses inappropriate or unusual behavior, they seek to investigate further to understand the possible source, which may be trauma. Staff seek to see beyond the behaviour and understand what may be behind it. When experiencing trauma-induced behaviour, staff ask themselves, "I wonder what happened to this child?" not "What's wrong with this child?"
- Create trauma-informed discipline policies that seek to assist the student to manage trauma, rather than adding more trauma to an already hurting individual.

Building a Trauma-Informed School Culture



- Similarly, teachers can create trauma-informed classroom management policies and procedures that address and resolve conflicts through mediated conversations and small group conferences, instead of focusing on rules and punishment. The focus should be on the harm done, accountability for behaviors and appropriate reparations.
- Staff can be sensitive to the triggers of powerful emotions caused by trauma and avoid them.
- Praise publicly and criticize privately.
- Staff access brain science and trauma-informed practice training in their professional development plans.
- The school reaches out to the families of students to better understand the community which will inform the needs of the students.

United Way of Calgary and Area's All In for Youth initiative focuses on removing barriers to high school completion. After the first five years of the initiatives implementation, working in 21 Calgary high schools and piloting and scaling successful interventions that contribute to an increase in completion rates, one lesson has stood out amongst them all—that a key element affecting high school completion rates is having a trauma-informed approach for working with at-risk youth. Schools that have created a trauma-informed school culture and use trauma-informed strategies are experiencing significant improvement in student engagement and high school completion.

When experiencing trauma-induced behavior, staff ask themselves, “I wonder what happened to this child?” not “What’s wrong with this child?”

The flagship program of All In for Youth are success coaches. These individuals work directly with youth in high schools and they are trained and educated in understanding trauma and use trauma-informed strategies when working with youth. Barriers that may seem insurmountable for students can often be addressed with support, guidance and a small amount of resources. Success coaches are well-connected to the social support network within the broader Calgary community.

The most significant impact reported by students working with a success coach was having a positive adult connection in their lives. Students connected this one-to-one support with having more success academically, improved attendance, better grades and a significant increase in high school completion.

The experience of early trauma is not a destiny. Building caring relationships with students who have experienced trauma in an

atmosphere of empathy, caring and sincere concern, can build connections in the brains of traumatized youth and change challenging behaviour.

When we recognize and accommodate students' trauma responses, we open a path of possibility that can lead to greater academic success and a richer fulfillment of life. ■

Craig Foley is the current Director of Signature Initiatives for United Way of Calgary and Area, which includes the leadership of UWCA's Signature Initiatives in the Kids, Poverty, and Communities focus areas. Craig also oversees the Indigenous strategy at United Way, Natoo'si.

Dr. Jennifer Medlock is the Project Manager of the All In for Youth initiative through United Way of Calgary and Area. All In for Youth is a city-wide movement of individuals, corporations, community agencies, and governments dedicated to realizing the potential of all youth in their city.



Inside Learning Disabilities for Educators

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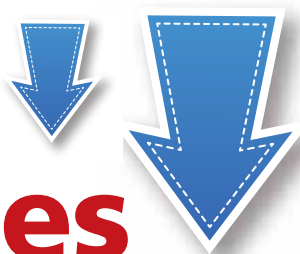


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The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is a health and welfare trust governed by 10 Trustees. It offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for over 61,000 covered members and their dependants in 58 school jurisdictions and 11 associations across the province. ASEBP is pleased to contribute a regular column in the CASS Connection.

Working Together to Lower Dental Fees



By Kelli Littlechilds, ASEBP

Dental fees in Canada are unregulated, meaning that dental offices set their own rates for the services they provide. As a result, the cost of the same service can be drastically different between dental providers, even within the same province and city. With Alberta's dental fees currently sitting at the highest in the country, there has been an increase in pressure in recent years on dental providers to lower their rates.

In an effort to increase transparency about fees and to, hopefully, rein in the

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cost of oral health for Albertans, in 2017, the Government of Alberta and the Alberta Dental Association and College (ADA&C) collaborated to release a dental fee guide (ADA&C Fee Guide) that includes suggested pricing for specific dental procedures. The idea being that if Albertans have a reference point for the cost of services, they'll start to discuss fees with their dental office and possibly "shop around" for those who charge closer to those presented in the guide.

Oral health isn't just on the mind of the government though, at ASEBP we've been actively monitoring rising rates over the past several years as well. With dental fees increasing every year, something needed to be done to ensure our covered members continued to have access to the oral health care they needed.

The work of our Health Benefits Advisory Panel (HBAP)—a multidisciplinary group of experts who work with us to review our plan offerings and makes recommendations for possible enhancements—has helped us make big strides in this area. Through analysis of our plan experience,



consultation with government and oral health care professionals, HBAP brought forward a number of recommendations to the ASEBP Trustees.

These recommendations led to the creation of the ASEBP Oral Health Strategy,

a multi-year plan aimed at ensuring our benefits effectively achieve positive oral health outcomes for our covered members and their dependants, at a reasonable and fair cost to the plan. Getting ahead of this issue and laying the groundwork for future

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With Alberta's dental fees currently sitting at the highest in the country, there has been an increase in pressure in recent years on dental providers to lower their rates.

changes has been key. So key, that we've already begun to realize the benefits.

Our proactive oral health measures, like annual reviews of our dental reimbursement rates (the maximum amount we reimburse for dental treatments), have meant cost savings for our covered members and the plan. In fact, our rates are already very closely aligned with the ADA&C suggested fees, which is great news for our covered members. Now that the ADA&C Fee Guide has taken effect (January 1, 2018), we're hopeful that dental providers will start to align their fees in the coming months and years with the guide as well, meaning a further possible reduction in any out-of-pocket expense for our covered members for most routine dental services. We will be monitoring this closely over the coming year.



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To help ensure our covered members are informed consumers of oral health services and are better equipped to have conversations with their dental providers about how their fees compare to the ADA&C Fee Guide, we've also introduced an Online Dental Guide. This new tool, available on My ASEBP, has a searchable procedure code database which allows covered members to look up information and procedure code descriptions for popular dental services. This online guide also provides coverage amounts and maximum reimbursement rates based on the covered member's plan. Having this information readily accessible means covered members will be able to determine ahead of time whether they will be expected to pay out of pocket for dental visits.

Another key component of our Oral Health Strategy is the creation of the ASEBP Oral Health Advisory Panel—made up of dentists and dental hygienists. The panel was developed to build on the work of HBAP but focus exclusively on a review of ASEBP's current dental plan offerings. The panel makes recommendations to the ASEBP Trustees for possible enhancements based on evidence-based practice and insights from members of the dental community.

As we carry on with our Oral Health Strategy in the coming years, we're confident that we'll continue to achieve more positive outcomes that both support our covered members to make informed decisions about their own and their family's oral health care and allow us to better protect the financial viability of the plan now and in the future.

On a broader level, we're looking forward to continuing work with others in the province to employ strategies that will see the dental landscape in Alberta evolve, ensuring oral health care remains accessible to all Albertans. ■

Kelli Littlechilds is the CEO of ASEBP and has more than 30 years in the health and benefits industry. As the leader of one of Alberta's Top 70 Employers for 2018, Kelli is a champion for personal and workplace well-being.



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Werklund School of Education -

University of Calgary 4

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE EDUCATION

HeLa Ventures 29

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PROVIDER/LEARNING DISABILITIES

Foothills Academy Society 25

RECREATION

The Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum 17

REGULATORY BODY

College & Association of Respiratory

Therapists of Alberta 6

ROOFING ASSOCIATION

Alberta Roofing Contractor Association 6

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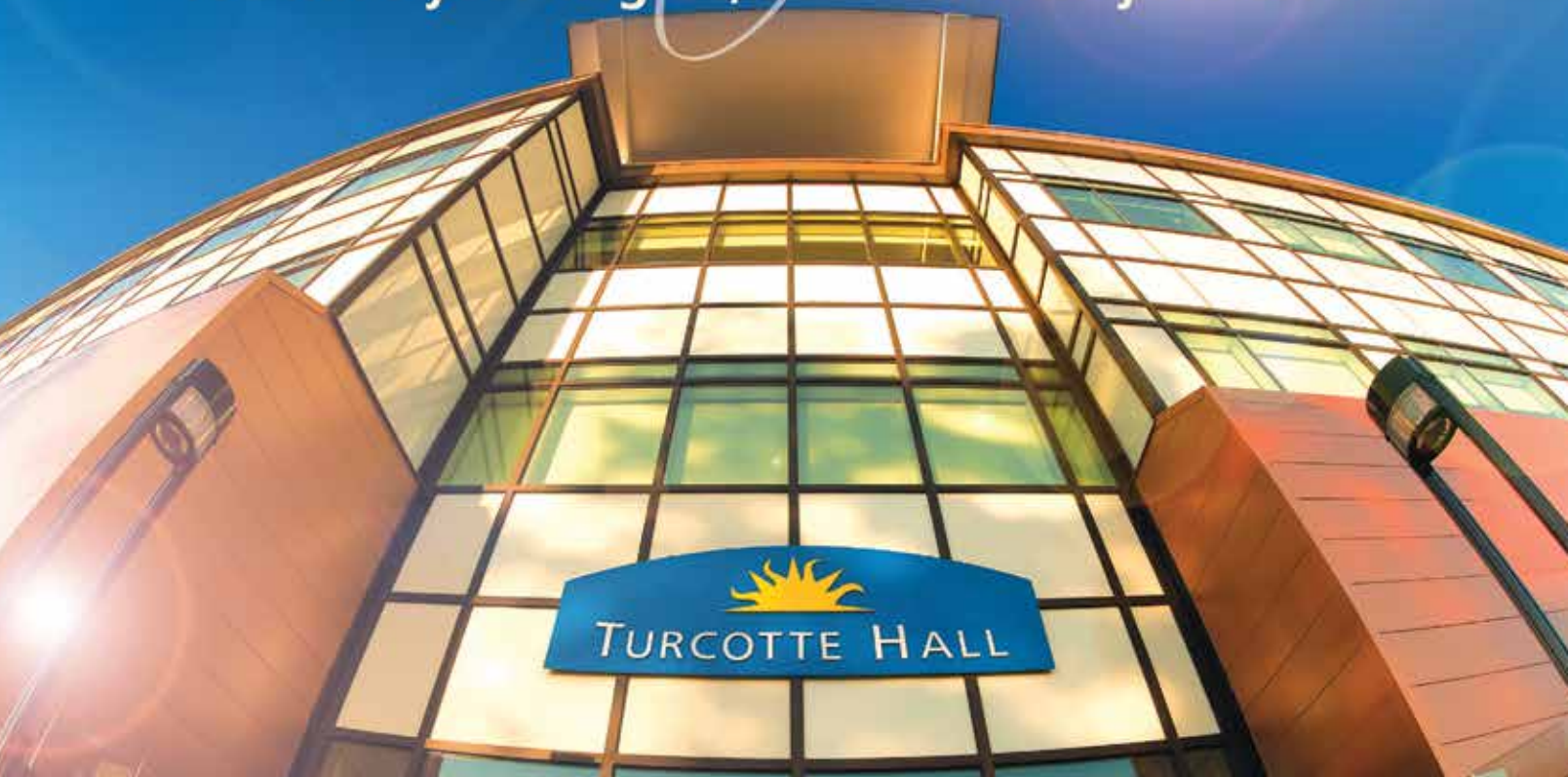
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