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The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents

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Nathalie David et Sylvie Monette

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Guide d'accompagnement (160 pages)

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Par un groupe d'enseignants

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Jacques Beauchesne†  
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À la fois interactif et évolutif, il vise à décrire plus aisément les choses, les personnes, les animaux et les situations qui les entourent. Cet ouvrage aidera n'importe quel écrivain, jeune ou moins jeune, à bien s'exprimer tant à l'oral qu'à l'écrit.

Ce dictionnaire est dédié d'abord aux élèves des 2<sup>e</sup> et 3<sup>e</sup> cycles du primaire, aux enseignants du 1<sup>er</sup> cycle et à toutes les personnes qui vivent l'appel de l'écriture.

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# Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable Dave Hancock | Minister of Education

“We will need the help, wisdom and support of the broader community if we are to rise to the challenges of education our children in an increasingly complex world.”

It has often been said that it takes a village to raise a child. That sentiment has continuing currency because it is demonstrably true. However, one of the most important aspects of child rearing is making sure children get the educational opportunities they need to succeed to the best of their abilities. This includes ensuring they have ready access to community supports and services they may need to enable them to succeed in school. So, in effect, it takes a village to educate a child as well.

Though it is unlikely there are too many people who would dispute that point, it creates some challenging questions for all those interested in education: How big is the village? Who actually lives in it? And what are their expectations of the education system?

I think all of us strongly believe that engaging communities in the education of their children is critical to the transformation of Alberta's Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system. What we need, however, is a clearer idea of what community engagement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century actually means and how it can best be achieved. This is going to require all of us to think differently about when, how and who we want to engage and why it is important to do so.

Community engagement is about building solid, ongoing relationships rather than those that are issues-related and sporadic. We all need to accept

that true community engagement is more than inviting parents to school board meetings or sending out newsletters to let them know what is going on in their children's schools. All Albertans support our education system through their taxes. Yet, only about 25 per cent of Albertans have children in the school system. This often means that their engagement with the education system is marginal at best. They may or may not understand what is happening in education and why. If they do not understand, they cannot be supportive of our efforts towards transformation.

We need to engage the broader community in order to show them what we are doing and how the return on their investment will benefit the province in the future. We will also need the help, wisdom and support of the broader community if we are to rise to the challenges of education our children in an increasingly complex world. This will mean reaching out to communities of interest that, in the past, have not been invited to the educational tent. This is particularly true for the business community that will employ the students our education system graduates. We need to be certain we are equipping our students with the skills they need to be successful in the world of work.

I am the first to admit that there is no single approach to community engagement. How it can be achieved will depend on local circumstances. However, as superintendents, I believe you have the knowledge, skills, attributes and commitment necessary for you to be able to lead your boards in the right direction. ■



# China

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## LOVE IN THE SUN 2012

Dear Guests:

When we enjoy our happy life in the sun, there are still many children whose parents are behind the bars wishing to receive our love and concern.

We would like to help these children, and you'll have the same opportunity to do so by joining us on this trip and visit the Beijing Sun Village. On behalf of our company and our tour members, we'll donate \$10 for every tour member registered for this program.

### BEIJING SUN VILLAGE

Beijing Sun Village was founded in 1995 by Mrs. Zhang Shuqin. It is a home for over 100 children of incarcerated parents aging from one to eighteen.

As a non-governmental charitable organisation, Sun Village has been dedicated to providing foster care and education for the children of convicts for over ten years. Sun Village is committed to bring these minors together in a stable and warm family. This environment enables them to grow-up both happily and healthily, just as other children would. Our charitable services include tailored educational programmes, psychological counselling, rights protection and vocational training.

SNA Educational Program 2012

### Info Sessions November 2011

DATE	CITY	LOCATION	ADDRESS	TIME
Nov 28 <sup>th</sup>	Calgary	Southland Leisure Centre, Cedar Brae Room	2000 Southland Dr. SW, Calgary AB T2V 4S4	5:30 PM - 7:00 PM
Nov 29 <sup>th</sup>	Lethbridge	Lethbridge Centre Level 2	200 - 4th Ave South Lethbridge, AB T1J 4E1	5:30 PM - 7:00 PM
Nov 30 <sup>th</sup>	Calgary	Aero Space Museum of Calgary	4629 McCall Way NE, Calgary, AB T2E 7H1	5:30 PM - 7:00 PM
Dec 1 <sup>st</sup>	Red Deer	G. H. Dawe Centre	56 Holt Street, Red Deer, AB T4N 3T4	5:30 PM - 7:00 PM
Dec 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Edmonton	Best Western Cedar Park Inn	5116 Gateway Boulevard Edmonton, AB T6H 2H4	5:30 PM - 7:00 PM

\* Add on airfare \$200-\$300

### Beijing



**Beijing Sun Village** - The village is now a home for over 100 children of incarcerated parents aged from 1 year to 18 years. The sun village was set up 1995 without any government aid. The head of the village, Mrs. Zhang Shuqin is the founder of Sun Village.



**Chuangdixia Village** - Chuandixia is known for its architecture and natural beauty. It is home to 500 well preserved courtyard homes dating to the Ming and Qing dynasties. Many of these homes have been converted into inns offering food and lodging to travelers.



**Mutianyu Great Wall** - Mutianyu is a section of the Great Wall of China located in Huairou County 70km northeast of Beijing. The Mutianyu section of the Great Wall is connected with Jianshou in the west and Lianhuachi in the east.



**Tiananmen Square** - Tiananmen Square is located in the center of Beijing, and it is the second largest city square in the world. It has great cultural significance as it was the site of several important events in Chinese history.



**The Forbidden City** - The Forbidden City was built during the Ming dynasty. It is actually a city-within-a-city; with 9999 rooms spread over 250 acres. During the Ming and Qing dynasty, 24 emperors made their home in the Forbidden City.



**2008 Olympics Games Sites** - The National Stadium serve as the main venue of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The design was awarded to a submission from the Swiss architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron in April 2003.



Xian Giant Wild Goose Pagoda



Xian Terra Cotta Warriors



Guilin Reed Flute Cave



Guilin Li River

\*Add on fare \$200 for round trip

\*Plus airport taxes & fees, fuel surcharge are subject to airlines approve by government

### Testimonials

What a fantastic tour! The old saying, "If it's too good to be true, it probably IS too good to be true," is NOT true. The China trip through SNA was so fantastic and incredible and it seems too good to be true, but it was better than we could have ever expected!

Bob Fleischmann  
Director at Mesa Public Schools  
Phoenix, AZ

Thank you ever so much for the wonderful opportunity your company as provided for our family and our first visit to China. It has been an awesome experience as well as an educational one! What a welcoming country China is, highlights for the visit to the Great Wall, and many sights. We feel very well taken care of by your tour guides. They were always as helpful and willing to make accommodations. I would highly recommend this to my fellow teachers.

Patti Berry, Principle  
Wye Elem School  
Sherwood Park, AB





# President's Message

**Roger Nippard**

President

College of Alberta School Superintendents

**T**he poet-teacher Gabriela Mistral wrote, "It's vital to consider the school not as one person's house, but as everyone's house." Over the past two years through transformational initiatives such as *Student Speak Out*, *Inspiring Education* and the drafting of a new Education Act, educators have opened the doors of the schoolhouse and Albertans have had an opportunity to participate in a generative dialogue about how we can best deliver opportunities for student learning.

Against the backdrop of "mandate creep", educators, policymakers and families increasingly agree that schools cannot do it alone. Children need multiple opportunities to learn and grow—at home, in school and in the community. The preponderance of evidence in the research supports the contention that when school staff, families and community members work together to develop a system of supports for children, these collaborative efforts lead to better developmental and educational outcomes.

Moving beyond the traditional bake sale or construction of a new playground, to more authentic involvement of parents and the broader community, requires courage, hard work and leadership. Jim Collins, in his manuscript, *Good to Great*, notes that the "Lone Ranger" style of leadership in the social sciences is increasingly less pervasive and effective. Green and Etheridge (2005), in a study of eleven school districts, commented that, "new leaders were sought, hired or elected because of their inclusive leadership style. They exhibited particular traits that facilitated participatory governance of the district and fostered collaborative working relationships."

The College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) Framework for School System

Success identifies research-based leadership practices having a demonstrated positive impact on student achievement. *Dimension 8: Building and Maintaining Good Relationships* recognizes the importance of authentic relationships between schools and families and the broader community. The University of Calgary Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) review (2009) concluded that parent and community participation is crucial for school success and provided concrete strategies for involving parents in schools. Aside from the AISI research the academic literature corroborates that parental interest and involvement in their child's learning can have a profoundly positive effect on a child's success in schools. Benefits cited include improved school readiness, higher student achievement, improved attendance, and higher rates of school completion.

While engaging parents is important, community partners are also a gigantic piece of the equation. Effective engagement is a shared responsibility carried out everywhere children learn. I would contend that historically our efforts at engagement have looked more like a divided highway than a two-way street. It's important to realize that learning is increasingly taking place outside the physical walls of the schoolhouse. While it is important to invite the broader community into the schoolhouse, it is equally important for schools to connect with the families and communities they serve. Schools can certainly benefit from the social capital expertise of community-based organizations and the authentic learning experiences they can provide.

Our proposed new *Education Act* "ups the ante" for the formal leadership in the education sector by referencing, in

its preamble, that "the collaboration and cooperation of all partners in the education system is necessary to ensure the educational success of all students." It specifically places the responsibility on boards and individual trustees, to engage parents, students, staff and community on board matters. Collaboration with municipalities, other boards and community-based agencies is required. This cooperation and collaboration is deemed to be necessary to ensure that all students experience success. Our recent focus on generative governance has prepared us well to move in this direction.

Successfully involving parents and the community requires hard work but the long-term results are well worth it. We need to both reach and touch our communities. Involving hard-to-reach parents and community members requires strengthening ties to community leaders, following through on commitments, developing trust and building relationships. It requires a firmer grasp of the cultural and language barriers for populations that have been historically marginalized.

My first position at the school division level was that of a partnership facilitator so I am very pleased that community engagement was selected as the theme for this edition. On behalf of the CASS Executive, I want to take this opportunity to thank all contributors for sharing concrete examples of community-based approaches that stand in stark contrast to more traditional, school centric and individualistic approaches to engagement. Your insights and practices are highly valued as we continue to move towards positioning our schools and divisions as "everyone's house."



# Family Programming: A Catalyst for Community

*Edmonton Catholic Schools' Early Learning Team is one example of how a school district has demonstrated leadership in building bridges through family programming.*

*By Corine Gannon, B.Ed., M. Ed.*

Within the province of Alberta, the Government supports educational programming that is in addition to the regular instructional time within the early learning (pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten) classroom. This is referred to as Family (Orientated) Programming, which traditionally was designed for children identified with severe needs. It materialized as one and a half hour home visits where quite often, a social worker would visit homes and do various activities together with the parent and the child, as recommended by the speech language pathologist, occupational therapist or classroom teacher.

As with all experiences, we recognized the strengths and challenges with such a program. We recognized as a district the value of extended programming, where opportunities were given to both parent and child together, to continue the building and practicing of strategies utilized in the classroom. This helped to build stronger bridges with the home and the school, and to provide some additional individualized programming to children with identified needs. We also recognized challenges. As we built a bridge to school and home, we were not providing opportunities to build these bridges into community, nor were we utilizing existing community resources in the spirit of aligning and sharing community resources. Parents were not brought out into their community, rather, sessions were typically conducted in their home where networking opportunities

Child and parent participants in various Edmonton Catholic Schools' Early Learning programs.



and relationships with other parents and families were not able to develop.

In a quest to overcome these challenges, we re-designed our family programming. Along with this new direction, we revolutionized our pre-Kindergarten programs so that rather than having segregated sites with children with severe needs, we created more authentic community based pre-Kindergarten programming where children with varied abilities (i.e. typically developing, mild/

moderate or severe needs and English as a second language learners) were grouped together into more natural, organic environments.

As we re-designed our family programming for pre-Kindergarten, we also included all our Kindergarten programs. The notion of working with family programming and offering this to all our children was something that all our families could benefit from.

What began as a small brochure offering a handful of evening sessions for parents





and children to come together under typical topics such as behavior and speech and language, is now a series of sessions and integrated disciplines that include speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, adapted phys-ed and fine arts. It also includes a variety of partners from around the city, within the context of early learning environments and philosophy.

In each program, various members from the Early Learning Multidisciplinary Team participate and integrate their expertise into each session in an inclusive, meaningful way to parents. As well, parents gain increased awareness about what the city and other community organizations and facilities have to offer, to further support them and their child's growth. Below are a few examples of our community based, family programming.

#### Little Movers

This is an example of a partnership with the City of Edmonton. At various recreational facilities around Edmonton, this umbrella title includes three different series offered at select sites. These programs are an opportunity for parents to get active with their children with a series of swim classes (Little Swimmers), gym classes (Little Shakers) or exploring days at the Edmonton Valley Zoo (Little Explorers). In this way, parents are not only introduced to various facilities around the city but they are exposed to them in ways that build their capacity to strengthen the quality of the visit with their child and

practice and build on the skills that the child needs to further develop.

For example, as children explore the Zoo, a speech language pathologist works with the families, modeling how to elicit language from children and develop both conversations and vocabulary that is meaningful and motivating for children.

One day, I had the opportunity to go and observe Little Shakers, our movement and gymnastic program. Our physical therapist was in attendance together with a child who had some challenges moving one side of his body. His parents were not only smiling but they were talking to other parents and they were laughing. Their child had a stroke earlier that year and the family was a newer family to Canada and had few supports.

In speaking with the family, they were delighted to see their child participate in a program with other children. There was a natural mix of children with varying needs and most importantly, they were all children first, together with their parents, enjoying both relationships and a rich community hub.

#### Multi-cultural programming

Edmonton has a growing population of new families from various countries. Multi-cultural evenings have been most successful and bring together the various cultures in a classroom. We have also developed specific cultural evenings that support building networks within the comfort of the families' own language and nationality.

One of these programs is our Mandarin series, which includes four sessions and is facilitated by one of our Family School Liaison Workers and a Speech Language Pathologist who is also Mandarin. Mandarin food is brought in for dinner, parents and children sing songs and rhymes in their first language, and the SLP dialogues with parents ensuring that parents continue to honor their first language in their home and with their children.

Families have enjoyed these sessions and we have expanded them to include Spanish and Vietnamese. Further to this, we offer field trips to our new families to various facilities around the city, so that they can learn and participate in what the City of Edmonton has to offer. It is not unusual on a family field



Figure A

Parent's pre-participation goals for attending Triple P	Parent's post-participation comments for attending Triple P. What is the most powerful message you are taking away from being involved with this group?
Wants to stay positive in parenting.	I have a game plan now.
Address challenges with own child's jealousy with her family day home children.	I feel in control as a parent even though my child has some challenges.
Concerned about constant drama and acting out behavior.	I know who is driving the bus.
How to develop better listening skills.	I know my role as a parent.
How to handle different parenting expectations.	I have strategies that are working.



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trip bus to have three or four different language interpreters as well. Family field trips include trips to Fort Edmonton, John Walter Museum, Muttart Conservatory, John Janzen Nature Center and the Zoo.

Following is a story from Laura Moniz, one of our Family School Liaison Workers, who planned and facilitated a spring art project night with families.

*I would like to share with you my "success story" of a family I worked with this year.*

*This little boy joined us in September in the 100 Voices program. He was considered to have little to no English and did not speak in his mother tongue in Chinese. His parents were so concerned about his lack of socialization that they took him to China thinking that if he was around his cousins, he would start talking and playing.*

*They returned from their trip discouraged as Tim (not his real name) seemed to lapse even further into his own world. His family doctor recommended 100 Voices. Tim was also born with Cerebral Palsy and wore leg braces. His parents would carry him around most times. After a few days in the 100 Voices (pre-Kinderergarten) program, his mom was convinced to allow Tim to walk around the room on his own. Our adapted Phys-Ed specialist suggested he have his braces off for circle time so he could sit with the others on the carpet. Although his mom was hesitant, she began to allow us to integrate him into all the activities and eventually felt she could leave him with us.*

*I encouraged Tim's parents to sign up for family programs and this started to open Tim's world up! He participated in Little Movers and Little Swimmers—at first he was content to just watch the other kids but soon he was playing in small groups with the support of the team. Tim's parents brought him to my Spring Art Project night. The kids were making kites and decorating birdhouses and Tim had so much fun that night; he had never used paint or flown a kite. His parents were delighted to see him giggling and smiling with the other kids. At the end of the evening, Tim's parents came to me to thank me for the evening. Tim's mom had tears in her eyes as she grabbed me and gave me the biggest hug I have ever gotten. She said, "Tim like kids." I responded, "Oh yes, Tim loves to be with other kids." His dad quickly corrected me, saying, "no, no. Tim is like his friends now."*



*Since then, Tim has been diagnosed with High Functioning Autism. Despite a strong recommendation from a doctor that he attend a segregated program for Autism, his parents refused. They have expressed that they would have never seen the changes in him now had he not had caring people in his life that supported his growth. They will be continuing on again next year and are very excited. Inclusion—and feeling and being a genuine part of community—are a great thing!*

### Community hubs/aligning services

We are also in the process of creating a community-based center for our new Canadian families. *Mosaics* (the bringing together of different pieces into one site) is an early learning family center for new families with young children that serves both Edmonton Catholic School families as well as other community families in the area, whether or not they are registered in the school district.

In our room we will have an Early Learning Facilitator who will act as the Program Coordinator and is already working with a Family School Liaison Worker, building partnerships with surrounding agencies to provide an ideal “one stop” for parents. This Early Learning Family Center will act as a site for family programming, family networking and will be an opportunity for agencies within the community to offer additional programming and services/resources to families.

The site also serves as the District ESL Centre to all the families in Edmonton Catholic Schools, and supports Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programming and child minding services.

### Music and language programs

Rhymes that Bind, a program developed by the Centre for Family Literacy, has been widely received by hundreds of our families. Rhymes that Bind gives parents and their children (birth to six years) an opportunity to get together with other young families to sing songs, have fun and share a meal.

The six-week drop-in program promotes positive parenting and language development. Children learn about rhymes and rhythms. While children have fun, parents learn new ways to interact and enhance their child's speech. A few years ago we established a formal

partnership with the Centre for Family Literacy and they have provided training for our own personnel to offer these sessions. Once again, these programs, although offered to our early learning families, have been implemented in many schools and have also been extended to the larger community. This is an excellent opportunity for schools to open their doors to potential new families, as well as participate in some pre-transition programming for younger children not yet in the school system.

This year, we have not only added additional sites for Rhymes that Bind, but we

have created a new music program entitled Genesis Early Learning Music (GEM), that will be offered to families at various locations across the city. This includes singing, dancing, listening and playing instruments and is free (like all of our programs). It is for parents and their children (birth to six years old).

### Triple P Positive Parenting

This series enables parents to find successful strategies to deal with the challenges of raising children. The program aligns well with Alberta Education's initiative to provide

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access to this program to build stronger families. Following is some pre/post data that one of our social workers collected from the parents who participated. It was collected at the beginning of one of these series and at the end of the series (See Figure A).

### Early Learning Mobile Unit

For this school year, we are further expanding our community programs by building an Early Learning Mobile Unit (EMU) that will travel to various locations in the city and offer programming to children and their families

in their own communities. For those families who find it challenging to come to our sessions, this is another way for us to go to them in their community.

Partnerships are being developed with agencies who will hop on board the EMU to provide enrichment that will engage community children (birth to six years), both in the educational system and those still in their “pre-transition years”. Many of these drop-in programs will be open to all children and parents, whether or not they are currently registered in Edmonton Catholic Schools.

This fall, Edmonton Catholic Schools plunged into a new territory, providing formal education programming away from school and into the social heart of a community at a new recreational facility (Terwillegar Recreation Centre, City of Edmonton). The program has been so widely received, that we soon had to open up an additional classroom at the center. This newer concept of school away from school—in the social heart of the recreation center rather than in a traditional school—is where active living and pre-Kindergarten programming is being fused together with our families and where we are being challenged to redefine education within the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Today, we have hundreds of family programming sessions, many of which can be located on our district website ([www.ecsd.net](http://www.ecsd.net)) under Early Learning. Be sure to take a look and be inspired. There is no doubt that the old African proverb, *It takes a village to raise a child*, is most noteworthy. Although we are not in Africa, it is very clear that if we are to support our families, it is the whole community that needs to come together and embrace this common goal that we all share. ■

*Corine Gannon, B.Ed. M.Ed., has been a teacher and school principal for 25 years and is currently the District Principal in Edmonton Catholic Schools who supervises and coordinates Early Learning.*



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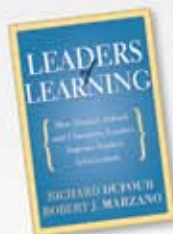
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# Seeking Elder Counsel Through the Elder Advisory Council: Making Our Learning Public

*The Calgary Board of Education is committed to personalizing learning to achieve success for each student, every day, no exceptions.*

*By Dianne Roulson and Elizabeth Gouthro*

In an effort to enhance our understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) wisdom and teachings, and to serve FNMI students well, our chief superintendent invited Elders from Treaty 7 Nations to meet regularly with some members of the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) staff, forming what has come to be known as the Elder Advisory Council (EAC). Our first gathering took place in October 2010. We met five times during the 2010-2011 school year and will continue to meet during the current school year.

EAC has proven to be a powerful vehicle for mutual learning and we would like to share some aspects of our own learning journeys, as influenced by our participation in it. We have found ourselves *living* the central tenets of our district strategy of personalized learning. These include, beginning with engagement, being active and effortful, assessing our learning and allowing for transformation. Personalized learning, as it is understood in the CBE, involves a complex interplay of interactions around tasks that are deemed to be worthwhile. It is a living practice in which those participating and the work in which they are engaged, are each influenced and shaped by the other. See Figure 1.

One of the principles of personalized learning is that “we learn to do the work by doing the work, *not* by telling other people to do the work, *not* by having done the work at some point in the past, and *not* by hiring experts who can act as proxies for our knowledge about how to do the work.” (City, E.A., Elmore, R.F. & Fiarman, S.E., p. 33, 2010). We must also be willing to make our learning public.

It is in the spirit of these ideas that we share some of the learning and questions that have emerged for us as a result of our involvement in the EAC. We do so to provide a glimpse of the complex interplay of our engagement as learners with the Elders and the tasks we have taken up together. Of course, our learning as adults must influence the learning of students in CBE and student success is our *raison d'être*.

One of the first thoughts that came to mind when we paused to consider our own learning and experience with the Elders resided around being *struck by beauty*. Being struck can be construed as a violent or hurtful act or in some way being dealt a blow. But to be struck by beauty is something else entirely. It is kinder, somehow, and yet its impact remains great. We have been overwhelmed by the beauty of the culture(s), wisdom and teachings that flow from the Elders. They have both touched and changed us. There is a gentleness and generosity that we have felt in their presence, even when the lessons we have learned have been jarring.

We have felt a sense of belonging in the presence of the Elders

that we long to create for others in our work. They have not told us we belong, but rather, have received us. They have not said they have heard us, but rather, have listened. We have been moved beyond words by their teachings.

We have come to appreciate the significant role the Elders play and *why* they are honoured and esteemed within their various Nations. We have a growing understanding of what it is to have pride in one's culture and identity. It is a pride that draws others in and expands as it is expressed. Their acknowledgement of many Nations allows us (and others) to participate *with* them and to be included.

It has been challenging to face, acknowledge and witness the cultural destruction and devastation in the wake of the residential school experience. At the same time, the Elders offer forgiveness and generosity in the midst of great suffering that leaves us, as learners, with confidence in our capacity to heal and find our way together.

A significant aspect of personalized learning, as it is understood in the CBE, is that the teacher teaches just the thing that the student needs to learn next. Therefore, we are never relieved of having to ask ourselves, “what is our next level of work” at this particular time and place and in the company of one another? As the Elders have shown us repeatedly, our next level of work *will always depend*. They continue to teach us what it is we need to learn next and, in doing so, our work takes on a different shape as we strive for success for every student, every day, no exceptions.

Our experience with the Elders has been humbling and unsettling as well as calming. We have felt accepted while also having had our thinking and way of being in the world interrupted and challenged. Their teachings have caused us to think differently and to take time to pause. We are learning, albeit slowly, how to hold questions in silence, in thoughtful pause, as a sign of deep respect for the



Figure 1. Personalized learning. This image is from: City, E.A.; Elmore, R.F., Fiarman, S.E., & Teitel, L. (2005). *Instructional rounds in education: A network approach to improving teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Press.



questions themselves and for our work together. Historically, we have often felt the need to fill the silent space and are discovering how to allow questions to simply sit in-between us.


We can see our way forward when we are working like this together in the EAC—not the way forward but many ways forward. The Elders teach us but do not provide us an answer. They teach through story as we are able and willing to listen. As we anticipate a new year of learning with the Elders, we ask ourselves, why does this work matter and how will our learning contribute to the CBE's

promise of learning/as unique/as every student? The spirit of these questions is reflected in the Niitsitapii (Blackfoot) value of **Ihpipototsp**, calling us to question our purpose for being wherever we are and how we will live what we learn. Although this definition does not give the language the depth of interpretation that it deserves, it helps us begin. ■

*Dianne Roulson has been with the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) for 25 years. She has served CBE students in a variety of ways including classroom teacher, assistant principal,*

*specialist, principal and, most recently, as manager, Diversity, Learning Services. Roulson has a B.Ed, M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of Calgary.*

*Elizabeth Gouthro has been with the CBE for 38 years. She has served CBE students in a variety of roles including teacher, assistant principal, principal and director. She is currently director, Learning Services. Gouthro has a B.Sc. from St. Francis Xavier University, a B.Ed. from Acadia University, an M.Sc. from Dalhousie University, and an M.Ed. from the University of Calgary.*





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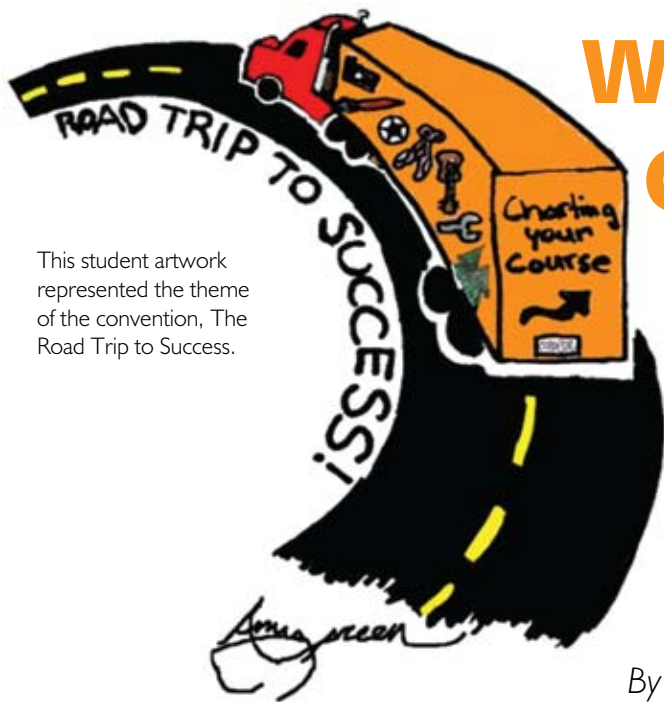
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**ACHIEVEMENTS**



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This student artwork represented the theme of the convention, The Road Trip to Success.

# When the Community Participates, Relevance Goes Up

By Bryan Funk and Alexander (Sandy) McDonald

*The student-planned Road Trip to Success convention exceeded expectations.*

**W**hen school improvement is discussed, the issue of how engaged students are in their learning is discussed frequently as well. When students are not fully engaged in their learning there are many consequences, including students not completing high school. As a result, increasing high school graduation rates is a priority for educational systems across North America. Many factors influence high school completion and the complex problem is one that should be given consideration long before students enter high school. One strategy for improvement is to help students see school as relevant and identify connections between their interests, the work they do in school and their future. In their 2009 book, the *Fourth Way*, Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley addressed this concept, stating increased community engagement and giving students a larger role to play in educational change are two strategies to improve education. The purpose of this article is to describe how Derek Taylor Public School, in Grande Prairie Alberta, attempted to create the conditions for increased community engagement and student participation in influencing their own learning. The planning and implementation of a Grade 6 to 9 student

career convention, built upon significant student input and extensive community involvement, are described and the lasting benefits of the event are shared.

## Planning and implementation

Connecting with community is important at Derek Taylor Public School and students are constantly reminded of the important role they play in the neighbourhood and the city. As a new school opening in 2007, staff at Derek Taylor decided early that community-based learning opportunities were a priority. Engagement with parents, field trips off campus and inviting guests into the school are opportunities to develop and practice the skills that help connect students with their community and are organized whenever it was possible and relevant.

In October of 2008, staff began discussing the topic of student engagement and ways to help students make the connection between school and life after school. Talk centered on ways to help students learn more about themselves and connect their interests to careers. Planning for a Student Career Convention began. The priority for planners was to involve students and the entire

community in making the event a success. Two of the school's goals, success for all and social responsibility, would be supported through the activity and students would be engaged in building self-awareness regarding their individual strengths as well as supporting their development as lifelong learners.

Prior to the convention days, groundwork was done in two areas. Students were guided through several days of activities to help them identify their interests, skills and strengths. This newly developed self-awareness was later used for choosing individual sessions during the convention. Students were also surveyed before the convention to rate how much they knew about their strengths. Using the information about themselves from the lead-up activities, students worked with staff to select sessions to attend that reflected these results. Students were also encouraged to explore one area outside of their strengths as well. When the event was over students were surveyed again to assess the growth they experienced as a result of the convention.

Secondly, the student convention was designed to be hosted by the students for the students and they were given ownership of the many roles necessary to make such an



event successful. Students embraced ownership and came up with the convention title, designed the logo, welcomed the guests into the building, directed presenters to their sessions and generally helped with setup and implementation.

The great unknown was whether or not the community would see the benefit to the students and connect with them. Presenters were encouraged to speak to the students about their careers as well as the life path they took to end up in their current roles. The challenges presenters had to overcome to achieve personal and professional goals were a common discussion topic with students.

Presenters were also asked to make the session as hands-on as possible, which led to a high level of engagement by the students. The question and answer sessions that occurred helped students gain first hand experience from experts in the community, which was an impressive benefit!

The opportunity for the adult members of our community to talk about their passions with the future of our community

enhanced their participation and made a dramatic impression on the entire school community.

### Lasting benefits

The Road Trip to Success convention exceeded initial goals, achieving success on many levels. From the perspective of student engagement in the learning activity, staff could not have been more pleased. Students were visibly and actively engaged in all of the sessions and the presenters were consistent with their praise for student behavior.

Additionally, the post-convention surveys showed students experienced significant growth in self-understanding. The benefits of the convention were evident among the school's parents as well, who reported high levels of satisfaction on district and provincial surveys regarding the school's ability to prepare students for the world of work. By having the opportunity to choose sessions they wished to attend based on learning inventories, students had a chance to engage with passionate members of their

community and get a glimpse of their future. By hearing community members speak about the path they took from school to work, students had more chances to understand the path that lay before them. Seeing how their interests and strengths in junior high can ultimately influence life outside of school after graduation helped reinforce the relevance of school for students.

The Road Trip to Success increased student engagement at Derek Taylor Public School, gave students the opportunity to engage with their community in a very positive way, and hopefully will stay with them as they all complete high school successfully! ■

*Bryan Funk is the Vice Principal of Derek Taylor Public School, located in the Grande Prairie Public School District. Alexander (Sandy) McDonald is the Director of Educational Technology for the Grande Prairie Public School District. Follow him on Twitter at [acmcdonaldgp](#) or check out his blog: <http://over40andstillinschool.blogspot.com>.*



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# Supporting the Village that Raises a Child

*Immigrant children will succeed if they are properly supported.*

By Cathy Cameron, Kathleen Finnigan and Paul Mason

With continued growth of immigrant families in central Alberta, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools has adopted a full service model to support newcomers to their school community. This model is built on the concept of the collaborative learning village; a belief that children will succeed in school when newcomer families successfully integrate within the community as a result of stakeholder collaboration

to provide joint supports and connections. The school becomes a focal point in this learning village through the development of trusted relationships and ensuring quality education for children. To complete the triad between school, family and community, local parishes have a significant role in our village concept.

Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools has an ESL student enrolment of almost 700 children in 2011 (with an overall student population of

approximately 6,700), an increase of approximately 11 per cent since 2010. The provision of supportive ESL learning programs extends across 16 neighbourhood schools throughout the division from Pre-Kindergarten through to Grade 12.

Support from the Central Services team at Red Deer Catholic has been critical to the program's overall success through the delivery of professional development in the areas of instructional and assessment strategies, standardized reporting and program evaluation. An ESL Reception Centre provides a central location where families are supported through the registration and intake process. During intake, family interviews are conducted and student assessments are completed. This provides key information to neighbourhood schools prior to the student's arrival.

To appropriately welcome new students to their neighbourhood school environment, Red Deer Catholic has established a Student Ambassador Program. Based on the Alberta Education's *ESL Guide to Implementation*, Ambassadors are given the opportunity to demonstrate servant leadership skills by welcoming and supporting students with orientation, establishing new friendships and familiarizing the new students with cultures and customs that are taken for granted in our Canadian schools. Student Ambassadors and staff receive training in order to provide consistent services across the division.

As a result of this program, new students gain a positive start which is encouraging for parents and opens the door for ongoing relationship building between the school and family. The Newcomer Orientation Week (NOW) model is successfully implemented for high school students whereby a week long orientation course is offered at the beginning of the school year to develop ambassador leadership for newcomers and further connect students positively to the school community.



Father Martin Carroll takes time from Sacred Heart Parish to learn about which countries the students in Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools lived before arriving in Canada.



Student Ambassadors welcome parents with a "Morning Muffin Mingler".



Neighbourhood schools are encouraged to provide opportunities for family interaction and engagement. Across the division, these activities have included Parent Advisory Council, international potluck dinners and talent nights, Parent Information Nights, and school celebrations such as awards and Masses that are open to families. In many of these activities, interpreters and/or translators are required to support parents and family members that have not acquired the necessary English skills to fully communicate with staff.

In Red Deer, a crucial partner in the delivery of the collaborative learning environment has been the Central Alberta Refugee Effort (CARE), a not-for-profit community organization that, in cooperation with Catholic Social Services (CSS), provides settlement services for new Canadians. The services provided by CARE include settlement support in schools, interpreter/translation services during registration and intake, support for parent/teacher interviews and family/school events.

As an example of community collaboration, an initiative was undertaken between St. Patrick's Community School, CARE and the local Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) program to provide *Focus on Families*, a positive parenting series that included information sessions on nutrition, positive discipline, school culture and volunteerism through service learning. Each session of the series was delivered to a capacity audience.

The series concluded with "An Evening of Advent" celebration hosted by 35 program participants and was attended by over 400 students and families. In addition, immigrant parents are now personally invited, through the support of CARE interpreters, to Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings and Joint School Council meetings to ensure their voices are heard as we continue to meet student needs within our school division.

Our Catholic faith is foundational in making Christ known to children and for that reason, our local parish communities are instrumental in helping to welcome and include new children and families. Many of our new families choose Red Deer Catholic Schools because of their Catholic roots from their home countries, and for that reason the connection between school, family and church is critically important. Our parish

priests are well-known to our students and families as they visit schools regularly to visit students and staff, bless prayer centres, take part in school events including liturgies and Masses, and to support sacramental preparation in the various grade levels.

As the village continues to grow, so does the importance of providing timely services and supports to immigrant families new to Canada. Even in a community with over 90,000 people, new families in Red Deer are feeling welcome due to the personal relationships and caring approaches used at the

neighbourhood school level. Because of the collaborative efforts between our schools, our churches and our community, newcomer families are integrating and embracing their new lives here in Canada. ■

*Cathy Cameron is a Vice Principal at St. Patrick's Community School and is the Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools ESL Division Lead. Kathleen Finnigan is the Associate Superintendent-Student Services at St. Patrick's Community School. Paul Mason is Superintendent of Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools.*

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# On-Site Signage: A Communication Win

**W**hile Facebook pages and websites are playing a greater role in improving school communications between staff, parents and students, marquis signs on school property remain valuable tools to engage the broader school community.

Leo Letourneau, principal of St. Stanislaus School in Edmonton, has made it a priority to have an on-site sign at every school he has worked at. Marquis signs are an effective way to relay information such as term start and end dates, fundraisers and parent-teacher interviews.

Letourneau recalls the expense of placing ads for kindergarten registration in magazines

and newspapers, or mailing out flyers in the catchment area. This is no longer necessary with his school's highly visible marquis sign. Signs are economical, with purchase price and installation typically costing less than \$10,000. Colt Chesney, an architectural technician with the Calgary Board of Education, says 90 per cent of school signs are purchased with funds raised by parent committees.

The purchase and installation of marquis signs has also become a district-wide initiative. Bernie Girardin, Superintendent of Business and Operations for Saskatchewan Prairie South School Division No. 210, recently purchased 22 signs for his district. He says, "we wanted all our schools to reap the benefits of these effective communications tools."

Marquis signs communicate practical information. "Getting information out to parents and the community is critical," says Betsy Linnell, co-chair of the parent advisory committee for Signal Hill Elementary in Pemberton, B.C. "Parents are busy and sometimes need a visual reminder. There have been instances of parents forgetting about a Pro-D Day and arriving to drop their kids off, to a locked school. Paper notices get stuck in backpacks and often do not make it into parents' hands." Not to mention report cards.

"We have to operate with a business mentality," says Letourneau. "Each child at your school means upwards of five or six thousand dollars for the school. I tell people that with two new kids at your school as a result of your sign, you've paid for that sign."

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# A Passion for Learning Helps Build a Library in Peru

By Tannis Emann, Joanne Lambrinoudis, Laurie Renton and Natalie Veldhoen

Grade 3 students at Battalion Park School in the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) are bringing their own perspectives and experiences to the social studies curriculum. Through active inquiry and engagement, fostered by synchronous online connections, students constructed meaning in the context of their lived experience. As such, they gained a genuine understanding of what it means to be global citizens by connecting with the small, rural village of Q'enqo, Peru through the use of video conferencing and Skype. As this organic experience blossomed, students realized the potential within themselves to contribute to a positive change in the world.

Connections, such as the one at Battalion Park, would be difficult for schools to undertake without the support for innovative practices. The role of Learning Innovation, a CBE service support unit, is to work with schools to create new images of teaching and learning in a personalized context and focusing on global citizenship. Ongoing collaboration and a relationship of trust between Learning Innovation and schools such as Battalion Park ensures that schools leverage opportunities to enhance the learning environment for their students.

Last November a video conference kicked off a year long journey for the Grade 3 students and a passion was sparked! The students connected with a CBE employee and his children while they were Peru. Students were able to experience, through conversations, authentic and real time information about life in Peru from the perspective of children their own age.

This opportunity increased the students' level of engagement and as they processed the experience, they generated many questions, illustrating the natural development of true inquiry. Due to a lack of full video conferencing capabilities needed for future connections, the school approached Learning Innovation about using Skype to continue the synchronous communication. Consequently, the school participated in a Skype pilot project and it proved essential in creating an environment for seamless connections and relationship building with people in Peru.

Through stories from primary sources about the land, the people and the challenges of everyday life in rural Peru, Calgary students developed a rich awareness, understanding and appreciation that exceeded any textbook or Google knowledge. The

learning truly came alive for students and resulted in a connection to the people of Q'enqo and a desire to make a difference. The Grade 3 students were moved to action as they discovered how challenging it is for the people in Q'enqo to meet their basic needs, something many of these Calgary students never have to consider.

With drive and passion, the students began to coordinate, organize and plan fundraising events by generating support from the school and parent community. Although the students had hoped to use these funds to purchase sports equipment for the children of Q'enqo, it became quickly apparent that the needs were so much greater. Through their connections, the students came to realize that several years before, Q'enqo had been forced to abandon a school library project due to lack of funds. Through a variety of student-driven fundraising efforts the Grade 3 students at Battalion Park School were able to make a significant donation that will fully fund the renewal of the library project, including renovating a building, constructing shelves, transporting materials and most importantly purchasing books.

The scope of this experience reflects the growth of Battalion Park Grade 3 students' global awareness as they learned their actions could positively affect people elsewhere in the world. The Grade 3 students successfully brought together their school community to truly make a difference and become agents of change in a community, a continent away. ■


*Tannis Emann is a Learning Leader at Battalion Park School. Joanne Lambrinoudis and Natalie Veldhoen are Specialists, Learning Innovation. Laurie Renton is a teacher at Battalion Park School.*



Battalion Park School connection to Q'enqo, Peru school library project.



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# Community Partnership Night at Edmonton Catholic Schools

By Carol Durnford, B.Ed. M.Ed.



The ancient African proverb, “it takes a whole village to raise a child” holds true in our 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. It takes many people to teach a child all that he or she should know and so community is very much involved in the education and growth of children. This was true in an African village many, many years ago and is still true today.

We might argue that community has become even more important in a global society. Children are exposed to many facets of our world via the Internet. They can research almost any topic and reach out to many communities around the world. However, this second hand research should not be the only exposure children have to the world around them. The world is a fingertip away yet it still can remain at arms length if we stop here.

In order to help students develop skills to maneuver this fast paced world, we need to help them explore their natural curiosity about the world around them and experience the world first hand. They need to interact and experience their communities in real time. Entrenched within inquiry-based teaching is the connection to community.

This isn't a new concept. John Dewey in the early 1940s was a strong advocate for inquiry-based teaching in which children are allowed to learn from direct experience and he maintained that the importance of

the skills learned through direct first-hand experience is imperative in a growing technological world (Dow, 2009). This message applies even more so today, where the skills and attitudes that can be developed through authentic and direct learning experiences is critical in a rapidly changing world.

The Galileo Educational Network (2011) describes inquiry as a study into a worthy question, issue, problem or idea. It is the authentic, real work that someone in the community might tackle. One dimension of inquiry as given by the Galileo Educational Network (G.E.N.), is authenticity. An element of authenticity, involves students involved in studying a question that not only has meaning to the students, but also would be a question an adult working in the community might tackle. Through this authentic exploration, students might have the opportunity to contribute knowledge and experience back to the community and discipline.

Among the other eight dimensions of inquiry, as outlined by G.E.N., are several with direct links to the importance of community in education. The dimension of “Active Exploration” is described as a study which requires students to spend time doing fieldwork, interviews, and studio work, in authentic working environments.

“Connecting with Experts” is a dimension that requires students to observe and interact with adults in a variety of work-

based situations, and “Beyond the School” speaks to the acquisition of skills and competencies, which are expected in high performance work organizations. Skills such as team work, self-management skills, problem solving, communication and decision making are all skills which can be nurtured through direct learning experiences and studies that connect students with interactions and experiences outside the school environment.

Establishing partnerships and encouraging community involvement through inquiry-based learning is an initiative in Edmonton Catholic Schools to encourage the direct exploration of authentic learning experiences for students.

On October 12, 2011, approximately 15 community groups will come together to share what their organization can do to support teachers in providing an opportunity to connect the curriculum with the community.

Post secondary organizations, professional organizations, and educational support organizations will be on hand for teachers to explore the potential classroom partnerships towards student learning.

It takes a village to raise a child, and the ECSD Community Partnership Night is helping to strengthen our village. ■

*Carol Durnford, B.Ed. M.Ed., is an AISI Inquiry Consultant for the Edmonton Catholic School Board.*

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Dow, Peter (2009). *Why Inquiry? A Historical and Philosophical Commentary*. Foundations Volume 2: A monograph for professionals in science, mathematics, and technology education, National Science Foundation.

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# Getting it Right: Community Engagement in PSD

By Tim Monds, Kelly Wilkins, Emilie Keane and Claire Jonsson.

It's not often that a school division can score a big win resolving tough issues around boundaries, redirecting attendance areas and in making changes that potentially impact a few hundred students and their families.

Pressure was on and in some cases it could be described as the "perfect storm". With a past experience that failed to leave parents satisfied with both outcome and process, Trustees and Senior Administration in Parkland School Division (PSD) were determined to find a way to ensure 1) that the best decisions were made by involving parents and community and 2) that stakeholders felt valued and heard in the process. We needed to get it right this time.

Parkland School Division is home to 21 schools and several alternative sites serving 9700 students in both rural and urban communities directly west of Edmonton. Changing demographics has resulted in utilization issues; experiencing significant over-crowding in schools in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain where growth is prevalent and the challenges of declining enrolment in other schools. Aged attendance boundaries did not adequately address the current numbers and resources are finite.

Supported with the expertise of an outside consultant, Hugh Skinner (Stantec Consulting), Parkland School Division Trustees and Senior Administration developed and implemented a comprehensive System Review. The goal was to find some short term solutions and to develop a long term planning framework while building trust and credibility along the way.

The task began by clarifying and articulating the purpose of the review and by establishing the process and timeline. One of the key elements of Phase One was the development of Planning Principles that would be used to create and evaluate options. During the Phase One Open Houses (held in 3 schools across the Division) the public was engaged by

reviewing a series of storyboards that shared the Planning Principles and detailed information about attendance area boundaries, school enrolment data trends, school facility restraints and expansion possibilities. Trustees and staff were available to speak with the public. No solutions were proposed in Phase One. Public feedback was solicited in a variety of ways, verbally, comment sheets and emails. All feedback was collated, shared and reviewed with all Trustees, Senior Administration and the consultant in order to determine next steps.

Throughout the System Review there was continual communication, notifying stakeholders of progress. Every possible opportunity was leveraged to inform and engage as many people as possible—School Administration meetings, School Council meetings, Council of School Council meetings, Municipal Partners and Student Advisory Committee.

Phase Two Open Houses (again there were 3 held across the Division) fed back to the public what was heard from them in Phase One and then provided proposed actions for public review and comment.

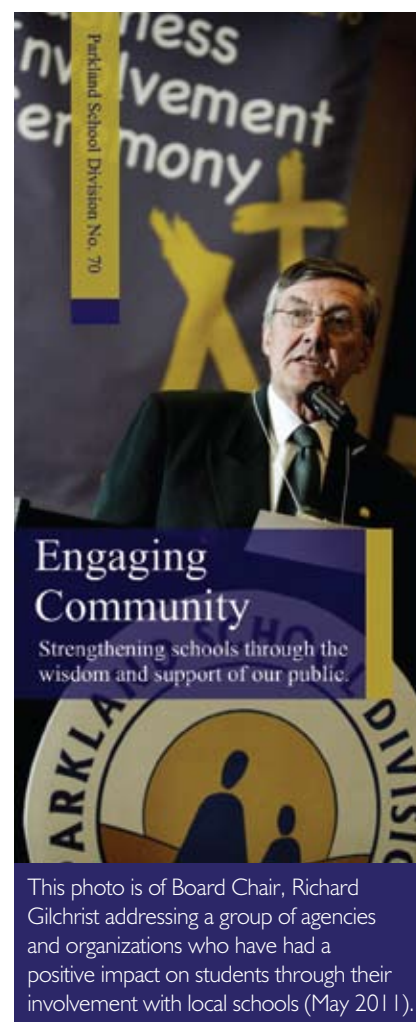
Public feedback confirmed that the Board heard the right messages. For instance, "keep families together and enable grandfathering with any boundary changes, limit cross-boundary students at overcrowded schools and rural students attend rural schools when urban schools are overcrowded". Feedback from Phase Two influenced the Board's decisions including boundary changes.

Every detail was considered as the changes were implemented. Personalized letters were sent to every affected family.

The messy work is never done and the pressure is still on but the sentiment is so different. As we continue to tackle the remaining issues, there is a more confident and unified commitment and a much stronger sense that we will collectively continue to make the best decisions for students.

Our solution—focused process did much more than resolve some of our utilization and demographic pressures. It went a long way in walking the talk; demonstrating that we value open and transparent communication and in modeling that we are a learning organization. And finally, on the value of deepening the trust with stakeholders ... priceless. Our school communities including parents, staff and Trustees would agree that the win was truly a win-win! ■

*Tim Monds, Kelly Wilkins, Emilie Keane and Claire Jonsson are all a part of the Senior Administration team of Parkland School Division.*



This photo is of Board Chair, Richard Gilchrist addressing a group of agencies and organizations who have had a positive impact on students through their involvement with local schools (May 2011).



By Bruce Buruma

# Connecting With the Community



**R**ed Deer Public Schools has a strong reputation for connecting with our community and we've been pleased to share some of our community engagement strategies with several other jurisdictions. "There is a sense of satisfaction when others come to see what you are doing or ask for resources so they can develop their own variations of events and activities that build strong relationships with stakeholders," says Piet Langstraat, Superintendent of Schools.

Here are a few examples:

## District Town Hall meetings

When people want to come back year after year, you know you have a good thing going. Town Hall meetings for Red Deer Public Schools play a key role in shaping direction for the district. With 200 parents, community partners, students and staff attending each year, the meetings provide significant input to the Board's planning retreat and the shaping of the District Education Plan.

Specific issues are addressed in small group settings. Participants consider the issue and suggest strategies that are brought forward to the whole group. A key feature is the use of electronic polling technology that provides an equal voice to all in establishing the priorities. The results are shared so the process is transparent and participants have an idea how their input provides direction for the jurisdiction.

## Student Town Hall meetings

Building on the success of the District Town Hall Meeting, the Board hosts a

Student Town Hall Meeting to connect and get perspectives from students. Linking the meeting to the Program of Study, 120 students in Social Studies 20-1 and 20-2 from our two high schools participate in the annual event.

Before the meeting, students identify a dozen topics they want to talk about, ranging from career supports and school fees to student discipline and the arts. Students identify what is working, what could be working better and recommend strategies for the Board to consider for implementation. Students share their ideas with each other and then rank their top priorities. The insights provided by students have been outstanding and provide valued input at both the school and district levels.

## Creating connections

When it comes to education, it's always great to get together and talk about kids. In his first months as superintendent, Piet Langstraat invited more than 50 community partners and agencies for a luncheon to get to know one another better and create connections. Recognizing the importance of collaboration and partnerships, the "Let's Talk About Kids" event opened the door to conversations among those working in the best interest of children and youth in our community. Months later, the luncheon comes up regularly in conversations as a great example of engagement and promoting working together.

## Involving everyone

The annual plan of the Board includes several meetings with stakeholder groups

including the Chamber of Commerce, local media, City Council, the executive of the ATA local and our MLAs. While much of the focus is on building positive connections and relationships, we value ideas and opportunities to work together to support both district and community priorities.

## IAP2 provides focus

Using concepts and processes from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), the district uses these techniques in its planning processes. Throughout the year, school administration meetings used IAP2 processes to support compelling conversations and powerful discussions that resulted in a transformation of priorities and direction for the District Education Plan. Furthermore, one of the first professional development activities for the new Board of Trustees was the IAP2 training program, *Public Participation for Decision Makers*, which assists the Board in its community engagement processes.

## The Foundation

The Foundation for Red Deer Public Schools provides another avenue for the community to support public education. Established in 1993, the Foundation has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for projects that go "Above and Beyond for Children". The impact has been felt by thousands of students through a wide range of projects and initiatives that enhance and enrich learning opportunities and would not be possible without support from our community.

As Piet Langstraat says: "While we value the many opportunities to connect with our community, we are really focusing on purposeful connections; meetings with a purpose. These processes play an important role in getting valued input and feedback that helps shape the district." ■

*Bruce Buruma is the Director of Community Relations, Red Deer Public Schools.*



# Online Community Engagement Strategy: Conversations Toward Student Success

By Paul Bennett and Nathan Freed

**I**n my view, there are two essential ingredients in an excellent education system. The first, obviously, is highly skilled teachers. The second is community engagement in education. What we must do is have a discussion about how we can develop a true community governance system for education that ultimately will mean both better student outcomes and invigorated communities.” Minister Hancock’s blog: The Informed Transformation of Trusteeship ([www.davehancock.ca/2010/10/the-informed-transformation-of.html](http://www.davehancock.ca/2010/10/the-informed-transformation-of.html))

Peace River School Division (PRSD) embraced Minister Hancock’s vision of an excellent education system. During the 2010-2011 school year, we led a team that created an online public engagement strategy to deepen generative governance, enhance community engagement and inform the decision making process. PRSD recognized that informed decision making, where the community has an opportunity to have its voice heard, is essential to generative governance.

PRSD also believes that true public engagement honours the dialogic process because all participants are on an equal footing and one individual or group cannot privilege its perspective above others. We acted upon this vision and actively sought input from the public.

In the spring of 2010, PRSD conducted five face-to-face public engagement meetings throughout the division. Although face-to-face public engagement is a highly effective means of connecting with the community, it does, however, have challenges. For example, only those attendees at the meeting were able to engage in the dialogue. Face-to-face meetings eliminated those individuals who couldn’t attend because either the location or the time was inconvenient. In addition, once the meeting was over, there was no further opportunity to add to the dialogue. Therefore, PRSD made a commitment to

continue the dialogue employing online techniques.

In addition to establishing a Twitter presence, PRSD used a free online tool, *Google Moderator*, to facilitate dialogue. Participants were asked, “What would you do if you were superintendent for a day?” The public reaction exceeded original expectations. During the campaign, almost 300 people submitted over 250 suggestions and cast nearly 4,500 votes in response to the question.

Through this initiative, PRSD learned key insights that may be of assistance to those planning an online community engagement initiative.

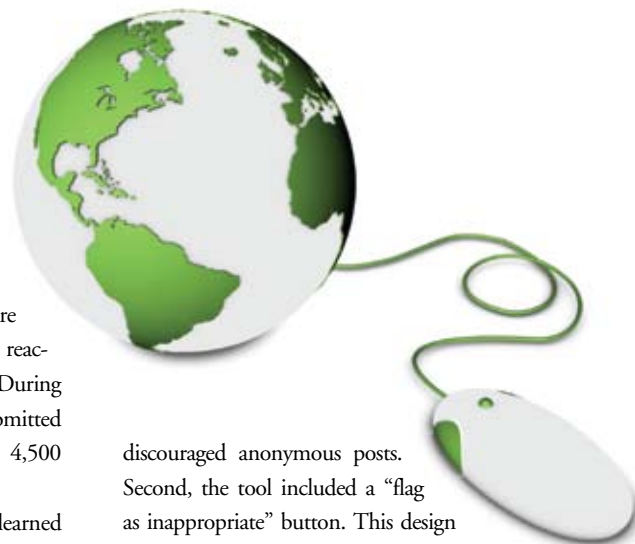
**Online complements face-to-face.** Ideally, face-to-face and online should be designed to occur simultaneously with each process complementing each other.

**Begin with intended outcomes.** Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are just some of the “sexy” tools to use with your online engagement strategy. The most common mistake, however, is beginning with the tool in mind. Begin with the intended outcomes, then pick from a suite of online tools to help operationalize the outcomes.

**Promote, promote, promote.** Building an elaborate and sophisticated online engagement platform doesn’t guarantee the community will find the web presence. The communications strategy engaged a variety of media to get the message out including traditional (print and radio) and non-traditional (Twitter).

**Build a team.** A key success for CTSS Online was the creation of the team with members possessing a diverse skill set and an ability to champion the initiative. The PRSD team included two trustees, two superintendents, a communication coordinator, a technology manager and a representative from Alberta Education.

**Community moderation.** Two methods were used to assure appropriate posting. The first was requiring participants to log-in which



discouraged anonymous posts.

Second, the tool included a “flag as inappropriate” button. This design transferred the moderation to the community.

**Commitment.** If the engagement is not meaningful and authentic, the community will become disenfranchised and disengage.

**Metrics.** Decide on which metrics to collect during the planning stages and then monitor them throughout the campaign to make modifications, if necessary, and confidently assess, at the end, whether the campaign was a success.

CTSS online has been very successful for PRSD. This continuing initiative has better enabled the PRSD Board of Trustees to inform, engage, gather input and strengthen relationships with the public through the use of technology. The division is now better able to provide communities with a greater voice in education. Although CTSS online was and continues to require considerable commitment, it has indeed ensured that we are well on our way to “developing a true community governance system for education that ultimately will mean both better student outcomes and invigorated communities.”

Go to [www.prsd.ab.ca](http://www.prsd.ab.ca) to learn more. ■

*Paul Bennett is the Superintendent of Schools for Peace River School Division. Nathan Freed is the Zone 1 Field Services Manager with Alberta Education.*



# Lochearn: C.A.R.E.S.

By Kim Wedman



Associate Superintendent Tom Spurling engaging in reading with a student in Grade 4.



Tobias Rapley donating his time from the Scotia Bank and a Grade 2 student reading for the Lochearn: C.A.R.E.S. program.

*It takes a village to raise a child* is a concept that rings true with the community of Lochearn School. *Lochearn: C.A.R.E.S.*

(Community in Action for Reading in Education for Students) is a reading program that was developed by myself; Alexis Holstead, District Administrator for Wild Rose Public Schools and former Principal of Lochearn School; and Vera McLeod, a community member and parent volunteer for Lochearn School, that engages and builds community relationships through business and neighbourhood support, encouraging volunteers to join the Lochearn Community and listen to students read.

According to the Family Literacy Foundation, “having a parent or other caring person read aloud with their children helps children learn listening skills, vocabulary and language skills, as well as develop imagination and creativity.

Our vision plays on this and is: “Building community relationships through business and surrounding community support through volunteers listening to all students read at Lochearn School.” (Alexis Holstead, Vera McLeod, Kim Wedman, 2010).

Using a creative approach, in lieu of monetary donations, businesses in the community of Rocky Mountain House were approached to donate one hour per week of time from willing employees to work with students at our school. Using the gift of time, we wanted to promote deeper learning and positive mentorship in school through community involvement. The word spread throughout the community and soon we had many volunteers including employees from banks, neighbourhood residents and retired community members. All were coming in to ask if they could volunteer to work with students. What’s most impressive is that many of the interested volunteers had no previous connection to the school.

Danielle Spencer, principal at Lochearn School, loved the community approach and the relationships it built in our school between community members and students. She says,

“it was really powerful to see students looking forward to their *Lochearn: C.A.R.E.S.* reader coming to read each week.”

The response has been phenomenal. With over 60 volunteers in our first year, our school community has grown and has been enhanced by all of the new members. Everyone in the school—office staff, teachers, teacher assistants and custodians—works together to make the it a welcoming place for all community members.

When staff members were asked about what the biggest benefit to the program has been, the overwhelming response was how the program increased student engagement towards reading, with students being motivated to read with their volunteers.

One volunteer was moved to tears as a student he had particularly connected with intently practiced reading a part of a book so that when the volunteer came, he had a polished reading piece. Reading was particularly hard for this student but he was motivated to succeed because of the influence of his volunteer.

Students now have mentors and readers that they have connected to and see in the community. With their eyes bright, the students love to be able to come to school and say they saw their *Lochearn: C.A.R.E.S.* reader at the local grocery store or movie theatre. Our school community has become bigger now and through *Lochearn: C.A.R.E.S.*, it has brought together many facets from outside our school to make our community a close knit group, promoting active reading for life.

For more information and video of our volunteers in action, please see our webpage <http://lochearncares.blogspot.com/>. ■

*Lochearn School is a Kindergarten to Grade 5 school with approximately 350 students located in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta in Wild Rose Public Schools. Kim Wedman is a teacher and instructional coach at Lochearn School.*





# Enhancing Parent Attachment to School Communities

By David Keohane

In a recent article in *The District Management Journal*, consultant Nicholas Morgan describes strong “theories of action” as “If ... then ...” statements that test hypotheses about how change will occur. When teaching, if one’s investment in a hypothesis is backed only by a qualitative assessment of processes applied, we never know if the desired change actually occurs and benefits student learning. After all, reading programs don’t just occur because they are fun for students, parents and teachers. Their benefits are ultimately determined by their capacity to improve reading comprehension.

Existing theories for action regarding community engagement should be determined with the same caution in mind. When it occurs as simply an event, community engagement may not really further the most desirable result; this being a meaningful relationship to the school community that actually benefits the child.

Extensive research from the Gallup Organization indicates that there are predictive and meaningful connections that must be maintained with the public to further its strong engagement with our schools.

With interest in maximizing capacity to improve student learning by pursuing full system wide engagement, our attention has recently turned from employee and student engagement to our parent communities.

Based upon research conducted by John Fleming and Jim Asplund, and as communicated in their book, *Human Sigma*, the next step for all personnel within our organization is to create a disciplined focus around four key dimensions that will enhance a parent’s emotional attachment to his or her school community.

Each dimension, as illustrated in the Figure 1, represents the most desired perception from parents, as a result of the various “touch points” of their interpersonal relationship with staff. The diagram and

## Four Dimensions of Emotional Attachment



Figure 1. Copyright ©2000 Gallup, Inc.

its accompanying research is instructive in letting our school communities know that parents need to experience those “touch points” which bring to the forefront of their emotional experience confidence, integrity, pride and finally, passion.

This framework for describing a hierarchy of engagement within our schools serves as a powerful reminder of what practices will likely determine the highest form of praise coming from passionate parents—that they can’t imagine a world without their school and that the school is a perfect place for them and their children.

Studying and implementing learning from *Human Sigma* already has begun at the divisional leadership level, and will, through the work of our principals, be a powerful tool to enhance the efforts of all staff as they further the engagement of their parent communities.

What is additionally instructive for our school communities as we unpack this research are the following conclusions, all derived from nearly nine million data sets that *Human Sigma* has informed us as being essential to the staff / client relationship.

- The “brand” that a school wishes to communicate is only as lasting as is the perception derived from parents regarding their most recent encounter with the school community.

- Parents are more likely to enhance their engagement with our schools if a problem occurred and the school subsequently acknowledges the problem and resolves it, than if a problem never occurred in the first place. This is a powerful reminder to our schools that precedence or system need coming before learning need are weak motivators for enhancing the engagement principle. “Fairness,” “understanding,” and “responsiveness” means everything in the minds of parents.

The list of events dedicated to the engagement of our various communities in Greater St. Albert Catholic School Division is, for all the right reasons, an extensive one. However, the compelling research on authentic engagement reminds us that involvement and engagement do not mean the same thing. Therefore, it will be important for all employees who continually relate to our public to infuse within their communications behaviours which support a theory for action that leads to enhanced parental engagement and the improvement of student learning. ■

*David Keohane is Superintendent of Schools in the Greater St. Albert Catholic School Division. The division provides education to over 6,000 students in the communities of St. Albert, Morinville and Legal.*

# Engaging Community Through Re-imagining

By Lucy Miller, ED.D



The Chief Superintendent, employee group leaders, and staff use images to facilitate discussions around how people see things from different perspectives.

Over the past several years, the Ministry has consulted extensively on education across the province. In Alberta Education's *Action Agenda*, school districts are reminded that we need to rethink how we engage with communities and that, "communities and parents need to have more opportunities and be encouraged to become more involved with their local schools and in what's happening with their children's education." (Alberta Education Action Agenda 2011-2014, 2011)

Over the past several years, staff, trustees, parents, students and the wider

community have worked together to make community engagement a meaningful, effective and efficient process in the Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD). The process is called "Re-imagining" and involves a multi-layered approach and a wide variety of public engagement strategies and vehicles many of which come from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) framework and others that have been developed by participants. Involving stakeholders in decision making has evolved naturally and has become a critical component of the transparent culture and commitment

to shared responsibility that the district has strived to establish.

The public engagement process began almost five years ago as a new leadership team came together in the district and started asking the question, "What would it look like if the best happened?" The team recognized that the answer to this question required the responses of all stakeholders if everyone was to feel involved in moving the district forward and sharing ownership for its success.

The resulting conversations have informed decision making and guided policy development regarding issues such



as budget, accommodation planning, program offerings, healthy foods choices, homework, the use of social media, school traffic flow issues, fee structures, fundraising and Ministry initiatives such as *Action on Inclusion*.

Re-imagining takes place at a variety of levels. At the school level, the principal seeks input from staff, students, parents and community members, for decisions that are being made at the school or to provide feedback to district staff on more global issues. This level of re-imagining takes place at School Council meetings or at special re-imagining meetings held around a particular topic such as traffic flow issues or canteen offerings.

At the district level, the Chief Superintendent and senior staff seeks input from trustees, school communities and beyond. Re-imagining on an issue such as how to address an accommodation crisis in a community will have as many as eight hundred members of a community come together to formulate a shared

solution. Large sessions such as this use a “world café” format and are facilitated by superintendents and school administrators. Senior administration also meets with school administrators, the Student Advisory Council, non-school-based staff, and community members regularly to get input on a variety of issues.

The Board of Trustees holds “*Parent-Trustee Forums*” every two months. The forums are held in each quadrant of the city and all school communities are represented. They also host meetings for school council chairs which are open to all parents as well. The “world café” format is used in all of these meetings and staff helps to facilitate.

One of the keys to the success of the process is the communication piece. There is a “Re-imagining Update” presented at every public board meeting and in a monthly “Chief Superintendent’s Update.” Both updates contain all feedback from all “Re-imagining” with all groups. Feedback is widely distributed, and is posted on the district website so that there is complete

transparency. Everyone sees what everyone else is saying. This helps participants realize that there are many opinions on every issue and that there is no way we can please everyone but we are trying to take into account as much information as possible and then ultimately have the responsibility to make a decision that is best for as many students as possible.

These generative conversations will continue to expand so that community engagement is maximized. The result has been development of a culture of trust, mutual respect, transparency, and collaboration. This process makes decision making easier and more effective. It reinforces the message to stakeholders that their input is valued and it gives the message to children that we are all working together to support their success. ■

*Dr. Lucy Miller is Chief Superintendent with the Calgary Catholic School District. The District has 106 schools, over 47,000 students and a staff of over 5,000.*

## WRITE FOR THE CASS CONNECTION

We will be asking for abstracts for the Spring 2012 issue of The CASS Connection very soon!

Do you have something to share that fits our theme of Engaging Partners? If yes, please email a 50 word abstract, noting the authors and school involved, to [ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net).

A formal call for writers will be emailed out by the CASS office, by the new year. It will include dates and deadlines.



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# The Legal View on Community Engagement

By Jeremy D. Schick

**A**s an education lawyer, one of the most positive aspects of dealing with my clients is an almost universal belief in positive transformation: that through education, students and the world change for the better. In short, in most cases, change is good. I must admit that this can be an interesting paradigm shift for a lawyer. Change—even positive change—leads to uncertainty and uncertainty makes many lawyers slightly squeamish. The reaction from even the most intrepid lawyer can be akin to that of Indiana Jones: “Snakes ... why did it have to be snakes?”

All of this helps explain how a lawyer can strike a cautious tone with even the most positive of topics: that of community engagement. The importance of parental and community engagement has become central to school board thinking in recent years, supported by educational research showing parental and community participation is crucial for student success. And, in the most recent draft of the *Education Act*, which was tabled in the Alberta Legislature as Bill 18 on April 27, 2011, the recognition of the importance of engagement took on proposed legislative form. While consideration of Bill 18 was adjourned at second reading and the proposed act is undergoing further consultation, there is every expectation that the principle of engagement will be retained in future versions.

Section 33 of Bill 18 stated:

A board has the responsibility to:

- (d) provide, where appropriate, for the engagement of parents, students, staff and the community on board matters, including the board's plans and the achievement of goals and targets within those plans ...

If a new *Education Act* emerges from further consultations with a similar statement

of responsibility for boards to provide for engagement, the inevitable task for boards (and their lawyers) will be to interpret what that responsibility means in practical terms. From a legal perspective, the creation of any new positive obligation upon school boards creates uncertainty concerning the scope of that obligation: what are its requirements and/or limits?

It seems likely that the obligation to provide for appropriate engagement will not be capable of precise definition. As with many topics in the proposed new Act, the legislation appears to provide a guiding theme for the direction of boards, but not mandate the precise manner in which boards must act in a particular instance. Thus, it is possible that a court looking at such a provision might handle it as courts handle sections which enunciate the general principles of a piece of legislation: using the principle of engagement to inform how the court might interpret other sections of the Act or its regulations, rather than imposing any specific obligation in a particular instance. Nonetheless, a board will also want to ensure that it can point to policies within its policy framework which identify that the board has indeed provided for engagement.

A solid policy foundation for appropriate engagement is essential to avoid the potential legal pitfalls that might arise from an unstructured push for engagement and collaboration. Superintendents will be well aware of the various cautions which lawyers provide to boards whenever a board considers collaboration with any non-board entity concerning education. School boards owe non-delegatable, non-transferable statutory obligations to their students and staff, and the same legal risks that must be considered by boards in making many types of decisions may not be shared by a board's collaborative

partners. Careful consideration via policy of what methods and processes of engagement are appropriate in what types of circumstance may ensure that neither the process nor the results of external engagement place the board in legal peril under privacy law, labour law, human rights law, civil liability or other obligations.

Put simply, while the proposed draft *Education Act* would mandate boards to provide for appropriate engagement, it does not immunize a board if those attempts at engagement violate other legal obligations of the board. For example, the sharing of information with collaborative partners in the process of engagement must always comply with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Thus, front-line administrators of the board, upon whom boards will rely to bring energy and excitement to parental and community engagement, will also need to be trained to approach engagement in a deliberate and structured manner as well.

One welcome piece of certainty in the area of engagement is the existing work of school councils, boards and government to develop the school council as a forum for parental and community engagement. The existing School Councils Regulation has been in existence since July of 2007, and section 13 of the Regulation already contains an obligation for boards to provide opportunities for school councils to advise on school matters. While opportunities for engagement under the Act will certainly not be limited to the forum of school councils, the existing school council system does provide the certainty of an existing legislative framework, as well as a mechanism for engagement which is already familiar to boards. The Alberta School Councils Association's "Alberta School Council Resource Manual" provides



useful guidance to both parties to outline the appropriate roles and responsibilities of school councils, boards and administrators under the existing Regulation, and which is broadly applicable to engagement under the proposed new legislation.

Increased parental and community engagement in education is an exciting prospect for Alberta's education system, and the recognition of a positive legislative obligation to provide for that engagement is likely only an affirmation of work that is already under way. The cautious administrator will ensure that the ground for that work is deliberately cleared with appropriate processes and staff training. (And is free of snakes). ■

*Jeremy D. Schick is a lawyer for the Alberta School Boards Association.*



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## Engaging Communities

*ASEBP is governed by five members from the ATA and five members from the ASBA. As a partner with the education sector, ASEBP is committed to developing and promoting resources that support individuals, groups and leaders in creating and sustaining healthy people, healthy workplaces. Working with the education sector has provided many learnings that they are pleased to share in their regular column of CASS Connection.*

**W**hen considering effective methods for engaging one's community, a population health approach can be of great assistance. Canada has always been a leader in population health initiatives, a concept which emerged from the foundations of public health, community health and health promotion in the 1970s (Strategic Policy, 2001).

What is significant about a population health strategy or approach is its focus on the health of an entire group. As a leader in your community, understanding population health concepts can provide you with a broader scope of understanding when assessing your community's needs.

### What is population health?

A population health approach views health as a resource, as opposed to a state of overall well-being. When health is treated as a resource, it becomes something that can empower an individual or group to pursue goals, obtain skills and education, and ultimately grow. This concept is a broad one that also takes into account the social, economic and physical environment factors that contribute toward the health of a population (PHAC, 2001; Strategic Policy, 2001).

The main goals of population health as outlined by the Public Health Agency of Canada (2001) are:

1. To maintain and improve the health status of an entire population; and
2. To reduce health inequities among population groups.

Outside of the health care system, many things affect the health of individuals and communities. These factors are termed "determinants of health" and include the following (PHAC, 2001):

- Income and social status;
- Social support networks;
- Education;
- Employment and working conditions;
- Physical environments;
- Social environments;
- Biology and genetic endowment;
- Personal health practices and coping skills;
- Healthy child development;
- Health services; and
- Gender and culture.

### Where should I start?

If you want to take the concepts of population health into consideration when planning community engagement initiatives, all of the above listed determinants of health could be used as "entry points" into the community. Often these entry points will be specific health issues or concerns that are characteristic of your community. However, you may find that you wish to capitalize on and develop a particular strength instead.

Most likely, you can already think of many potential entry points. When faced with the options, recognize that health issues are demonstrated in many different ways. In other words, all determinants of health interact with each other. By choosing one entry point to

start with, you will indirectly affect a variety of health concerns that are influenced by the initial entry point or health issue of choice (PHAC, 2001; Stamler & Yui, 2005).

### A possible scenario

Your wellness committee has been learning about the rise of diabetes in the overall population and is concerned about the implications this may have on your school jurisdiction's community. They read that lifestyle changes like healthy eating and regular physical activity are effective in preventing the onset and progression of type 2 diabetes in many people. Based on this analysis of the health issue, the committee identifies two potential priorities to take action on—healthy eating and physical activity. They decide, at this time, to focus on increasing opportunities for regular physical activity within the school community.

By implementing this one population health strategy, you may soon find that while initially addressing a personal health practice—regular exercise—you also reduced income and social status inequities by improving access for all to physical activity opportunities. By having community members come together to interact in meaningful ways, you created an environment

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where healthy social interaction and support networks can form within your community. As well, the individuals who begin to implement regular exercise into their lives not only reduce their risk for onset or progression of type 2 diabetes but also heart disease, stroke and many other conditions.

This scenario is meant to demonstrate that population health approaches do not need to be hard or complex. In the long term, when population health strategies are effective, the health of a population improves. As healthy group development

increases throughout the population, less health care and social benefit supports are needed. Overall, the community is better equipped to support itself and draw on each other as resources for each person's day-to-day health and quality of life (Stamler & Yui, 2005; Paniagua, Reilly, Evans, & Bond, 2011).

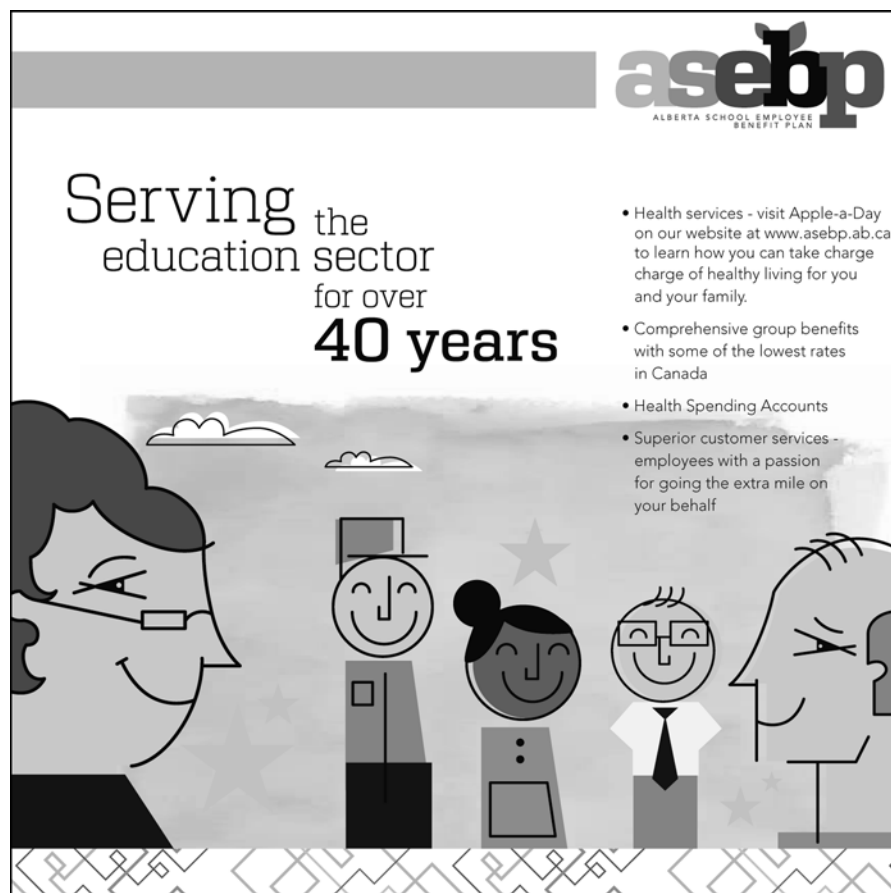
For assistance in using a population health approach and/ or implementing new health initiatives and programs, please contact a Health Advisor at ASEBP by email at [foryourhealth@asebp.ab.ca](mailto:foryourhealth@asebp.ab.ca). ■



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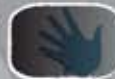
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# World's Finest Chocolate

## ***Banning Chocolate Fundraising Will Not Fight Childhood Obesity***

There are school boards in Alberta that believe eliminating chocolate fundraising will reduce the obesity rate of their students. The truth is that chocolate fundraising takes place away from school, and the Alberta School Board Association clearly states that decisions on fundraising activities and the expenditure of fundraised dollars should be made in consultation with school principals, staff, students, school councils and parents.

Polls have proven that not only is the chocolate consumed primarily (77%)<sup>1</sup> by adults, but 90%<sup>1</sup> of parents believe that parents, not school boards, should be responsible for deciding whether their children participate in chocolate fundraising campaigns.

## ***Banning chocolate fundraising could reduce the funds available that are used to purchase equipment and pay for field trips, initiatives which teach children the skills to live a healthy and active lifestyle.***

World's Finest Chocolate has been a proven fundraising winner for schools for over 50 years! It has partnered with Canadian schools, athletic groups and social clubs since 1958.

## ***Is a once or twice per year chocolate fundraising campaign part of the reason some of our children are obese? No***

## ***Is fundraising with chocolate contrary to school board efforts to teach children about healthy eating and living active lifestyles? No***

### ***Consider the facts about chocolate fundraising that you may not be aware of:***

- Chocolate comes from a fruit tree and is made from a seed. Scientific research suggests it delivers important health benefits and is rich in antioxidants, flavonoids, vitamins and minerals
- There is NO correlation between chocolate and obesity<sup>2</sup> and research states it may be a viable instrument in the prevention of heart disease<sup>3</sup>
- A study reported in the British Medical Journal, involving more than 114,000 people, showed that higher levels of chocolate consumption 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%)<sup>3</sup>

### ***Common sense and behavioural science support occasional treats in a healthy diet***

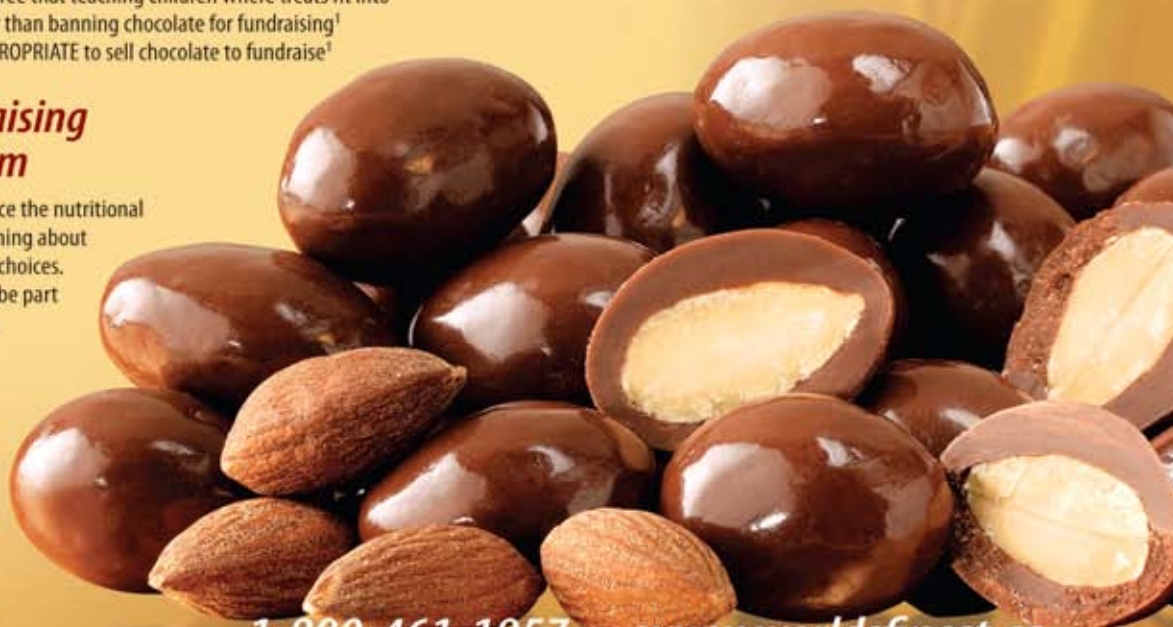
- 92% of Registered Dietitians (RD) say people maintain a balanced lifestyle when they don't deprive themselves of treats<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly three quarters of RDs (72.9%) agree that milk chocolate can be part of a healthy diet<sup>4</sup>

### ***What do parents say?***

- 91% of adults surveyed agree that teaching children where treats fit into a healthy lifestyle is better than banning chocolate for fundraising<sup>1</sup>
- 97% of adults say it is APPROPRIATE to sell chocolate to fundraise<sup>1</sup>

## ***Chocolate Fundraising Is Not The Problem***

It is a good opportunity to reinforce the nutritional information that schools are teaching about the importance of balanced food choices. But most importantly, it can also be part of the solution through the many programs it helps fund.



Source: 1: September 2010 Ipsos Reid poll of 1300+ adults (including 500 parents of children aged 4-13).

2: "Patterns of chocolate consumption", 1994.

3: "British Medical Journal", chocolate consumption and cardiometabolic disorders, 7 studies, involving 114,000 people, studies up to Oct. 2010.

4: Chocolate's Role in a Balanced Lifestyle - Survey of Nutritional Professionals: an online survey of 450 registered dietitians (RD) by the Hershey Center for Health & Nutrition.

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