

# the CASS CONNECTION

Fall 2019

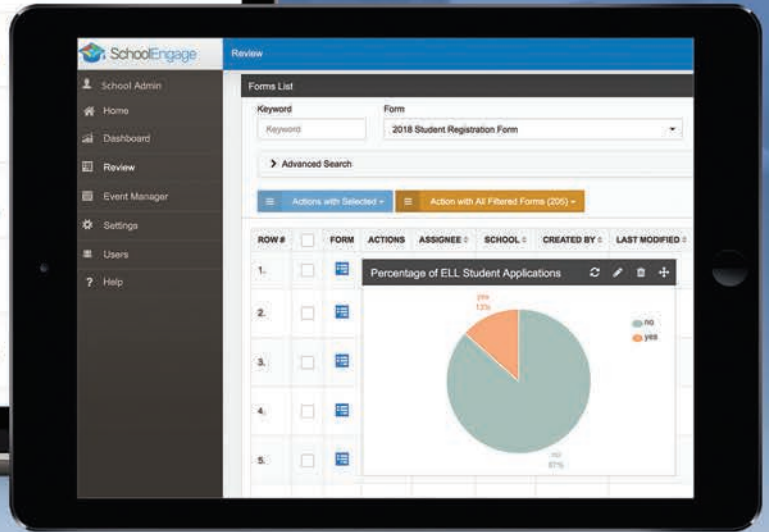
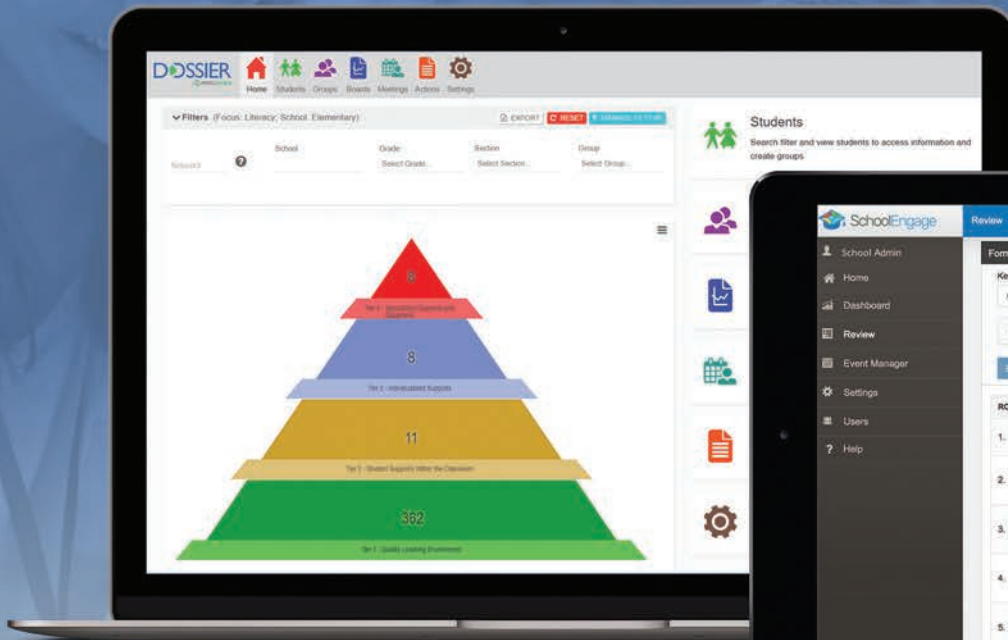
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## LEMONY CHICKPEA CUPCAKE

PULSE	PREP TIME	BAKE TIME	MAKES
Chickpeas	15 min	18-20 min	12 cupcakes

### INGREDIENTS

1 can (19 oz/540 mL)	chickpeas, drained & rinsed (yields 2 cups/500 mL cooked)
1/3 cup (75 mL)	canola oil
1/4 cup (60 mL)	fresh lemon juice
2 tsp (10 mL)	grated lemon zest
2	egg yolks
2/3 cup (150 mL)	all-purpose flour
1/2 cup (125 mL)	granulated sugar, divided
2 tsp (10 mL)	baking powder
1/2 tsp (2 mL)	salt
2	egg whites
1/8 tsp (0.5 mL)	cream of tartar
2 Tbsp (30 mL)	freshly squeezed lemon juice (optional)

### RASPBERRY CREAM CHEESE FROSTING (OPTIONAL)

2 packages (8 oz/250 g)	light cream cheese
1/2 cup (125 mL)	butter, softened
1/2 cup (125 mL)	icing sugar
1/4 cup (60 mL)	seedless raspberry jam
1/4 tsp (1 mL)	fresh lemon juice

### NUTRIENTS PER SERVING (1 cupcake, no icing)

163 Calories, 7 g Fat, 1 g Saturated Fat, 32 mg Cholesterol, 21 g Carbohydrate, 2 g Fibre, 10 g Sugar, 4 g Protein, 220 mg Sodium, 138 mg Potassium, 46 mcg Folate, 1 mg Iron

### DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Prepare muffin tins with large muffin cup liners.
2. In a food processor, purée chickpeas with oil, lemon juice and lemon zest. Add egg yolks and blend well until mixture is smooth.
3. In a large bowl, combine flour, 1/4 cup (60 mL) sugar, baking powder and salt. Add puréed chickpea mixture and mix well.
4. In a medium bowl, beat egg whites and cream of tartar until foamy. Gradually add remaining 1/4 cup (60 mL) sugar in a slow, thin stream, beating until whites form stiff glossy peaks.
5. Fold beaten egg whites into chickpea mixture. Divide batter among paper-lined muffin tins. Bake for 18-20 minutes, or until toothpick inserted in centre of cupcake comes out clean. Cool 5 minutes, then remove from muffin tins and onto wire racks to cool completely.
6. Drizzle 1/2 tsp (2 mL) lemon juice over each cupcake, then sprinkle with icing sugar if desired or omit icing sugar and top with raspberry cream cheese frosting.
7. To make cream cheese frosting, cream together cream cheese and butter in a large mixing bowl. Add icing sugar, jam and lemon juice and mix on low until combined. Scrape down sides, then beat on high speed for about 1 minute until smooth and fluffy. Makes about 3 cups (750 mL) frosting.

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# Message from the Minister of Education

Adriana LaGrange | Alberta Minister of Education

**T**he start of the new school year is an exciting time for Alberta's Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system, and I'm proud of the many accomplishments our government has made so far. The Education Act is now in effect, moving us forward in strengthening and modernizing Alberta's education system. I appreciate your hard work over the summer in providing valuable feedback on the supporting regulations, and my department remains committed to working directly with school authorities during this time of transition under our new legislation.

Our government has moved forward on an important commitment to broaden consultation on the provincial curriculum so we can ensure we get future curriculum right. That is why I have appointed a curriculum advisory panel that I believe will enhance the vision and direction for student learning in Alberta. Panel members have been tasked with drafting an updated ministerial order on student learning. This work will be a starting point for public dialogue in early 2020 and I look forward to hearing from you at that point. As this work is carried out, development and drafting of the curriculum will still be done by the ~350 teachers who are currently sitting on the Curriculum Working Groups.

During the last few months, I committed to sharing education funding information as soon as I could. I'm proud to say that we will continue funding the School Nutrition Program, as we recognize the positive impact school nutrition has on student learning. Keeping this funding intact means about 35,000 students will receive a daily nutritious meal this school year. The program

funding will remain at \$15.5 million, so each school board will receive the same amount as in the 2018-19 school year. As we head into the fall and an upcoming budget, I can assure you that we remain committed to education funding and that enrolment growth will be accounted for. Watch for more details in Budget 2019.

As the school year has just begun, student transportation is also top of mind for many. In order to provide certainty and consistency to parents and school boards, we are maintaining the current 2.4 kilometre service eligibility criteria. This means school boards continue to be required to provide transportation for eligible students. It also means eligible students will still receive provincial funding. Changes to the Student Transportation Regulation give school boards greater autonomy and flexibility to provide service based on local needs and preferences. As always, school boards will be accountable to their parents for the fees they choose to set.

Thanks to the important feedback from many education partners, including CASS, I was able to move forward with a more measured approach to seclusion rooms. Like you, I don't want to see these rooms used unless absolutely necessary, but we also need to recognize that exceptional circumstances need to be considered from time to time. For all involved, it's about ensuring the safety and well-being of students and education staff. New standards, including robust guidelines on limited use, will be developed by the end of October. The standards will provide expectations for schools that choose to use seclusion in situations where a child or student's behaviour poses significant,

*"I appreciate your hard work over the summer in providing valuable feedback on the supporting regulations, and my department remains committed to working directly with school authorities during this time of transition under our new legislation."*

imminent danger of serious physical harm to themselves or those around them.

Looking a bit more down the road, we have committed to making further improvements where needed, and we plan to introduce a Choice in Education Act. However, I want to hear from our important education partners, including superintendents. With this in mind, we will likely look for your input beginning this fall as we work together to continue to improve and modernize Alberta's education system.

This is an important time for education in Alberta, and I recognize the integral role you play in our collective success. As superintendents, you know the importance of leading a strong team and collaborating with your communities and partners to enhance the education of Alberta's students. I want to personally thank you for all the work that you do in supporting students and the education system as a whole. I wish you all the best this school year. ■



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# Message from the President

**Bevan Daverne** | College of Alberta School Superintendents

**A**fter a summer of rest and recuperation, students have returned to school and both school and district staff are beginning to implement the planning developed to guide the year's work with students. As an organization, CASS is also setting plans into motion. Many of our members have contributed and provided feedback to our strategic plan, which focuses on two areas – advocacy to promote student success, and continued development of leadership capacity amongst our membership.

Advocacy is most effective with strong partnerships and CASS will be working to build on our existing relationships with our primary partners. Our connection with the Ministry of Education is critical to strong advocacy in the success of students and we will continue to work hard to nurture that positive relationship. In order to have

well-thought positions in those conversations it will be important to adjust some of our organizational structures to more efficiently accept feedback and guidance from our membership on issues impacting the work with students. The Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) has also always been an important key partner for CASS. CASS believes – deeply – in the importance of strong local governance and the work we do together with school trustees and our relationship with the ASBA is critical to the overall success and health of education in Alberta.

As we look at the roles of our members over time, it is clear their jobs have continued to become more complex. Our members today require a more sophisticated and well-developed skillset to be successful in the support of their school divisions and of students. With this in mind, CASS is

embarking on a process of enhancing the services and supports we offer to members. This year, we have modified our mentorship program to provide additional and targeted support to new superintendents and we will be looking for opportunities to improve direct supports for other roles as well. As of this past year, all CASS zones offered “role-alike” collaborative meetings and we will be looking for other opportunities to share best practices to strengthen the capacity of our members.

Though our core purpose remains unchanged, there are some exciting new things ahead for our organization and we are eager to explore opportunities to better support our membership while also taking advantage of the skills and experience of CASS system leaders across the province to better advocate for the success of our school system and our Alberta students. ■

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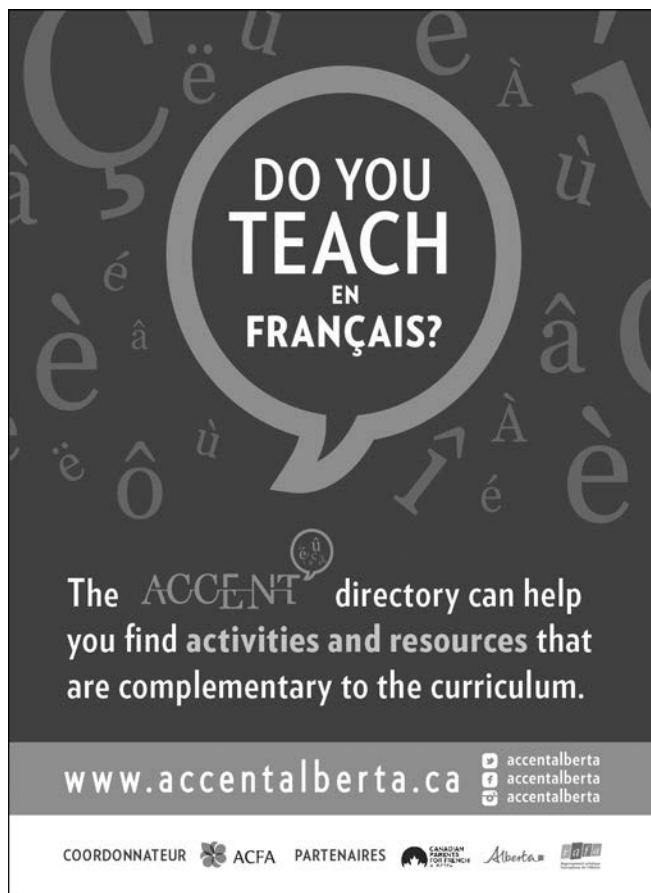
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# Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

**D**o you know what makes my blood boil? Hearing “Nothing has changed in education for the past 100 years. Students still sit in rows and listen to a teacher at the front of the room.”

I won’t even begin to address the improvements that have taken place in terms of teacher preparation, use of research-based pedagogy, the continuous quest to develop outstanding resources, or the supports now in place to support student wellbeing. What I do want to speak to is the incredible changes that have taken place during my time being involved in education with respect to the theme of this magazine: ensuring equity in education for all students.

To do so, I will share three personal experiences which stem from growing up in Chipman, Alberta, a small village of less than 300 people.

The first memory is of a friend who did not do very well in school; something that as an elementary and junior high student I would never have tried to understand why. In those days, it was just the case that some students did not do well and left school at an early age. It was only when my friend was an adult that it was determined that my friend had gone through childhood with an undiagnosed severe hearing impairment. With the training teachers and school and system administrators now have, and with advancements in general health and medicine, I believe that it is virtually impossible for a child in today’s education system to have to suffer through such an experience.

The second memory relates to a friend who had Muscular Dystrophy. In about Grade 7, my friend suddenly was no longer attending our school. It had nothing to do with health but rather the general practice that was accepted and in place during that time; students who were

physically, mentally, or emotionally challenged were simply sent away to a congregated school in the city. I kept in touch with my friend until his passing when we were 18, but only because our families both lived in Chipman and he would be allowed home on some weekends.

The third story I share began when I was in Grade 9. A new family moved into Chipman and the oldest sibling was a classmate of mine. His infant sister was born with cerebral palsy and had very limited movement. I would not have realized it at the time, but as I began my teaching career in 1978, her parents’ insistence that she be allowed to attend the school in Chipman resulted in likely the first legal decision in Canada with respect to ensuring all students had the right to equity in education. “In 1978 (the) Alberta Supreme Court decision ordered Lamont County school board to widen doors, build a ramp, and educate Shelley Carriere, a student with cerebral palsy, in her home community school.”<sup>1</sup>

A number of years later, I was the vice-principal of the high school Shelley attended when she completed her K-12 education and while I did not always agree with some of the actions of her parents, I have come to understand that they, and other parents with children with challenges, were the ones that fought for and eventually established a basic principle that, 41 years later, is considered a right of every child in Alberta: equal access to the public education system.

Students may still attend buildings called schools, and in some cases do sit in rows in classrooms, however to suggest that education has not changed in the last 100 years, or even the last 50 years is comparable to saying that there is not much difference between a 1925 Model T and today’s automobiles because they both have four tires and a steering wheel.

The commitment of system and school leaders, along with teachers and support staff, to build their personal professional capacity so that every student entering a school is provided the opportunity to succeed is as stark a contrast as the Model T engine to today’s automobile engines.

To close, I want to formally welcome the Honourable Adriana LaGrange, who was appointed Minister of Education following the April election, and thank her for her submission in this edition of *The CASS Connection*. Minister LaGrange’s schedule is very full, and I know that I speak on behalf of CASS members and school board trustees when I extend appreciation to her for her commitment to meet with school boards and leadership teams, something that she has already begun to do.

I also want to thank the previous Minister of Education, Mr. David Eggen, for his contributions to *The CASS Connection* during the time he served as Minister.

Thank you as well to each of the authors in this edition of *The CASS Connection* for sharing your Alberta Stories of Practice about ensuring equity in education for all Alberta students.

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

## Reference:

1. Cameron, Pamela. *An Introduction to Special Education Services in BC*. Vancouver Island University Presentation (2011). <https://slideplayer.com/slide/6363460/>.



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# The Role of Schools in the Community

*By Melissa Leonard, Red Deer Public Schools; and Paul Stewart, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools (retired)*

Communities generally respect education as a way to create a better society, a future of opportunities for students, and to teach them to one day be good citizens. Canada, like many first world countries, offers good education programs. However, even in Canada, there are still challenges that exist to close the gaps between students who are different from the majority, students who are disadvantaged, and those who are born to a more advantageous position.

As schools continue to grow and change, classrooms are becoming more multicultural. As the populations of schools transform, educators must consider both the effects that this globalization should have on their culture and practices, as well as the resulting society which the school is working to prepare students for.

Successful multicultural schools achieve their success by being culturally responsive. To be effective, this equitable and inclusive culture should be consciously supported by administrators school wide and incorporated into each classroom. All students should feel accepted and represented in their school and educated in a

way that teaches understanding and acceptance. Being culturally responsive in schools leads to the improved success of all students.

Educators may have limitations in their own world experience that can make it difficult to connect with and understand a new culture or perspective. Research on the value of equity in schools and how to break barriers that inhibit this equity affirms the value of a positive and accepting school culture and highlights the responsibility of educators to be inclusive in their practice.

Experiences in many school districts demonstrate the importance of creating a culture of understanding and acceptance. This culture should be common amongst staff and evident to the community. The purpose of education is connected to the positive results of being culturally responsive in schools to achieve equity and ultimately success for all students.

As the population in a school changes and diversity increases, the culture and practices in that school should reflect that change. When a leader decides to implement changes, they should be supported by the education

department, the School Board, and the school community. What other schools and districts are doing that works is a question that should be considered when starting to develop a plan.

Even with the best intentions, educators are subject to their own experience, which in many cases has ingrained specific expectations and attitudes. It is important that educators:

- Consider their own biases and limited experience when working with students in their school because there is a greater chance that these students come from a different experience;
- Consider whether the strategies are universal across different countries and in different schools, and whether they are supported by research and experiences in each district; and
- Be thorough in determining which are key ideas and strategies that will universally help school leaders to be culturally responsive in their practice.

Education groups all students together, embracing equality, so that each student – no matter their background, ability, or way of life – will achieve to their potential. For this to be

accomplished there can be no singular plan to achieve success. To make all students equal in achieving this goal requires a collaboration of many strategies and practices. Therefore, for education to be equal for all students, it must be equitable.

However, it can be difficult to determine where equality is achieved and where diversity and differentiation are required. Administrators and teachers need to value each student equally. Teachers need a comprehensive and current repertoire of planning, instruction, and assessment practices to meet the diverse needs of the students in their classroom.

This requires educators to get to know their students and their needs before carefully planning their practice to ensure an inclusive, equitable access, and responsive, flexible approach to learning. This vision in education is supportive, however, we must be careful not to forget the reality of the challenges in education to achieve this ideal.

Equality in a classroom often comes down through all these channels and debates but ultimately, it is up to the professionalism of each educator. It is a teacher's job to get to know his

or her students and to teach to the best of his or her ability through differentiated lessons and environments to help all students. This becomes complex, but nonetheless vital, when students from different cultures are in the same classroom and school.

Alberta Education (2010) further emphasizes this value in the Inspiring Education document by saying that all learners should have fair and reasonable access to educational opportunities. Thus, to be totally open and accepting, schools must consider what the barriers are for minorities, specific student needs, and how we can eliminate them while preserving the rights and freedoms of both sides of those barriers. Being inclusive is more than being "nice" to all students.

In May 2017, anti-immigrant protesters rallied in the parking lot of an urban high school in a Canadian city. The rally was organized by the protesters because of fights between Syrian students and Canadian students. The group protested on the grounds that the Canadian students involved were not as seriously reprimanded as other students. This news spread via social media and had been stretched from

a simple misunderstanding to a complete misrepresentation of the truth. These protesters claimed to be concerned parents, but, in fact, the group included members of the Worldwide Coalition Islam, Canada, and participants from outside the community.

When news came of the imminent protest, the local community was concerned, and several parents hesitated to send their students to school out of concern for their safety. To this, the principal sent a message to parents ensuring them of the students' safety and encouraged them not to allow their child's education to be interrupted by such an event.

On the day of the event, most students did come to school, and some even braved the protesters. A few students helped spread positive messages through the media. These students modeled the ideal culture of acceptance and education that the school strives to build.

The school worked through this unwanted situation and used it as a teachable moment. In the end, the school's staff and students used the attention brought on from the negative intentions of the protesters to spread their positive and accepting culture beyond themselves.



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Images of the RCMP playing soccer with a multicultural group of students were spread over social media, which further reinforced this positive image.


A Grade 11 student was quoted saying, “We need to educate people like this,” in reference to the protesters. Another student spoke out against the protesters. He held a sign to contrast their messages of hate that read, “No More Hate, No More Fear, Refugees are Welcome Here.”

Given the melting pot of cultures present in many school populations and the increasing immigration in many developed countries, an education that considers all students requires schools to be culturally responsive. Culturally responsive schools and educators do more than experience different foods and festivals, and go beyond including folktales and multicultural images. Educators and schools are culturally responsive when they are accepting of all points of view and perspective in their practice. Not only should all students feel represented in their school, but this representation should be shared in a way that teaches understanding and acceptance.

Reaching out to the community and even basic online research can be helpful tools to close gaps should an educator encounter limitations in their own world experience that can make it difficult to connect with and understand a new culture or perspective. To teach diverse groups of students, good educators start by learning about their students and communities with a cooperative approach. Then they seek to understand and connect with others around the world.

Building relationships with students and designing lessons where all students can connect and feel accepted for who they are is key in creating environments where they can thrive. When the attitude of seeking to understand and learn about others with acceptance and inclusion becomes culture in schools, all students can grow into peaceful capable citizens in the diverse, dynamic, and demanding world of the 21st century. ■


*Melissa Leonard is currently a middle school teacher with Red Deer Public Schools. Paul Stewart is a retired Associate Superintendent with Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools and is an instructor with City University of Seattle.*



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# "Being" Inclusive:

## A Required Step Towards Student Success and Well Being

By Carolyn Jensen, Memorial Composite High School; Scott Johnson, Parkland School Division; and Dr. Dianne McConnell, Parkland School Division

**E**mily Perl Kingsley published a poem in 1987 titled "Welcome to Holland,"<sup>1</sup> about a mother's dream of expecting a perfect child, only to then be alarmed and disheartened when she discovers that the child has a disability. She is saddened and unprepared, but when she has support and gains insight, she begins to look at her circumstances differently. Through Kingsley's narrative, we become aware of a gentle shift that the mother makes into acceptance and love for her child.

The poem is a metaphor comparing this mother's experience to a travel experience of planning and looking forward to going to an expected destination, Italy, and finding that she had landed somewhere completely different and unexpected, Holland. The poet explains that she was prepared for Italy – she read the guidebooks, understood traditions and culture, and knew what she was interested in doing there. In Holland, she felt lost, confused, and probably unhappy.

"Welcome to Holland" could just as easily be a metaphor for education today. It's possible that our teachers arrive on the job with an expectation that their pedagogy is sound, and as a result their students should be successful. They know their program of studies, have their resources, their year plans, and their expected outcomes. They feel prepared, comfortable, and ready to do their job.

Yet we hear from many teachers that this is not always the case. Some have expressed feelings of being overwhelmed and isolated in trying to meet the diverse needs within their classrooms. This is not where they expected to be. They don't have the resources, the training, expertise, or time to be responsive to the degree of diverse needs within their classrooms.



*The poem "Welcome to Holland" speaks of a mother's dream of expecting the perfect child.*

Many are blaming inclusion for disrupting the system, which is fair. The word "inclusion" is confusing and, as a result, we lack clarity about our end in mind. We can only make meaning of words by our own experiences and history attached to those words. The use of the word inclusion and its associated meaning has evolved continuously; and as a result, the word has described different concepts at different points in time. Many have adopted an understanding of inclusion that is embedded in the special education world, describing a process of programming for all students in "typical" classrooms.

Alberta Education's policy for inclusion says that, "Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance and promotes a sense of belonging for all learners." An essential understanding of this policy includes thoughts that are universally

received, have lasting value beyond the classroom and will always be with us. Our work in Parkland School Division has shown us that our essential understanding for an inclusive education system needs to become a coalition: "Being and doing inclusion becomes the lens through which we develop mindsets of respect, understanding, and belonging, leading to a natural way of being."

Our staff has worked diligently to embed "doing" inclusion into their daily practice. Our challenge is continuously to identify how to support our staff to become empowered or have the capacity to embed the "being" piece into their practice.

The shift in practice that we are striving to accomplish is heart-work. We want to create experiences for our staff where they can reflect on the following question: "What is the experience that is created for your students in your

presence?” It is important for us to know that our staff create experiences for their students – all their students – where they feel that they are really seen. Positive and supportive relationships and connections become critical.

The work within our schools and division focuses on being clear about our understanding of an inclusive education system. We have to engage our staff in looking differently at and identifying problems of practice – what’s getting in the way of delivering on this foundational belief system? Often a problem of practice is identified as a symptom of an underlying issue that has a root cause.

Over the past three years, one of our high schools embraced the work of Jigsaw Learning in putting the scaffolding in place for teachers to implement the Collaborative Response Model, Hewson, 2015. Capacity building comes in many formats. While there are certainly times that a one-shot experience to learn about a specific topic is appropriate, developing networks between educators is also essential. Schools are filled with years of experience and much wisdom to respond to the unique needs of students. Teaming becomes the venue for sharing insights and strategies to develop the efficacy needed to embrace the universal acceptance needed to create a sense of belonging for all.

We have also identified that we need to be clear to our key stakeholders (staff, parents, community, and students) about the evidence that we are looking for and reporting in a manner that stakeholders can easily understand.

As we continue to participate in a provincial Assurance Model for education, our planning and reporting are heavily dependent on stakeholder engagement. We present our desired state through “assurance elements” – those unique aspects that stakeholders would expect to see to gain trust and confidence that we are achieving our intended outcomes.

Just as Kingsley’s protagonist realizes she needs to learn a whole new language, we must think about planning for inclusion in a different way. The system priorities and goals need to clearly define inclusion as both a learning goal and a value, one that is reflected in the budgeting allocations for professional learning and for enhanced supports and services for all our students.

Kingsley concludes her poem with a strong thought: “If you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn’t get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things... about Holland.” Freeing ourselves to find enjoyment in the destination, thus embracing inclusion, provides us with the opportunity to encourage each one of our schools to design their own path for their respective journey. Each one of our schools have their own unique identity. They all encounter varying degrees of community and stakeholder influences depending on the community they serve. Regardless, we all have the same vision and we all embrace the concept of equitable access to quality programming for all our students.

We work in a complex human system and, as such, embracing a collaborative approach

to problem solving is helping us move further along with inclusion towards our ultimate goal of student success and well-being. We continue to make inclusion, wellness, and quality learning a priority and act based on what we know about ourselves and about our students. We continue to lean further into the discomfort, learn from both what worked and what didn’t work, just as the mother in Kingsley’s poem did.

Our mission is that we assure supportive learning environments, meaningful experiences and healthy relationships that create opportunities to develop resilience, to gain diversity in perspectives, and to achieve enduring success. We engage from a place of acceptance and caring that is felt by students and our community will feel confident that we will support all our students, even if it takes time to figure out what supports need to be in place. ■

*Carolyn Jensen has held a variety of positions supporting diverse learners in schools and is currently the principal of Memorial Composite High School. Scott Johnson joined staff of Parkland School Division in 2003 and began his role of Associate Superintendent in 2014. Dianne McCormell has been an Associate Superintendent with Parkland School Division since 2013.*

## Reference

1. To read Emily Perl Kingsley’s poem in full, visit: [www.dsasc.ca/uploads/8/5/3/9/8539131/welcome\\_to\\_holland.pdf](http://www.dsasc.ca/uploads/8/5/3/9/8539131/welcome_to_holland.pdf).

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# Equity is the Moral Purpose

By Dr. Carmen Mombourquette and Dr. Pamela Adams, University of Lethbridge

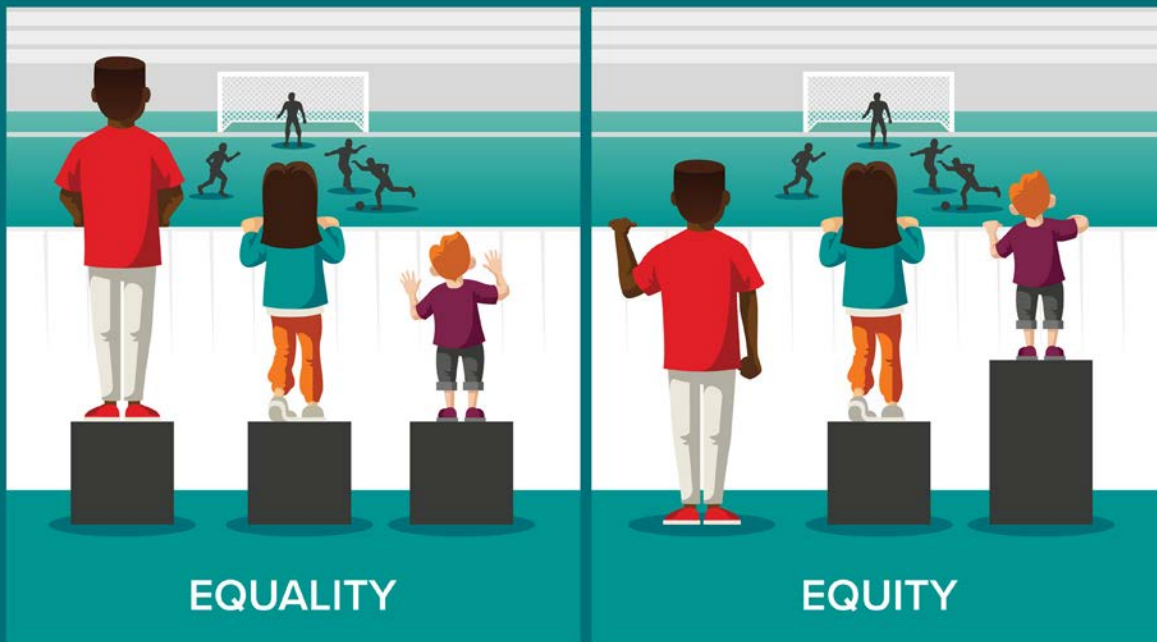


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Over the past decade, Michael Fullan has made frequent presentations to CASS members around understanding and actualizing his concept of “moral purpose” (Fullan, 2002).<sup>1</sup>

For Alberta teachers, school leaders, and superintendents, the phrase “optimum learning for all students,” though seemingly simple, is highly complex and provides the moral purpose for teaching and leading in the 21st century. Recently, we have been interviewing teachers, school leaders, and superintendents about implementing the 2018 Teaching Quality Standard, Leadership Quality Standard, and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard. These interviews are part of a four-year research study funded by Alberta Education entitled Optimum Learning for All Students. Led by Dr. Jim Brandon (University of Calgary) and conducted in partnership with researchers from Concordia University, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge, one aspect of the research asks participants to define the term optimum learning. Their responses have focused heavily on what we refer to as equity. These statements included the following:

- “It is about understanding each student as being unique and it is our job to know what they each need to grow and learn.”
- “Need to ensure we are teaching effectively to all students.”
- “Meeting our students where they are at and ensuring we provide what they each need to move forward.”
- “It is not the same for every student, success is measured in a different scope and sequence.”
- “Optimum means helping each student achieve what is needed for them as individuals.”

- “Having a really good understanding of what each student needs. Putting into place structures, process, programs, instruction, etc. to help students achieve their own potential.”
- “Fair does not mean equal.”

The last statement was an oft-noted expression from several participants and was consistent with observations about current practice in several schools that we have worked with during the past six years. We have witnessed the exemplary efforts of teachers and leaders to ensure that Albertan students have access to the services they need to grow and learn. We have also seen firsthand the clear and unwavering recognition of school authorities to be highly purposeful in promoting equity; and, in so doing, they are providing optimum learning opportunities for all students. In what follows, we highlight the work of two school authorities who are doing so.

## Lethbridge School Division

Dr. Cheryl Gilmore, Superintendent of Schools for the Lethbridge School Division (LSD) stated, “When we look at our schools through the lens of social justice, equity is the ultimate goal. Equity begins with the attitude that students are at the center of decision making with the goal of meeting the learning needs of each and every student in inclusive schools. We consider inclusive practices as the foundation and driver for coming closer to the goal of equity.”

To promote equity, LSD uses Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to provide students with rich learning experiences. UDL was adopted to mitigate practices that built barriers, including addressing social and emotional well-being in classrooms so that all students felt respected, valued, and experience success. The specific strategies

employed through UDL placed emphasis on a student-centric decision-making process in order to offer students a greater sense of belonging and purpose.

Throughout the 2018-19 school year, school leaders commenced their UDL learning journey by completing the Alberta Education Indicators of Inclusive Schools. Many school leaders used this initial “deep dive” as an inspiration to develop an inquiry question to guide their UDL learning throughout the year. Ultimately, the goal was to ensure that all staff were focused on “build[ing] a compassionate learning community that recogniz[ed] the deeper needs of all people, including a sense of safety, a sense of belonging, and the feeling of being a part of something meaningful,” (Katz, 2012, p. 4).<sup>2</sup>

A critical part of the learning process was building a clearer understanding of UDL for parents. In LSD, the term “inclusion” became aligned with “less resources,” “less EAs,” and “larger class sizes.” The division embarked upon developing a Diversity and Inclusion Parent Table that involves hosting four evening events for parents to discuss and share what inclusion and diversity mean to them; learn more about the system and how it supports inclusion and diversity; and ultimately, identify what the system may be missing in its equity efforts.

Reaching the goal of equity through inclusive practices also required close attention to the provision of support services, including:

- Counselling teams with a wellness focus;
- First Nations, Métis, and Inuit teams with the theme “FNMI for all.” All students developing foundational knowledge; teachers understanding how to approach concepts inclusive of an Indigenous lens; access to Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers; and recognition of Indigenous culture and language;
- Programming for newly arrived English Language Learners;
- A poverty committee focused on supporting nutrition programs at schools;
- A mental health project, Making Connections, with liaison workers who supported families, made connections to services in the city, and instituted prevention strategies in mental health across all schools;
- Support for early learning and access to professionals, such as SLPs and psychologists; and
- Strong support for LGBTQIA students, including clubs, conferences, and development of guidelines for inclusive practices in schools.

### Medicine Hat Public School Division

Medicine Hat Public School Division (MHPSD) similarly embarked upon its equity-focused work by implementing a series of universal supports for learning. To do so, leaders and teachers in this division first identified what constituted an Optimal Learning Environment, leading to greater numbers of teachers embracing the concept of UDL and its potential to positively impact all learners. This included a broader acceptance of the belief that all students must get the support they need, when they need it, where they need it, and in enough time to positively influence learning.

By strategically leveraging the Classroom Improvement Fund (CIF) over the last two years, more schools were able to embed teacher learning time into the daily schedule. This, combined with a

model of Collaborative Response, provided the vehicle for teachers to reflect on their practices and their impact on equitable learning opportunities.

A division wide “collaborative staffing” initiative led away from a formulaic process to one driven by student needs. School leaders worked with central services to design a staffing plan unique to their local context, thereby allowing schools to design class configurations that deployed teachers and educational assistants more effectively and created ways to support the social emotional needs of students.

Fullan’s contention that moral purpose undergirds educational growth was evidenced by the clear and strategic use of programs in these two urban school authorities in which optimum learning for all students was equated with equity of student opportunity. ■

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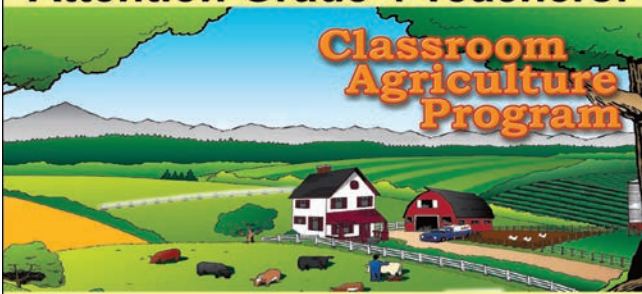
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# Personalized Programming and Equity

By Teresa Di Ninno, CAPE  
Public Charter School

Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence's (CAPE) charter is focused on a personalized program for each student predicated on the concept of equity. Every student matters, every student counts, every student is unique, and every student has specific needs and strengths. The personal and social variables within these priorities are not, and should not, be obstacles to achieving one's educational potential. Rather, all individuals are programmed for fairly as they strive towards their personal best.

While most schools write support plans for coded students, our school develops Individualized Program Plans (IPP) for all students. With parent and student input, IPPs are developed with the student's learning strengths and preferences identified. Goals are specifically chosen through a triage process which identifies an area that negatively impacts a student's learning. Strategies are



*These Grade 5 / 6 students are eager to share their thoughts.*

then selected to complement the student's skillset. Three times a year, student growth and the effectiveness of strategies are evaluated by the partners.

Overt teaching of fair versus equal occurs in all classes throughout the year. Students come to understand that they will receive the

support they need when they need it, and thus, they build trusting relationships with teachers and other adults.

When discussing student needs, staff (administration, current and previous teachers, and assistants) often confer as a team to review student needs and brainstorm support strategies. This leads to out-of-the-box solutions. Based on the needs of each student, administration develops an individualized support plan that is shared with staff to assist with the implementation of the IPP.

By arranging time tables and work spaces, students are able to move to other classes for one or two subjects, eat lunch with other groups or in other locations to support social needs, establish mentor relationships with older students, and facilitate community partnerships such as those with Big Brothers or Big Sisters. One routinely may see a student checking-in with an identified adult of trust, perched upon a ball chair or rocker, taking a work break, using headphones, handling a calm box, or receiving exam supports.



*These tables with number cards are used in the Grade 1 / 2 class.*

Exam supports range from writing exams one page at a time to increasing white space or writing time; from regular work breaks to assigned readers and scribes; and from writing in isolation to writing in very small groups. Accommodations are developed from assessment data and included in IPPs to ensure continuity when students transition to other schools.

While all supports have been developed in response to student needs, some strategies have proven highly effective for groups. For students who have had great variance

between their academic and social abilities, the development of individual time tables to accommodate both types of needs has proven successful. For social and physical activities, the students were kept with their age peers. For academic classes, the students were placed as “leaders” in the grade that matched their understanding. These students acted as mentors for younger students in many social ways, while benefitting from the academic program that was suited to their level.

Students with complex needs and a history of failure have benefitted from unique

personalized wraparound programs involving the school, behavioural consultants, home support and respite workers, teams of physicians, and other knowledgeable health practitioners. These aids collaborate to support the student and work with parents to increase capacity to support high-needs children.

Deficits in literacy development demanded a review of our literacy program. This review resulted in our current literacy program that provides targeted group supports. The Director of Student Services works closely with a literacy support educational assistant to provide research-based, data-driven instruction in letter-sound recognition, decoding, chunking, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. The multi-age groups vary in focal area.

Membership is fluid so that, as students grow to meet grade expectations, they transition from one environment to another. In the first year of our literacy program, we identified students who were not growing at acceptable rates but were already accessing universal and targeted supports. Individual supports were then tailored through additional literacy time.

This meant that students were receiving three doses of research-based, individually-tailored literacy instruction daily to bring them up to grade expectations. We are now entering year three of this program, and, once again, it will see slight modifications in response to a significant increase in enrolment.

For the past three years, a very small group of Grade 9 students in our Integrated Setting for Enrichment Education (I.S.E.E.) program were in need of significant enrichment and process development. A pull-out program was designed specifically to address these needs. In spite of the small group size, each student received instruction to the specific depth and breadth to sustain their inquisitive, highly-capable minds; yet, they addressed the deficits in process development.

While in high school, one student accelerated her program significantly; one worked on a science fair project and was invited to participate in the National Science Fair; another applied and was accepted to work at a university on a research project over the



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summer months; and another student was able to advance his understanding in math and science, and acquire the skills to be successful with higher-level thinking.

This type of personalized program is continuing within the 2019-20 academic year. We are programming once again for a very small group of highly capable Grade 9 students by structuring a combined Grade 9 / 10 program that is tailored to each student's current level of mastery; enriched Grade 9 review and distance learning / teacher-directed Grade 10 instruction for three students, and enriched Grade 9 for one student. The group remains together for emotional support and socialization. Parents of these students support this approach because the students' best interests have been considered by addressing the incongruent development through adapting the program.


The following specific examples further illustrate our personalized response to specific student needs and our focus on equity.

- For student OL, having cognitive delays as a teenager created an increasing level of confusion, anger, and defiance.

Behaviour referrals increased and staff reported OL's increasing struggles and noted rising incidents of rigidity, opposition, and refusal. Making changes to OL's timetable, providing him time with age peers for social activities, and

being in core classes with students at the same academic level proved highly effective. OL demonstrated the ability to act as a leader for younger students, assisted with leading gym classes, had no behaviour referrals, and was requested by


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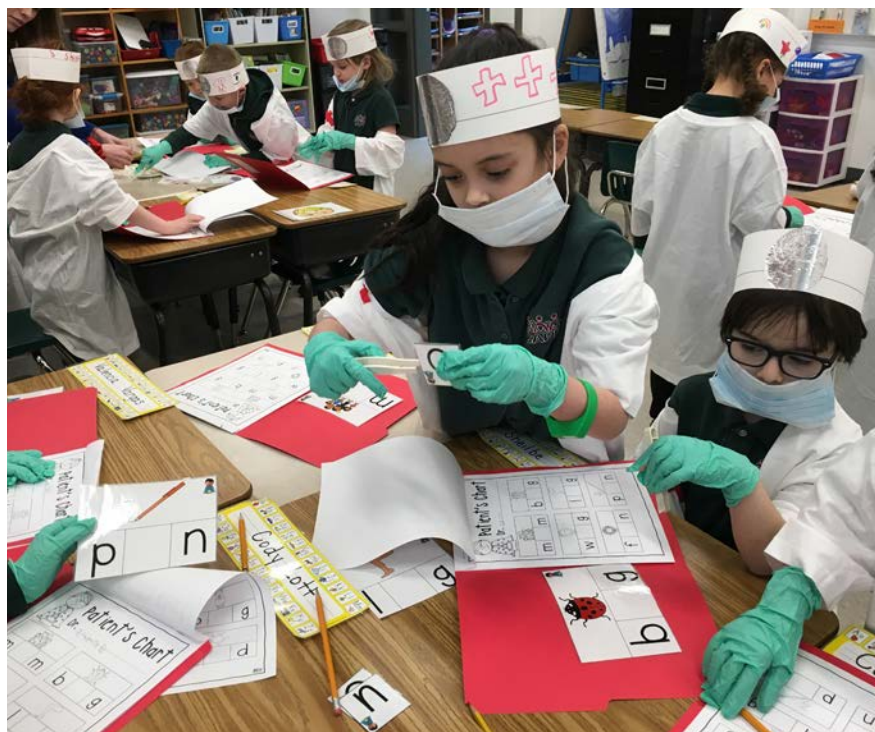
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other teachers to act as a helper during peer-mentoring activities.

- When a medical crisis impaired AK's ability to attend school, programming needed to be flexible and responsive to her needs. Literacy and numeracy time was reassigned to assist her in mastering core material. When her condition worsened, assignments were reduced to focus on core content to assist her in meeting Grade 9 objectives and prepare her for high school. Assignments were sent electronically with weekly hand-ins rather than daily. When AK could attend school, an administrator worked with her daily to provide one-on-one re-teaching and introduction to upcoming concepts. As a result, AK was able to complete Grade 9 content and is attending high school with her peers.
- TK struggled with learning how to read. While being eager to learn and willing to do the work, diagnosed delays were proving to be a difficult hurdle. Staff worked with his parents so that they acquired an understanding of the delays, and together they were able to develop an aggressive three-year plan to increase literacy skills from basic symbol-letter-sound recognition, to blending, chunking, and reading. TK's confidence blossomed in year two when he could read short books repeatedly. In year three, building on the work from previous years and



K-LC vowel surgery engages students in their learning.

continuing to have a triple dose of literacy every day, a repetitive reading program was implemented. He showed gains of two years in just nine months.

This flexible, responsive program relies heavily on the building and maintenance of relationships and partnerships, on assessments and personalized learning profiles and plans, on tracking and monitoring. Teamwork, shared knowledge, mutual

support, and parental involvement are crucial to its effectiveness. ■

*Teresa Di Ninno, CEGEP, B.A., B.Ed., M.A., is an alumnus of McGill University and the University of Toronto. Teresa began her teaching career in Alberta in 1980. She is also the founder, past principal and current superintendent of CAPE Public Charter School in Medicine Hat, Alberta.*



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# Psychological Capital: Equalizing Opportunities to Thrive in Today's Complex World

By Brian Andjelic, CASS; and Dr. Rhonda Nixon, Greater St. Albert Catholic Regional Division

**W**hether one is six or 60, living in today's complex world requires the capacity to navigate tensions between work, school, and home life. Consider your average workday contending with immediate work demands such as, "When is that budget due?" while reading an incoming text from your son sharing, "I can't believe how anxious I feel about that achievement / diploma / exam!" Anytime, anywhere, communication is the hallmark of being more connected digitally, but that can create tensions that threaten productivity and / or productive relationships and genuine social connection.

Navigating such tensions to be generative rather than destructive is the goal for anyone regardless of one's age. Kutcher (2017) defines an "individual's capacity to successfully adapt to complex life circumstances" and to create generative rather than destructive tensions from such situations as "mental wellbeing" or "brain health."<sup>1</sup> How does one learn this? Is there a way to achieve it regardless of one's age or life circumstance?

## Developing resiliency for everyone to thrive through HERO: psychological capital

Psychological capital, a construct that is rooted in positive psychology, is focused on positive outcomes for individuals (microlevel) and organizations (macrolevel). Such micro- and macro-level improvements depend on four,



mutually constitutive and synergistic elements of psychological capital or "psycap."

While levels of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism may vary (Figure 1) depending on the context, all four elements can be improved with practices that are transferable. Although psychological capital will be low if you are a fish trying to climb a tree, various studies have shown that general psychological capital will improve with practice over many contexts.<sup>2</sup>

For example, at a micro-level, if a student is getting ready for a presentation in class and their practice strategies are connected to each element of the HERO Framework, it is likely, based on

research, that the student will succeed in their presentation.

## HERO-in-Action in Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools' Building Communities of Hope

Building Communities of Hope (BCH) is a two-year research project that started in January 2019, and is focused on how youth define "hope," and what constitutes "hope-evoking practices" for them through a leadership course. The high school students and teacher codeveloped a leadership course for high school and junior high students (60

**Figure 1: HERO framework of psychological capital <sup>2</sup>**

1.	<b>Hope:</b> The Will and the Way	Motivation and creative pathways come together to allow goals to be met, especially when a significant cheerleader is involved.
2.	<b>Efficacy:</b> The Confidence to Succeed	Believing in oneself and one's abilities increases the capacity for producing desired results.
3.	<b>Resilience:</b> Bounce Back and Beyond	Not just bouncing back from adversity; rather, bouncing back "better than ever" as a result of lessons learned.
4.	<b>Optimism:</b> Expect the Best for Self and Team	Being realistic and flexible in both goals and results without losing sight of the desired results.

Figure 2: HOPE GRANDMEAN

	Your District		U.S. Overall
	2016	2017	2017
Overall	4.28	4.30	4.20
I know I will graduate from high school	4.58	4.59	4.65
I have a great future ahead of me.	4.39	4.39	4.40
I can think of many ways to get good grades.	4.16	4.24	4.17
I have many goals.	4.23	4.20	4.16
I can find many ways around problems.	3.97	3.97	3.89
I have a mentor who encourages my development.	3.95	3.92	3.45
I know I will find a good job in the future	4.41	4.44	4.37



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from two feeder schools) who came to their high school every two weeks to take part in the activities.

The high school students lead the lessons for junior high students and based their lessons on The Five Essential Elements of Wellbeing<sup>3</sup> (career, community, social, financial and physical) and Kutcher's "Go-To Educator" mental health research and curriculum. The participants in this study started by defining "hope" based on Gallup's Student Poll: the ability to set and meet goals academically and personally. Students in their jurisdiction have taken part in this survey yearly for almost a decade and they found that high school students decline sharply in "hope" compared to junior high and elementary students.

Most notably, high school students who self-identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit performed almost a stanine below their age cohort. In order to consider how the leadership course utilized the HERO framework, we are identifying the practices of the course as connected with each element of the framework.

- 1. Hope:** In this study, students began in small groups to review and share their inferences about their school's Hope Scores (Figure 2). A key theme emerged: students struggled to identify a mentor or someone who they felt comfortable to ask questions and to talk with while entering and experiencing high school.
- 2. Efficacy:** The class also took part in a photo elicitation exercise (each chose a photo that reminded them of hope), and then discussed why they chose the photo. A key theme was that "having someone to set goals with" was a hope-evoking practice for students. Given this result, the students decided to have large and small group discussions as part of every leadership class to ensure that each person in the class could set and reflect on goals with others every session.
- 3. Resilience:** Every two weeks, students continued the course by studying one area of wellbeing, and completed the Wellbeing Finder (a personal survey in which they saw whether or not they were improving in meeting their goals for physical, social, career / passion, financial, community and mental wellbeing). They recorded their scores and strategies for self-improvement

**Figure 3: Sample Psycap Strategies**

Psycap element	A few general practices to improve psycap:
<b>Hope</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reward the effort rather than results.</li> <li>Help narrow the focus. Too many and too broad goals confuse the issue.</li> <li>Celebrate small wins to start. Think big, start small.</li> </ul>
<b>Efficacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning and professional learning lead directly to efficacy.</li> <li>Offer more autonomy, with timely support as needed. Be clear on expectations, give choice on pathway.</li> <li>Fake it 'til you make it! Positive self talk!</li> </ul>
<b>Resilience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be active, eat well and get enough sleep. Drink more water!</li> <li>Call out and reroute negative thinking.</li> <li>Visualize success.</li> </ul>
<b>Optimism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer – help someone else. It's also a great distraction.</li> <li>Gratitude leads to optimism.</li> <li>Plan for the worst, hope for the best. Things almost always turn out better than we think, especially if we are well planned!</li> </ul>

in personal journals and met with partners to review their ideas and progress, or lack thereof. Students reported feeling “energized by meeting” and “proud of small gains.” They explained that “believing that they could overcome barriers was their biggest fear and meeting someone else helped them to face that fear.”

4. **Optimism:** At the end of the first leadership course, an unexpected result was that

many students had decided to take the course again this year. When we asked why there was such enthusiasm to continue, the dominant theme was that setting and meeting goals became meaningful when students studied wellbeing and strategies for self-improvement. They found their shared ideas for improving the high school experience created a positive momentum for continuing the course.

### HERO as a framework to equalize opportunity for everyone to thrive

While BCH illuminates the benefits of applying positive psychology and the four elements of psychological capital, what are some ways for you to get started in your context? Consider starting as they did in BCH with a location of tension. In BCH, they started by reviewing the Hope survey results. What data sources could you review with students?

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Although there are formal psychological assessment tools, professional teacher observations, experiences, tools such as the Our School survey are likely more realistic. Listen to your staff and students, especially those who appear to be struggling with social interactions and emotions. Which of the four psychological capital elements seems most salient?

Once an area for improvement has been identified, see Figure 3 for ideas of practices that are designed to generate conversations that assist those involved to connect their thoughts and emotions with their behaviors, whether in individual or group contexts. Of course, this will depend very much on each specific context.

For more practical ideas, a helpful resource for strategies to support students and adults alike is *Thinking Good, Feeling Better*.<sup>5</sup> ■

*Brian Andjelic has been involved in teaching and education administration for 40 years. Brian now works with the College of Alberta School Superintendents in the Director of Leadership Learning – Wellness portfolio. Rhonda Nixon has been an educator for 25 years as an elementary, secondary, and post secondary teacher, literacy consultant, district manager, and secondary principal. Rhonda is the Assistant Superintendent of Learning Services in Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools.*

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# Abandoning Our Islands: Five Considerations When Structuring Effective Teams

By Kurtis Hewson, Jigsaw Learning

Though talented teachers may positively impact students as islands of isolated excellence in our schools, good teachers who are organized effectively in collaborative teams can impact systems. These teams can ensure student success beyond the scope of any individual teacher's classroom. If the evidence related to the benefits that students and teachers receive as a result of professional collaboration is simply irrefutable (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), then how do we go about structuring these collaborative team experiences to ensure success?

We have been working with school authorities over the past decade to establish system-wide frameworks, known as collaborative response (Hewson, Hewson & Parsons, 2015). This school-wide framework focuses on responding to the needs of all students through collaborative structures, data-informed conversations, and timely supports. Collective efficacy is enhanced as teachers work together to deepen practice and envision innovative ways to support success within and beyond the scope of their classroom. The model has seen exceptional success for students and teachers throughout the province; however, it has become clearly apparent that effective collaboration for teachers rests on five powerful considerations.

## Time for collaboration

If we truly value collaboration for educators and believe in the impact it can have on student success, time must be provided as part of a teacher's regular timetable. Expecting it to happen after school hours, or reactively as needs arise, is not a recipe for success and sends a clear message that collaboration is not

the "real" work of teaching. Time needs to be provided through systemic resource allocation or through creative timetabling.

- **Systemic resource allocation:** At a systems level, districts can ensure that resources are deployed to provide time for teachers to collaborate.
- **Creative timetabling:** At the school level, innovative timetabling can ensure time is established for teams. We have witnessed the following examples be employed effectively:
  - > **Combining classes** – creating larger classes once a week for subjects, such as Physical Education, music, or other subjects that can manage as a larger group, can free up multiple teachers, with one teacher providing time for two or more colleagues.
  - > **Large group activities** – creating larger group activities for things such as library book exchange or study hall can once again maximize the staff to student ratio to allow teachers to be released.
  - > **Flex blocks** – providing students flexible blocks, particularly at the junior and senior high school levels, can allow students to seek out the specific supports they need, while releasing small teams of teachers "off the floor" to collaborate.

Although this abbreviated list only scratches the surface of ways schools can build regular time into their timetables, the focus for students during this time must remain purposeful.

## Focus for collaboration

Having teams establish a focus through the development of goals or inquiry questions is

critically important. True collaboration is not part of an educator's institutional DNA. A lack of clear focus, direction, and structure can lead to lower levels of collective efficacy.

Consider this snapshot of a team-planning guide: teams need to reflect on their weekly planning times, with weeks where administration checks in with focused questions related to their goal; and collaborative team meetings are clearly established where the teachers are joined by administration and other connected staff to specifically examine the students, the progress being made, and the classroom supports and practices to be considered to best meet their needs. See Figure 1, which shows a sample Team Planning Guide.

## Establish and reinforce norms for collaboration

Norms establish ground rules for how we will engage as a team. Merely assuming that we collectively know and understand how we will work together is not enough. Powerful collaboration requires established norms that guide behaviours and explicitly articulate how to respectfully interact as professionals; particularly when conversations push and challenge our educational practices.

Establishing and posting norms is a great first step. But the power of norms come when we examine them deeply, discussing what they look like in practice, and why they are important or how we will respond when they are broken; which inevitably will happen as a team interacts on deeper levels.

Consider the example from Lochearn Elementary School: the staff team examined their

Figure 1

School Logo	Team Name		Year
Team Planning Over View			
Team Members	Meeting Time	Team Norms	
		•	
Term Goals			<input type="checkbox"/> Specific <input type="checkbox"/> Measurable <input type="checkbox"/> Attainable <input type="checkbox"/> Results-Oriented <input type="checkbox"/> Time-Bound
Why?			
Current Reality			
Possible Strategies	•		
Date	What Did We Do?	What Did We Learn?	What Will We Do Next?
Sept.			
Sept. Term Goal Review	How did you arrive at your goal? How will you know if you've achieved your goal? What impact will it have? What challenges do you anticipate in accomplishing your goal? How can leadership support you in achieving your goal?		
Complete questions with Admin			
Sept.			
Sept. Collaborative Team Meeting	Collaborative Team Meeting Focus-		Term Tasks
Oct.			
Oct.			

norms of collaborative team meetings in depth, focused on the “why” for each one, then determined what that norm should look like if they are truly living it in their meetings. See Figure 2 for a sample from Lochearn showing their “norms.”

### Establish clear processes

Clearly articulating the focus for collaboration, then establishing and reinforcing the norms, can provide a solid foundation for collaborative teams working together.

- **Clear agendas:** Establishing a clear agenda that has been collectively determined for teams is important. Notes recorded from

conversations can provide several things, including:

- > A record of the work and learning of the team over time;
- > A measure of accountability for the team and for administration to be aware of the work that is happening, to assist in further supporting without needing to be “present” for every team;
- > Focus for the team time through clear agenda template development rather than a blank “running record” of notes; and
- > Transparency for other teams in the school and beyond.

- **Established roles:** Establishing clear roles early in a team’s collaborative development can be highly effective. Traditional roles like the note-taker, facilitator, and timekeeper can function to keep the team focused, organized, and efficient. The inclusion of non-traditional roles, such as the interrupter or cheerleader, can sometimes infuse a sense of levity to the work and add to the efficiency and focus for the conversation.

### Engagement of leadership

Effective collaboration requires strong leadership direction and involvement. Adopting a “loose-tight” mindset is critically important: leaders remain “tight” on the expectations for teams, while “loose” on the work that is accomplished within those structures. The purposeful support and supervision of teams can yield powerful results that go beyond the scope possible when principals primarily attend to the supervision of individuals (Hewson, 2016; Fullan & DuFour, 2011), however, leaders must be careful not to micromanage teams.

Through the structured process established through collaborative response, collaborative team meetings are established every three to six weeks, with leaders being directly involved in determining potentially innovative solutions for students.

### Collaboration is messy and takes time

Collaboration in schools involves hard conversations, successes and challenges, and never



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Figure 2

Norms	What Does it Look Like? Sound Like?	Why?	Statement
1. Respectful/ Engaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looking at speaker.</li> <li>One speaker.</li> <li>No interruptions of speaker.</li> <li>Equal speaking time (no pontificating).</li> <li>Giving opportunity for equal sharing.</li> <li>Be present...not distracted by phones and computers.</li> <li>Be thoughtful about how you respond to ideas, eg. I will try that or just a "thank you for that idea."</li> <li>No devices at meetings.</li> <li>When someone is sharing a success, positive acknowledgements only.</li> </ul>	<p>To allow for the efficient and professional exchange and sharing of information.</p> <p>Everyone feels valued and heard and is valued and heard.</p>	We shall be respectful and engaged with our meetings.

follows a single upward trajectory. Understanding that the process takes time and constant tending is critical for systems to attain high levels of collective efficacy.

If we can shift our profession to one that is truly collaborative, we can collectively experience levels of student success not attainable on a systemic level through the work of islands of isolated educators. ■

*Kurtis Hewson is the co-founder of Jigsaw Learning, a co-author of the text *Envisioning a Collaborative Response Model*, and currently works with districts and schools establishing collaborative response frameworks and interacting with thousands of educators annually.*

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# The Journey within a Continuum of Supports and Services

*By Loriann Salmon, Foothills School Division*

Inclusion, a value-based and adaptive challenge, can only be addressed in the context, and sometimes change, of people's beliefs, attitudes, and priorities (Heifetz, R. A., Linsky, M. & Grashow, 2009).<sup>1</sup> While Foothills School Division (FSD) began their continuum of supports around structures and systems, it was only by engaging the collective hearts and minds of the group closest to the work that a cultural change was felt. The growth in collective efficacy within the schools challenged the division to address the increasingly apparent disparity between the current reality and those of an ideal inclusive system.

A focus on three key drivers of assessment, capacity, and collaboration provided the foundation, and the needed engagement of leaders within the schools. In developing a continuum of supports and services reflective of and responsive to the ever changing needs, the division began with a strong focus on assessment throughout the continuum, beginning at the universal point with strong formative assessment. Respecting within school variability, divisional benchmark assessments were then introduced to further flag students.

Common diagnostic assessments then supported clarity and capacity in understanding the root of the challenges so interventions could be targeted for impact. A focus on ensuring a continuum of assessment through the two key priorities of literacy and safe, caring and welcoming cultures led to a common language; supporting both in and cross school collaboration, which is

essential for harnessing collective expertise and mobilizing teams to action.

The growth of transparent assessment practices, however, also brought discomfort within the division as a light, which could not be ignored, was shone on the students' challenges and needs. Recognizing commitment is also tied to efficacy, the division's continuum of supports, therefore was refined. The focus was to build the capacity in closing the gap between what they were seeing in their current reality and their desired and preferred future.

Divisional resources, therefore, were aligned to support the capacity building in the identified targeted areas within the two priorities. Professional learning for leadership teams within each school was provided around Universal Design for Learning. Support, through the identification of key leads, was also provided in building capacity around evidence-based practices such as trauma informed, positive behaviour supports, and restorative practices.

The development of protocols and procedures, such as suicide risk assessments and supporting positive attendance, also built capacity and brought confidence to the staff within the schools. Recognizing there is not a separate pedagogy for inclusion, a through line of capacity was built as universal approaches were pulled through the continuum within specialized staff such as learning coaches and Family School Liaison Counsellors. In continued learning and respecting diversity of perspectives, partnerships were made with agencies, such as Hull Services, which led to the development of specialized

mental health supports in junior high and a changed focus to the alternative high school.

A divisionally sought-out partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) led to a pilot supporting the mental health of students, staff, and families. While the focus on assessment and capacity was essential, a continuum built solely on solutions developed by a divisional team – who are farther removed from the challenges – will be sure to fall short. Therefore, FSD intentionally moved towards a stronger commitment of engagement and collaboration of leaders, both formal and informal, within each of the schools.

Leaders within the schools became the driving force. A diverse team of administrators, counselors, teachers, and support staff was developed by each school to tackle their contextually-based challenges. There was an intentional alignment of divisional resources to foster and support a collaborative inquiry process. The division supported leadership teams in the collection and analysis of triangulated evidence, recognizing and respecting the complexities in accurately identifying adaptive challenges.

The leadership teams' understandings and assessment of their unique school context, lent themselves to identifying the problem of practice in a way that external support could not. The iterative cycle supported by processes, such as design thinking and Learning Sprints (Breakspear, 2019),<sup>2</sup> engaged the leaders' competencies of collaboration, problem solving, and critical thinking in designing innovative plans to enrich their school's continuum of supports.

Taking Fullan's (2011)<sup>3</sup> cue in recognizing learning is the work, collaborative opportunities were supported by the division to bring leadership teams back together to share their stories of impact and learning. Through this learning and leveraging of the collective expertise from each other, the school's continuums were once again refined. As leaders recognized a connectedness in working towards a common goal, the culture was impacted, collective efficacy was fostered, and an internal locus of control was strengthened.

The division's continuum of supports and services was also strengthened as those closest to the work were supported in their thinking and learning in addressing the complex challenges being presented to them. The key to strengthening the continuum therefore was not to solve, but to engage.

A commitment to shared responsibility ensured that the division team was creating opportunities for engagement with others beyond the schools. Schools were identifying challenges that could not be solved by their school-based team alone. Therefore, monthly school linked meetings were developed that

included the divisional team, school-based team, and two rotating administrators from other schools to address these problems of practice.

Through these school linked meetings, however, it became apparent that many of these challenges that were being addressed at this divisional table were beyond the purview of the education sector alone and were being addressed by many agencies to the best of their efforts – but in a fragmented approach. Therefore, a multi-sectoral collaborative comprised of education (Child and Family Services, Family Support for Children with Disabilities, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Municipal Enforcement, and Alberta Health Services) was developed to address cases involving children, youth, and families that required an integrated and coordinated approach for supports and services. The division's continuum of supports and services was now expanded and enriched through the engagement of stakeholders beyond the system.

Foothills School Division's continuum began providing and developing a continuum of supports and services through the lens of assessment, capacity, and collaboration. It was, however, the

engagement and commitment of those leaders within the schools, closest to the ever-changing challenges, that not only strengthened the divisional continuum but brought shifts in beliefs and culture, essential in supporting an inclusive system and supporting all learners. ■

*Loriann Salmon is the Director of Inclusive Learning in Foothills School Division whose portfolio includes supporting all learners.*

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# Education Analytics for Equitable Success

*This article represents highlights of a conversation amongst leaders in education and industry hosted by Intellimedia and facilitated by Ahmad Jawad, CEO, that took place in Edmonton, Alberta on May 23, 2019.*



Data utilization in education is not a new concept. Questions such as, “What do you want to measure and how do you want to measure it?” and, “What is the purpose behind the data that we are gathering?” are often considered. Data is used to understand students, inform supports to meet their needs, and influence their learning in an inclusive environment.

An evolution of priorities and focus for data has been observed. Desire for information has ballooned and access to data has expanded. Opportunities to utilize data to automatically make predictions in identifying supports and interventions are sought. Questions are now being asked that require the integration of complex sets of data to inform adaptations in the learning environment.

What has not changed is the need to have good quality data (accurate, relevant, and timely) to ensure responsible action as professionals to various audiences (students, parents, community, provincial government, federal government). The power is in the ability to discuss the data so as to articulate vision, present options for consideration when planning and advocating, and engage in collaborative decision making. Education strives to ensure equitable opportunity for success for all learners.

## **Collaborative processes and structures for data review, analysis, and action planning**

The intention of education analytics is to use data to inform practice. For example, what supports do schools need or what is the underlying misconception in student understanding? Professional judgment is not enough, as levels of experience and training underlying professional judgment varies widely among educators. To develop a shared level of professional judgment, structured and purposeful collaborative conversations need to be systematized. Processes need to be articulated that identify norms for dialogue and debate about data and decision making. Collaborative conversations

enhance collective efficacy to ensure misconceptions and learning opportunities are more readily identified and addressed.

The most powerful position in education is the principal; they are instructional leaders connected to stakeholders at all levels. If systems invest in school leadership to develop and apply processes for collaborative conversations about data, consistent understanding of decisions and direction becomes more readily achieved. When those processes then identify actions to be taken and review of follow through on those commitments, and are further enhanced by the assessment of the effectiveness and impact of those actions, it is believed data is better leveraged for its potential capacity.

## **Empowered with data**

Without analysis, data collected serves no purpose. There is a need to address and demonstrate what the data means and how one knows its meaning. Data analysis should occur in a timely fashion – in education, to directly impact students, this often means in “real time.” Trend data can only provide historical information, with some potential for predictive power. There is a need to understand what actions are intentionally being taken to assess their effectiveness and to provide guidance in decision making: continue, stop, pivot, or try something new entirely?

There is the question of how teachers can be assured that the data is easily accessible and easily understood. Data needs to be presented in a consumable and dynamic way at an appropriate level for users to support sharing data, having conversations, and making predictions to inform their instructional practice. This has implications not only for the systems and processes through which teachers enter, access, and analyze their data, but also the professional learning that is necessary to enhance their practice.

The professional learning is multifaceted: the “how-to” of using the technology is only one small part. There is learning needed around the

“how-to” of the data analysis itself, and that understanding needs to occur so that teachers, school leaders, and district leaders develop not only comfort in the process but also common language to ensure data and its analysis is understood, meaningful, and relevant. Support is needed to ensure understanding of what questions to ask of the data and how to ask them appropriately and in context. Coaching and mentorship is needed to help educators become aware of their own biases and intentions when considering (or not considering) data and to skillfully navigate the integration of interventions informed by data and reinforced with professional judgment.

### Solving the data problem

Presenting evidence that is easily understood is an endeavour. Even within a single district, one may not know all the data sources that exist to integrate, to assess interrelationships, and to articulate a justified decision. However, given contextual uniqueness, that justification may not be the same or comparable to that of another district as even standard assessments may be administered, applied, or recorded in a non-standard way.

Education may have to turn to outside organizations to leverage their expertise in developing a unified system of student, school, district, and provincial information to inherently develop reliability and validity linked to applied methodology throughout. This would serve to integrate a variety of data sources and alleviate the data analysis process for educators as data mining has not been a skill typically required or leveraged in school districts.

### Education is a human industry

Ideally, interfaces would be created to help teachers work through a planning process and make informed decisions – what strategies work for what students in what context? Considering the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, there is recognition that big data is needed. However, the key data that needs to be collected in a huge database to truly leverage AI remains undetermined. Information in a system needs to meet the teachers’ needs to inform optimal ways to show students that teachers know about them, care about them, and understand them as learners. Even more, the information in a system needs to meet the students’ needs to help them be aware as both affective and cognitive learners.

AI will not provide innovative teaching and learning strategies; critical thinking and discerning judgment are still required. A system cannot do the work for students; teacher intervention and interaction is necessary. While AI can make suggestions to assist teachers, it certainly cannot replace them. Finally, student-centred education is not going to be replaced with AI-centred education; teachers will need to interact with machines, interpret their own wisdom and that of the machine, and figure out the “why” behind the learning for each of their individual students.

### Maintaining momentum

Data will need to become a relevant and provocative topic to drive change. The conversation will need to be pervasive and a fundamental component of educational leadership. It will be necessary to continue to bring people together to talk about best practices, because data does not make decisions – people make decisions.

Wahkohtowin is a Cree word which denotes the interconnected nature of relationships and communities. Once a connection is made, a relationship has been forged and we become a part of each other’s circle. When we exist in this circle, we accept the responsibilities that accompany our commitment to the relationship. We are willing to share, to compromise, and to consider how having many partners will be an advantage for students.

Alberta is a leader in the realm of teaching excellence. We need to remain committed to ensuring the conversation around data-informed educational practice and evidence-informed communication of learning continues. We need to coordinate opportunities to share stories and learn from one another. We need to continue to network and connect those in our circles who may be able to support one another as we strive to create optimal learning environments for students so they may identify and achieve their goals. ■

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*Ahmad Jawad is the CEO of Intellimedia, a service and solution provider specializing in education analytics and integration solutions to help schools power student success. Jennifer Ferguson readily engages districts and schools in strategic implementation of Educational Technology solutions to support collaborative, responsive structures to meet the needs of learners.*

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# Shining a Light on Mental Health



By Kelli Littlechilds, ASEBP

Imagine walking alone in a pitch-black room full of obstacles with a faulty flashlight – one that keeps cutting in and out, so you only get short, infrequent bursts of dim light. As you move around, you stumble more than a few times, becoming unsure of your feet and untrusting of your own instincts to guide you safely out of this space. Now, imagine being in this state for a prolonged length of time – days, weeks, even months.

This is how it can feel for people experiencing mental health challenges. Their dim beam allowing them to see only a small fraction of the resources and supports around

them, with the darkness making it feel as though they're all alone; when in reality, they're surrounded by people who can help.

So, how do we make it easier to help people out of the darkness and reassure them that they're never truly alone? We shine a light on the mental health resources that are available before they're needed. If we can raise the profile of available resources before the darkness falls, it'll be easier to remember the way to them in times of need.

At ASEBP, we're no stranger to the impact poor mental health can have. In 2018, 35 per cent of the Extended Disability Benefits claims we approved were a direct result of mental health conditions. While this may seem like a high percentage – and, we agree, it is – we see this as an opportunity to do better, for everyone. Therefore, we're choosing to shine our brightest light on all our mental health resources and encourage you to do the same within your workplace and districts.

## Psychology Benefits

*Who is this for?* All ASEBP covered members enrolled in Extended Health Care benefits.

*How can I access it?* Check out Other Medical Services & Supplies under My Benefits on asebp.ca.

Recognizing that we may need extra help dealing with a certain situation or our overall emotional well-being is a huge step in the right direction.

Whether you need help or know of an employee who's struggling, remember that each year covered members have access to \$1,200 for psychology sessions.

## Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)

*Who is this for?* All ASEBP covered members.

*How can I access it?* Check out Employee Wellness under My Benefits on asebp.ca.

Has an employee or colleague shared with you that they're not quite feeling like themselves lately? Or maybe you know that they've recently lost a loved one. No matter the situation, outside of being a friendly shoulder to lean on, we also encourage you to remind them of their EFAP. Professional guidance and support are available at any time; including services ranging from in-person, online, or over-the-phone counselling, to self-directed programs like iVolve – an online cognitive behavioural therapy program.

## Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

*Who is this for?* All ASEBP covered members.

*How can I access it?* Reach out to your school jurisdiction liaison.

Equip your employees with the language, tools and confidence they need to support colleagues facing mental health challenges by hosting a MHFA workshop. This two-day workshop, facilitated by ASEBP's own certified MHFA instructor, covers a variety of mental health conditions and scenarios, and explores ways participants can provide initial support to those in need.



## EFAP – Key Person Advice Line (KPAL)

*Who is this for?* ASEBP covered members in leadership roles within schools and district offices.

*How can I access it?* Contact Homewood Health and mention you'd like to access KPAL.

If you believe an employee needs assistance but are not quite sure how to broach the subject, we encourage you to talk it through with a professional. With the KPAL, you can do just that!

The KPAL provides superintendents, principals, managers and other key personnel the opportunity to contact a Homewood Health senior-level clinician at any time for immediate, just-in-time consultation around workplace issues, like unusual employee behaviour, workplace conflict, crisis support, or assistance with a formal referral for counselling.

## Workplace Wellness Liaisons

*Who is this for?* Leaders and wellness champions whose staff are ASEBP covered members.

*How can I access them?* Send an email to [health@asebp.ca](mailto:health@asebp.ca).

Feel like you need some extra support when it comes to employee and workplace mental health strategies? Why not enlist the help of ASEBP's workplace wellness liaisons! They're available to collaborate with education sector leaders across the province to assess the needs of employees, help you create sustainable plans, implement strategies and support your evaluation efforts.

From customized school district health profiles to facilitated in-person sessions, our workplace wellness liaisons can assist you in applying specific resources and tools – like the EFAP, The Sandbox, and the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace – to your wellness initiatives.

## Resilience in Leadership (RIL) Project Resources

*Who is this for?* CASS members.

*How can I access it?* Visit the CASS Chief Superintendents Portal.

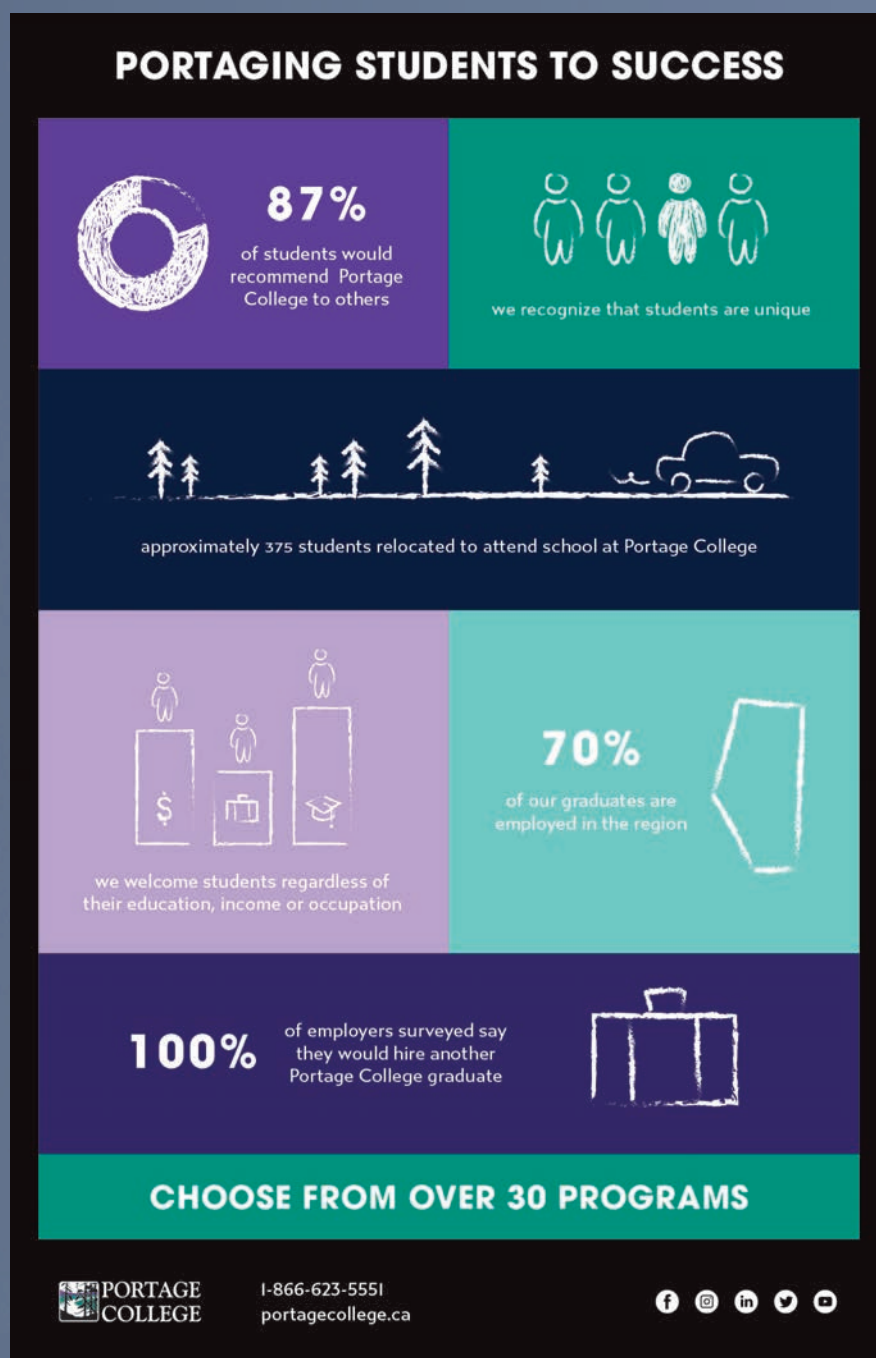
Supporting the mental health and well-being of your employees can put a lot of stress and strain on you as a leader as well. Be sure to practice what you preach by taking time out for yourself to recuperate; especially after dealing with a particularly stressful situation. The resources created as part of the RIL Project can help. Check out Supporting Leader Wellness and Resilience through the ASEBP Benefit Plan for some ideas.

With resources like these and the continued support of leaders like you, I'm

confident we can have a positive impact on the mental well-being of education system workers. If we can all direct even one person to the mental health resources they need, we'll have made a difference.

Together, we can light up even the darkest of spaces. ■

*Kelli Littlechilds is the CEO of ASEBP and has more than 30 years in the health and benefits industry. As the leader of one of Alberta's Top 75 Employers for 2019, Kelli is a champion for personal and workplace well-being.*



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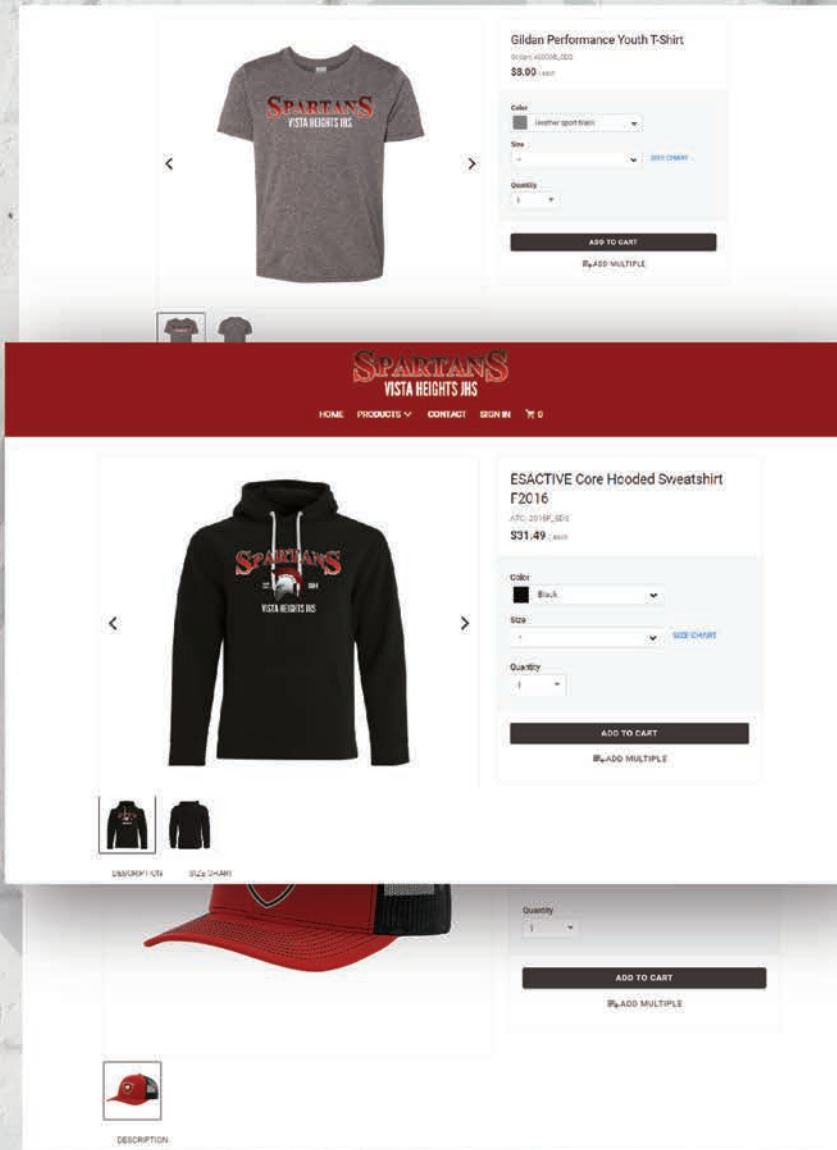
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