




the **CASSCONNECTION** Fall 2017
The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents

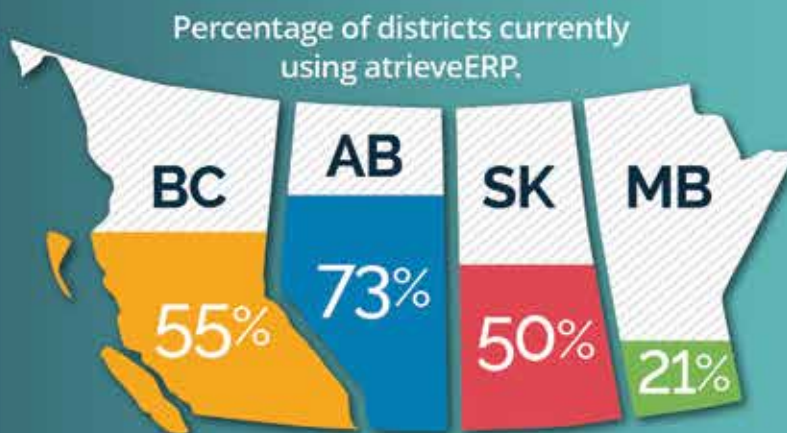
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Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable David Eggen

Alberta's education system is dynamic, constantly evolving and focused on helping students achieve more. That vitality is driven by the students in every classroom, the teachers who guide them, and the leaders who push the system to improve and bring students greater success in the future.

As the 2017-2018 school year gets underway, it is worth taking a look at our efforts to continue improving both the leadership of our system and the success of the students who rely on it. Alberta Education has a number of ongoing initiatives to support those aims, and our close working relationship with partners like the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) ensures that these initiatives will be successful. We count on superintendents not just to support and implement our initiatives, but to build your own innovative projects, at the local level, that encourage teachers and principals to continue to improve as they work to support students.

At the highest level, we are looking forward to continuing our review of assurance in Alberta's education system. Asking fundamental questions about what public assurance should look like in the province, and how we can provide that assurance within our existing legislative framework, will help us to build assurance practices that let Albertans know the education system is meeting the needs of students. This work will have important ramifications for superintendents, school boards, school leaders, teachers and Alberta Education, so we want to ensure we have a strong, shared understanding between these groups before proceeding with the important work of selecting the ways we will measure assurance in the education system and display it to the public.

We count on superintendents not just to support and implement our initiatives, but to build your own innovative projects, at the local level, that encourage teachers and principals to continue to improve as they work to support students.

I am also pleased by the joint effort to date that has gone into developing new practice standards for school and school authority leaders. Ministry staff have worked closely with members from CASS, the Alberta Teachers' Association, First Nations education stakeholders and many others to develop these new standards. While we are still in the process of finalizing these standards, they serve as an impetus for continued improvement in the leadership skills of the superintendents, school principals and other education leaders working across the province. Well-trained and prepared leaders will strengthen our schools and help bring about better outcomes for students.

Good leaders also make use of all the information available to them. That is why Alberta Education has introduced a new research network to foster better and deeper partnerships between researchers, policy makers and education leaders. Sharing and applying the findings made at local, provincial and international levels will allow us to make better decisions across our entire system. As the research network gets underway with representatives from school authorities, stakeholder organizations (including CASS) and post-secondary institutions, we

can discuss our research priorities and work together to identify promising practices for our students and communities.

These are just a few of our endeavours that connect the growth and development of our highest level leaders with the student success that Albertans count on. Many more initiatives—from our work to develop new curriculum, to ensuring every student is welcome in a safe and caring school—also tie in with the work of CASS and Alberta's dedicated superintendents. I look forward to continuing that work with you and all of our other education partners in the province.

Together, we will continue to push the growth of this system for the benefit of our students. As Minister of Education, students remain my top priority, and I know they are the primary focus of school authorities across the province. Educating the next generation of Albertans is a tremendous honour, and I am glad to work with leaders like CASS to ensure our students are ready for the challenges of tomorrow. Our government will continue to make life better for Albertans by continuing to fund education because we know that investing in education is an investment in our province's future.

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Message from the President

Christopher MacPhee | College of Alberta School Superintendents

The pressing question we, as leaders within the education system continue to grapple with is, “How do we determine if the work we engage in as system leaders has a positive impact on student success?”

There are many aspects to this important question—a very simple one being, “What is meant by student success?” To be a successful education system we have a duty to ensure that we create conditions and learning opportunities for students that allow them to grow and flourish in all aspects of their being. A culture must be created where everyone, no matter their role in the organization, is focused on the same outcomes.

In order to laser this focus, system processes must be aligned therefore allowing a system-wide culture to flourish. Working in isolation only fractures a system and will ultimately hinder us in being successful in achieving this desired outcome of improving student achievement. It is true that we are better together.

System leaders, as noted by educational consultant Michael Fullen, have the responsibility to determine what drivers will result in action that will positively impact student learning. Our work as system leaders is to determine those elements and then

empower our teachers to focus on these drivers to support the students in their classrooms. By utilizing distributed leadership we activate the grass roots and create a common understanding of what evidence constitutes success for students, thus making it readily understandable by all members of the learning community. This, in turn, ensures the coherence needed to move a whole system forward.

According to Douglas Reeves, founder of Creative Leadership Solutions, the most important variable affecting student success is the quality of teaching; the second most important variable is the degree to which a principal works with their teachers. If we are to act on this research then the questions we must ask ourselves within the Alberta context are:

1. How can the draft *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* in Alberta improve teaching practices, student engagement and student learning?
2. If we accept Vivian Robinson’s research finding that teacher learning and development is the leadership dimension with the biggest impact on student learning, how do we support principals in developing their capacity to nurture teacher learning?

To be an effective teacher means to be constantly changing and adapting to meet the needs of the individual students that face them each year while at the same time staying up to date on proven research. Life-long educator and author Dylan Wiliam states, “One that would be a leader must be a bridge.” As system leaders, how do we establish structures and supports within our system that will enable all staff to continually be able to bridge the gap from what is currently taking place within our schools to what needs to take place to meet the ever-changing needs of the students in our classrooms.

Once we have determined our goals, we have to create a coherence throughout the system to ensure that everyone is aiming for that target. We also need to ensure that we are testing our assumptions and using authentic evidence to determine the effectiveness of the actions of the system.

I am sure that the articles within this edition of *The CASS Connection* will provide inspiration as we contemplate the meaning of student success and how we, as system leaders, ensure that we are creating the vital North Star for action, establishing enabling conditions and shaping a pathway for change. ■

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Message from the Executive Director

Barry Litun | College of Alberta School Superintendents

Next year will be the 10th anniversary of what may be the most significant change in CASS' history; the launch of the professional learning initiative *Moving and Improving*, subsequently called *Leadership Learning*. This initiative has been the catalyst enabling CASS, working in partnership with Alberta Education, to provide powerful professional learning for system leaders in Alberta, addressing Goal 2 of the CASS Strategic Plan: "Leadership Capacity is Built and Supported."

In this edition of *The CASS Connection* you will read how strong system leadership positively impacts student success. In addition to the great work taking place in Alberta school authorities, I am very excited about the work that is taking place within CASS to build and support system leadership capacity.

In conjunction with providing strong orientation and powerful mentoring for new members, a focus for CASS is to support the implementation of the Professional Practice Standards.

The Professional Practice Standards Working Group, run by Colleen Symyrozum-Watt, Elizabeth Gouthro and Val Olekshy, has developed services and resources for system leaders to build awareness, understanding and a commitment to action of the draft Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS), in support of professional practice, growth and development.

These supports and services are housed on the recently developed Professional Learning portal on the CASS website (<http://cassalberta.ca>). The portal, open to all learners, showcases professional learning opportunities and resources based on

the SLQS competencies. The braid image shown on the portal, under the Professional Learning heading, identifies the competencies that describe the standard. The visual is intended to imply that the competencies are interrelated and interdependent.

I would like to highlight four areas of support that the Working Group was able to develop over this past summer.

Team leadership learning

In response to a CASS members' needs assessment, the Fall Conference and Annual Learning Conference will use the *Team Leadership Learning* approach to provide jurisdiction leadership teams a forum for building the collective capacity of the system leadership team through a community of practice approach. Team Leadership will be facilitated by Dr. Michael Fullan and Dr. Santiago Rincón-Gallardo, thought leaders who have experience with evidence-based practice and research, and who will make the learning meaningful for the Alberta context.

The team leadership learning approach enables:

- System leadership teams to engage in current research and professional practice that can inform system improvements and build capacity; and
- Opportunities for community building and networking with other school authorities and education partners.

Competency overviews

A valuable resource that has been developed are two-page *competency overviews*, intended to support awareness and understanding of the seven competencies identified in the SLQS. Each introductory competency overview has four sections, including:

1. Legal references;
2. Research;
3. Examples of practice in Alberta; and
4. Resources.

A getting ready to implement workshop

A *Getting Ready to Implement Workshop* has been developed for CASS members to use in their school authorities to assist in creating learning opportunities related to the new professional practice standard. Workshop outcomes will be:

- Creating awareness of the Professional Practice Standards;
- Enhancing understanding about ways to implement the standards; and
- Considering designs for implementation and professional learning planning.

The workshop is intended for superintendents and those aspiring to be a superintendent, including school authority and school based leaders.

Planning for implementation

Tools for system leaders charged with *Planning for Implementation* have been developed, so that the system leaders can support quality school leadership and teaching to create optimum learning for all students in Alberta.

Planning requires an understanding of the characteristics of successful implementation; coherence among plans and priorities; and the intentional efforts by education stakeholders to collaboratively address conditions to support implementation. A CASS comprehensive professional learning and implementation plan is available for system leaders to use when getting ready for implementation.

Thank you

To close, I want to thank all the writers who have contributed to this edition of *The CASS Connection*. Your stories shine the light on the positive impact system leadership has on student success.

Finally, on behalf of all CASS members, I extend sincere appreciation to the sponsors that 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. ■

Working as a School System, Not a System of Schools

By Shan Jorgenson-Adam and Rita Marler, Battle River School Division

"I feel like Battle River School Division is on the cusp of greatness."

— BRSD Principal, Start Right Conversations, 2017-2018 school year

A rewarding comment and reaffirmation that we are doing the right work and moving in the right direction. This is the third year of our Start Right conversations, where we spend 30 minutes with all our principals, vice principals and division leadership.

When we first began these conversations, it was with the goals of deepening relationships and gaining feedback on the work being done throughout the division to plan moving forward. Now, in year three, these conversations have continued to support our goals. They are an affirmation, that the work we set out to do after our first round of Start Right conversations, is gaining momentum and making a difference.

Year one (2015-2016) of these conversations provided us with the data, that as system leaders, we had made progress in building relational trust. Leaders felt supported and were pleased with how lines of communication had

been strengthened. However, it was very apparent that, for the most part, we were a system of schools not a school system. Principals and vice principals knew what they wanted to do in their respective schools and with their staff, but there was a definite lack of clarity around our work as a school division.

As the system leadership team, we gathered all the feedback provided from these conversations. We set out on the road of moving schools from being individual schools (islands), to a united, interdependent and successful school system. We spent the year revisiting both our division vision, "Every student, Every Day a Success" and our division-wide priorities, "Every Day Four: Welcoming and Caring Environments, Numeracy, Literacy, and 21st Century Learning and Teaching."

We knew that we needed to create a common understanding around what these should look like, sound like and feel like across our

division. School based leadership and their staff needed to understand why our vision of "Every Student, Every Day a Success" was necessary, and they needed to understand how we would do this work together to ensure its' achievement.

In planning for the year, we dedicated a large portion of our "Leading and Learning" sessions—where we get together regularly with administration and division leadership staff—as time for us to build clarity and focus in relation to our vision and Every Day Four. In addition, we regularly visited schools and met with administrators. We added two education technology positions and sought feedback from all stakeholders regarding our work, to determine where we needed to provide additional resources, professional learning and support.

By the end of this year we had a new professional development model, a new literacy focus, knew where we needed to focus in relation to

educational technology and a draft numeracy framework. As research by Hattie (2012) and Robinson (2011) demonstrates, teachers have the biggest impact on student success. We knew that our greatest avenue to teachers were our administrators. We knew that the time with them during our Leading and Learning meetings was not enough. We needed more.

In planning for the next school year, we budgeted so that our principals would not have a teaching assignment. We would plan to have them meet with us six times over the year in what we call "Principal Academy." We also changed the format of our Leading and Learning so that it would be only a half day for both administrators with vice principals remaining for the afternoon in a "Vice Principal Academy."

For the second year (2016-2017) of our "Start Right Conversations" we asked administrators and division leadership to come prepared to discuss three topics: Battle River School Divisions' positive core; what opportunities for growth does this "Start Right" process create for BRSD; and what supports they would need individually and for their staff to achieve our vision, "Every Student, Every Day, A Success."

From these discussions, several key themes arose including being student-centred, everyone being on the same team, continuous improvements, and having a strong and cohesive leadership team. We found opportunities to grow, as well, including focusing on what's important, being open to recommendations, ensuring team members were being validated for what they were doing and where they were going, and building personal connections and trust. Finally, when we asked how we could support our staff and students, ideas such as mentoring, making regular contact, learning how to properly use data, and building on what we had already started to create, arose as key themes.

Much of what we had planned for the year spoke to the themes that surfaced in these conversations. One of our key tasks was to ensure that staff understood that we were not doing more, but that we were going deeper. We were working harder to ensure that ALL had the same understanding of our purpose and our "why" (Hierck and Williams, 2015).

We believed our Principal Academy, our new Professional Learning Model (Timperly, 2011), Leading and Learning, and the Vice

Principal Academy would be key ways in which to accomplish these goals and address the themes from the Start Right conversations. We also undertook a full Inclusive Education review in support of our work in "Welcoming and Caring."

In addition, as a division leadership team, we broke into pairs and made regular visits to our schools. During these visits, we met with the school administration team and discussion focussed on ensuring student success. Principals were required to make regular classroom visits and provide teachers with feedback in relation to their teaching strengths, areas for growth, next steps and how they could support them.

School data was examined and learning services support staff worked with administration and teachers in building capacity in all the areas of our Every Day Four. We brought in award-winning educator, author and consultant, Charlie Coleman, to spend three days in the division to work with school teams and administrators in the area of school culture and creating positive learning environments.

During this year we used a number of books to focus and deepen our work: *The Principal 50: Critical Leadership Questions for Inspiring Schoolwide Excellence* by Baruti K. Kafele (2015); *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most*, by Peter M. Dewitt (2016); and *Using Data to Focus Instructional Improvement*, by Cheryl James-Ward, Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey and Diane Lapp (2013).

We covered a lot of territory during the year. However, it was not until we were three quarters of the way through the year that we began to see our principals being more vulnerable with one another and reflecting on their own strengths and areas requiring growth. We knew one year of this work wasn't enough. Consequently, when budget discussions for the following year began, finding a means to continue this work was a priority.

As the 2016-2017 school year drew to a close, we reflected on the progress made, the recommendations coming out of our inclusive education review, and feedback from our professional learning series and Principal Academy. We began to plan our work moving forward.

The end of the year found us planning another year of professional learning series, moving to a more centralized budgeting and

staffing model, creating division wide numeracy cohorts, providing more individual literacy support to teaching staff in planning, instruction and data analysis, adding three school-based collaboration days to our calendar and planning for and enhancing another year of Principal Academy.

After seeing Tom Hierck present at the fall CASS Conference, and having spent a year working on school culture with his colleague Charlie Coleman, we knew he was just what we needed to support us in our work with our principals. As a result, we partnered with him to work with us during the upcoming 2017-2018 school year. Momentum was building!

Having just completed a third year of "Start Right" conversations and reflecting on those from the previous two years, we know we have accomplished much. The themes arising from this year's conversations mirror much of what was shared in year two. However, leadership were much more open in regard to where they still needed support. Conversations were framed around two things: "Continue and Consider." If participants had suggestions for us to consider we also asked them to provide a plan of action to address it.

We are keenly aware that there is still much to do. Are we fully a school division and not a district of schools? No, but we are certainly closer. We believe there is clarity around both our purpose and our why, with both BRSD division and school based leadership. However, there is still work to be done in supporting our administrators to build this clarity with our teachers and support staff.

We agree with the principal whom we quoted at the beginning of this article. We are on the cusp of greatness! We look forward to our continued journey in achieving our vision "Every Student, Every Day, A Success." ■

Shan Jorgenson-Adam is the Assistant Superintendent-Learning, Battle River School Division. Rita Marler is the Superintendent of Battle River School Division.

References

References for this article are available by contacting Editor-in-Chief, Shannon Savory, at ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net.



Meeting Canada's Diversity Challenge

By Dr. Paul Stewart, Red Deer Catholic Schools, and Erika Stewart, Calgary Catholic School District

Canada is a very diverse country and it is only becoming more so. Many schools are starting to grapple with a diverse student population. New Canadians bring with them a diversity of languages, cultures, expectations, abilities and educational beliefs. These factors create a complex environment in which to teach and a complex environment for families to navigate.

Moving to a new country is demanding and adapting to a new culture can put a lot of strain on a family. If educators have a clear understanding of the issue, it will help families better adapt to the education system and to the country. It is important to understand where students are coming from and what is being done to welcome new people into the community.

Immigrant families are changing and challenging our current early childhood education system and the ways in which the system can benefit them. There has been much research done on how to best address the needs of immigrant families and to learn how these families can use early childhood education programs (ECE).

Many immigrants tend to face higher rates of poverty, lower parental education, work jobs with irregular hours and have

limited English language proficiency. A lack of early childhood education and low English language proficiency is an issue for immigrant families and their young children. Without that school readiness, their child can fall behind their peers. Having started out on unequal footing, the children of immigrants face greater challenges to their achievement and success.

For many new immigrants to Canada, becoming involved in a new community and school is a daunting task. They may often not be aware of what programs exist or that early entrance ECE programs would be a benefit for their children. A way to raise awareness of programs is to have pamphlets and information booths at locations and events that immigrant families frequent. Meeting in places where parents feel comfortable takes away from the anxiety and stress that comes with navigating a new educational and social system.

Welcome centres and non-profit support services for immigrants are ideal locations to place information pamphlets and posters. Many immigrant families frequent these centres for translation aid, settlement and integration services, and employment

opportunities. Since families are already in these locations to receive aid in navigating their new lives, they will be open to getting information on school entrance programs and education.

Events which welcome immigrants and celebrate various cultures are also great places to have information booths. Some communities have an annual festival of cultures each year that celebrates all the cultures in their community. Different groups set up booths and people wander around visiting the booths that interest them. It would be productive for the school district to have a booth that provides information on the local schools and early entrance ECE programs. New families in the community could then see what options exist for them. It would be even more beneficial if administrators and teachers, particularly for the ECE programs, could be present.

For a lot of new immigrant families, a new school is a big shock so getting the opportunity to meet some of the teachers could go a long way towards making families and potential students feel comfortable and welcomed. If affordable

ECE options were available and accommodations were made for parents who work irregular hours, enrollment of all children, particularly immigrants, would increase. This would allow children to begin school on a more equal foundation.

School systems and teachers do their utmost to accommodate the needs of all students. This should be the case for immigrant students. To do this the teacher must be willing to listen to the expectations and understandings of the parents and family. Meeting with parents is an excellent way for both parties to gain an understanding of their view of education and to reassure them that teachers are concerned about student learning. Teachers being available and visible to meet, when the child is dropped off at school or picked up, allows for brief updates. It gives them the opportunity to ask parents how things are going, and to build trust and a sense of familiarity in a way that is not time consuming for the teacher.

If parents are not present at drop-off or pick up, another way to communicate is by sending notes home. This becomes

a positive way to develop a relationship for parents who may not understand the welcoming and supportive atmosphere of Canadian schools. Being aware of the differences in cultures, and the differences in expectations that exist in different cultures, allows parents and teachers to create a cooperative partnership.

Another way to make parents and children feel comfortable in the classroom is to ensure that they are not separated because of their religion or cultural differences. Small things, such as addressing cultural and religious differences, can help the students relate to each other and understand and experience each culture. It helps the students feel welcomed and understood, while reassuring them that they are in a safe environment.

In Central Alberta, the Central Alberta Refugee Effort (C.A.R.E.) works closely with local school districts to provide translators and information on the educational expectations of various countries. Being aware of the differences in cultures, and the differences in expectations that exist in

various cultures, allows parents and teachers to create a cooperative partnership. This partnership will allow open dialogue, mutual respect, the shared goal of the child's success and often prevents conflict from happening.

As the diversity in Canada continues to grow, it is imperative that teachers adapt to their new teaching environment. The benefits of education and ECE programs, and how diversity benefits all students in a class, needs to be shared with the whole school community. As educators, we must use new information and research to inform our policies, create relationships with immigrant communities, and ensure that our education system is meeting the needs of our students. ■

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Scaffolding Overall Instructional Leadership



By Dr. Jim Brandon, Jeff Turner and Dr. Richard Tapajna, University of Calgary, and Dr. Paulette Hanna, Red Deer College

Even though 95 per cent of the principals and central office leaders in six learning focused school systems indicated that senior leaders were both focused on instructional leadership and had similar expectations for their school leaders, many of the same participants yearned for more ongoing and connected ways of developing instructional leadership capacity (Brandon, Hanna, & Negroponetes, 2015).

Echoing an OECD (2016) finding that, “a vast majority of principals act as instructional leaders, but about one-third still rarely engage in instructional leadership actions” (p. 28), a number of recent studies have investigated the challenges associated with providing effective instructional leadership (Brandon, Saar, and Friesen, 2016; Brandon, Saar, Friesen, Brown, & Yee, 2016; CAP, 2014; Schleicher, 2015).

This article focuses on the *overall instructional leadership* scaffolded by senior leadership teams, in overcoming two persistent obstacles to effective instructional leadership and supportive supervision: the *complexity* challenge and the *learning* challenge.

Our analysis of findings from recent Alberta studies yielded the following three lessons:

1. Shared, distributed and collective approaches to overall instructional leadership deepen and widen impact.
2. Supportive supervision should be part of a career-long continuum of practice that fosters teacher growth while ensuring quality teaching.
3. There are multiple learning pathways to effective overall instructional leadership.

Obstacles to leading learning

Inadequate time to provide instructional leadership and supportive supervision is a consistently identified impediment by school administrators (Brandon, 2008; CAP, 2014; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2015; Servage, 2014). Time needed to attend to such matters as budgeting, student and parent concerns, preparing reports, and other bureaucratic requirements often take precedence.

Issues associated with the intellectual and interpersonal demands related to understanding and supporting quality teaching contribute

to the first enduring obstacle, the *complexity challenge* (Brandon, 2008; Brandon et al., 2015; Le Fevre & Robinson, 2014).

The absence of ongoing attention to the development of instructional leadership knowledge and skills has been another major obstacle. Insufficient attention has been devoted to supervisory capacity building in many school jurisdictions, creating the *learning challenge* (Brandon, 2008, Brandon et al., 2015, Brandon et al., 2016; Brandon et al., 2017). Attendance at conferences and one-shot presentations can be stimulating, but the evidence suggests that much more in the way of ongoing support is needed.

Scaffolding overall instructional leadership

Much of the instructional leadership and supervision literature focuses on what Fullan (2014) described as *direct* instructional leadership—principal actions that directly impact instruction. In contrast, we have examined the broader conception of *overall instructional leadership* (Fullan 2014; Brandon et al., 2015, Brandon et al., 2017)—the wider range of purposefully employed leadership practices designed to positively impact teaching and learning.

Shared instructional leadership

Instructional leadership is more effective when shared among teachers and school leaders. Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) claimed, “leadership practices targeted directly at improving instruction have significant effects on teachers’ working relationships and indirectly on student achievement,” and that, “when principals and teachers share leadership, teachers’ working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher,” (p. 25).

The effect occurs, “largely because effective leadership strengthens professional community, a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning” (p. 25).

Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) found that *promoting and participating in teacher learning and development* had a large impact on

student learning outcomes, with an effect size of 0.82. “The leader participates in the learning as leader, as learner, or both” (p. 663). This leadership dimension is referred to as *leading teacher learning and development* in Robinson (2011) and focuses on the provision high quality and primarily collaborative professional learning opportunities with and for teachers.

Robinson’s research underlined the importance of effective professional learning communities (PLCs), wherein teachers take on both individual and collective responsibilities for the learning of all students in the school (2011, p. 107).

Wahlstrom (2012) grouped overall instructional leadership practices into two complementary categories: *Instructional Ethos* and *Instructional Actions*. School leader efforts in the Instructional Ethos category aim to build a culture that supports continual professional learning. “Principals whose teachers rate them high on Instructional Ethos emphasize the value of research-based strategies and are able to apply them in the local setting” (p. 68). The second category, Instructional Actions, involves explicit engagement with individual teachers about their professional growth.

Scaffolding overall instructional leadership, three lessons

Insights from our analysis of recent studies yielded the following three lessons for building instructional leadership capacity.

Lesson One. Shared, distributed, and collective approaches to overall instructional leadership deepen and widen impact. The research is increasingly definitive about the benefits of collective, shared and distributed leadership. An increasing number of principals see their work as part of instructional or pedagogical leadership teams within and beyond their schools.

Lesson Two: Supportive supervision should be part of a career-long continuum of practice that fosters teacher growth while ensuring quality teaching. Learning enriched school communities are vital to ongoing professional learning for both novice and veteran educators. Though each component of a research informed teacher induction program is an important contributor to initial teaching success, it is the beginning teacher’s overall experience within the larger professional community that has the greatest impact.

Similarly, informed instructional support can be a significant contributor to teacher learning through all career stages. Professional relationships based on mutual respect, and openness within a collaborative culture, promote growth and ensure quality teaching.

Lesson Three: There are multiple learning pathways to effective overall instructional leadership. A variety of leadership development pathways are available to serve the professional learning needs of aspiring and current leaders. Many of these programs aim to develop overall instructional leadership through sustained, job embedded and evidence based approaches.

Persistent senior leader commitment to *scaffolding overall instructional leadership* is becoming more widely evident in Alberta (Brandon et al., 2015, 2016, 2017). Increasingly, system leaders are working broadly to build a professional community and to generate benefit through the establishment of school and jurisdiction cultures that support continual professional learning. At the same time, they are working to enhance school leader capacity, to supportively engage with individual teachers and promote professional growth in classroom settings. ■

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Increasingly, school divisions across this country have recognized the need to gain further insight into the mental health of students and staff. In fact, in late 2015, Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) identified school based mental health as a national priority item.

Just this year, Kathy Short and colleagues (2017) published a CASSA discussion paper, noting that while most education leaders recognize the importance of mental health within their schools, “many feel ill-prepared to provide support and leadership in this area.”

It is widely understood that there is a need for common language infrastructure, protocols and role clarity. This is needed not only within our province but within our entire country, to address the significant mental health concerns we are facing. Academic learning and teaching abilities become inaccessible to students and staff who are emotionally unavailable.

Over the past two years, in collaboration with several school divisions across Alberta, we have developed a Divisional Wellness Model. It creates an opportunity for system leaders to have access to “high quality training and coaching on basic mental health literacy and on mental health leadership skill development.” This is outlined as essential, in a position paper delivered by CASSA this year.

Our model is based on an understanding that through the relationships children have with their caregivers, their teachers and education staff, they begin to develop the “story” of themselves and others around them.

When children have “anchors” in place, they have a much greater chance of developing into healthy, regulated and competent learners. Kids simply cannot learn how to stay calm, have empathy, or even how to apologize on their own. They require a village to teach them these skills.

The kids are, essentially, the least of our worries. If the systems that hold them are not healthy and filled up, the kids we serve do not stand a chance. Historically, we have poured the majority of our resources into children, in the form of educational programs that teach them how to make good choices. We have also upheld “zero tolerance policies” when children were noncompliant.

It is our staff and the systems who hold our children that should be the focus of our support. When staff are able to do this for each other, and in turn for the children and families we serve, incredible and resilient communities come together.

So, where do we start? There is a hierarchy that exists within our school divisions when we consider administrative operations. This

hierarchy has historically held kids as the primary focus, followed by parents/caregivers, then educational assistants and educational support staff (including custodians, bus drivers, librarians and administrative assistants), teachers, wellness teams, principals and school leadership teams, and finally trustees and senior leadership teams.

From an administrative perspective, this is necessary to provide structure and hierarchy when leading an organization. In an effort to enhance mental health literacy, we have come to understand the importance of speaking a “common language.” Often some of our biggest work involves being on the same page as our staff.

To that end, we have created four professional development days applicable to all staff, talking about four components essential in creating mental health literacy. This includes a day on relationships and the necessity for all children to be “lid flippers,” as well as a day on trauma, including a review of the ACES work. In addition, we have a day on compassion fatigue and understanding how being in our service profession will result in us paying a price. Finally, we provide a day on grief; an inevitable part of all service professions.

In addition, a Parenting Superpowers evening has been developed, bringing parents and

Guiding Staff Back to Why They Started:

A Wellness Model for System Leaders

By Darlene Ferris, M. Ed., Wild Rose School Division, and Dr. Jody Carrington

caregivers of the children we serve into our “common language.” As we all develop a common language, we then become the village that our children require. We have come to understand that relationships know no hierarchy.

School systems also taught us that it was critical that this wellness model be self-sustaining. Thus, in addition to offering mental health literacy training to all staff across four professional development options, we have also developed a three-day intensive workshop for the mental health leaders in respective divisions.

Although this looks different across each

district, we have encouraged divisions to consider who constitutes their mental health wellness team, the experts in their divisions who we work with intensively to further develop trauma informed assessment skills and treatment plans, and to identify how best to unfold this process in their respective divisions. This wellness team becomes the heart of our divisions, as these critical leaders manage and support the mental health and connection of all staff and students.

This model has been well received and we are looking forward to working with divisions

in this pilot process and learning more about what works most effectively on the ground ■

Dr. Jody Carrington is a Clinical Psychologist from Olds, Alberta who has teamed up with Darlene Ferris, Director of Wellness with Wild Rose School Division, in an effort to assist students, their families and school staff in understanding the power of the relationship in and outside of the classroom. If you would like more information or have any insights or feedback, please contact either Darlene Ferris or Jody Carrington; they would love to connect with you!



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Supporting Diverse Learners through Teacher Leadership and Mentorship



By Heather Kane and Tom Brinsmead, Calgary Catholic School District

An effective system leadership strategy in the Calgary Catholic School District has been the formation of the Diverse Learning Coordinating Teacher (DLCT) position in each school. This system-wide support has been beneficial in supporting our highly diverse population of English language learners, coded students and those with mental wellness challenges.

While every school has its differences, they all share the common goal of providing high-quality instruction in a learning environment where students thrive. Distributed leadership focuses on the collective practice of leadership and the resulting impact on change and improvement in schools.

This leadership must be strategic and deliberate when placing key individuals who can contribute positively to ongoing school improvement. It is that collective influence and leadership that is “linked to student achievement indirectly, through its effects on teacher

motivation and teachers’ workplace settings” (Leithwood et al, 2009).

Distributed leadership in the Calgary Catholic School District is evidenced through the strategic placement of DLCTs in each of its 112 schools. The DLCTs serve as a direct link between the Instructional Services department and the schools, providing key information, strategies and support for teachers and students. Since 2014, this mentorship model has enabled the DLCT to work with fellow teachers to identify and support diverse learners, then model and assist with the implementation of strategies that engage all learners and support all learners.

It is the interdependent interaction and practice that contributes positively to the systemic application of the district’s ongoing three-year plan, and the resulting success of students as evidenced in the Annual Education Results Report (AERR). “The differences between high performing and

low performing schools can be attributed to different degrees of leadership distribution. High performing schools widely and wisely distribute leadership” (Leithwood et al., 2009).

For example, formative assessment has been and continues to be a focus in Calgary Catholic. It is the DLCTs who work with the teachers to access tools like the Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention System, to determine evidence and application of the resulting data and to implement key strategies that support each student in their reading acquisition and development.

As one DLCT explained, “teacher confidence in student assessment of and for learning improved, which is important in understanding student learning and achievement. As a result, students who were functioning below expected literacy levels were quickly identified and brought forward for further discussion with the DLCT and parents.

Teachers could be more specific in identifying student needs, and plans could be put into place to support students who required further intervention, and teachers were reassured that the supports currently in place were appropriate.”

Another example of the integrated district work of the DLCTs would be the implementation and use of clevr. In 2017, Instructional Services introduced a forms management system called clevr™ to the schools to enhance access to supports for students in a systematic and effective manner. The DLCTs in each school were trained on the system and in turn, the DLCTs trained the teachers at their school. As the DLCTs trained the teachers on clevr, DLCTs worked alongside the teachers to develop effective learner support plans to meet the needs of diverse learners in their school.

They also led the school resource team, where school staff members meet to discuss students’ learning needs and identify key strategies to support those students. They guide teachers with identifying and understanding the English as a Second Language

(ESL) benchmarks of their English language learners, to support those students in their language acquisition and development. When the schools determine that additional support is required for any student, the DLCTs organize the request for support for Instructional Services involvement.

From a DLCT perspective, “teacher knowledge of the referral process and proper data gathering and the need for evidence became another benefit for the school community...resulting in more timely support for students who require other supports...”

It is that strategic linking between schools and the Instructional Services department that enhances the effective access and implementation of district direction and supports. This leads to a systemic understanding of the importance of identifying and meeting the needs of students to collectively champion students for success.

“Letting a thousand flowers boom is not distributed leadership” (Harris, 2014), rather, it is the collective alignment of purpose. The effective system leadership

strategy, using distributed leadership, as demonstrated in the deployment of the DLCTs, has enabled Calgary Catholic to provide a system-wide support focus on championing students to success. ■

Heather Kane is a Director of Instructional Services with the Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD). Overseeing the diverse learning supports in CCSD is a component of her portfolio. She can be reached at heather.kane@cssd.ab.ca. Tom Brinsmead is a Diverse Learning Supervisor with the Calgary Catholic School District. Overseeing the DLCTs mentorship model is a component of his portfolio. He can be reached at tom.brinsmead@cssd.ab.ca.

A special thanks to all the DLI/DLCTs in the Calgary Catholic School District, some of whom were quoted in the article, and all of whom diligently work to support teachers and are champions of students.

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Professional Learning Builds Success for Students

By Suzanne Szojka and Timothy Cusack, Edmonton Catholic Schools

At the forefront of work in curriculum, assessment and instruction is the voice of the teacher. “What knowledge and skills do we, as professionals, need to meet the needs of our students?” (Timperley, 2011). Edmonton Catholic Schools offer teachers a menu of options to deepen our professional knowledge and refine our professional skills in areas that impact the learning of our students.

Our teachers have been particularly responsive to three aspects of our plan which offer personalization of professional learning as determined by the teacher as the learner: specific allocation of district dollars to schools for teacher collaboration, supporting teachers as drivers of district-wide professional learning time, and sponsoring district communities of practice evolving from the identified needs of teacher participants. How does this unfold?

First, in the fall of each year, a dollar amount equivalent to 40 half days of teacher release time is transferred to each school in support of intentional teacher collaboration. Considering achievement data and other needs evolving from their lived context, schools determine how they will deploy this gift of time. There is a myriad of ways, such as clusters of teachers planning together, team teaching in each other's classrooms, observing each other to enhance their instructional repertoire, and attending district or community professional learning sessions.

For our principals and teachers, these dollars create conditions for planned and emergent professional learning, from and with each other

throughout the school year around topics or concerns that fit each teacher and school context. When a school teacher, learning coach and district consultant gather for a morning to engage in dialogue about specific student needs and intentionally plan focused instruction, guided instruction, collaborative learning and independent learning experiences, their collaborative inquiry, collective responsibility and targeted instruction result in improved student learning for all (Fisher and Frey, 2014).

to choose from a variety of advertised district learning sessions, facilitated by consultants, multidisciplinary specialists, colleagues or principals. Additionally, they may choose to work at their own or a colleague's site to engage in professional learning that is meaningful and deeply connected to the authentic needs of their students.

Teachers have expressed appreciation about having time to work independently or with colleagues, on what matters most at that time in their quest to improve student learning. We recognize that this approach to professional learning is being implemented with varied pace, as principals balance their own school's continuous growth plans and teachers take on increased responsibility of driving their professional learning.

A third important item on our district menu of professional learning, that speaks to the voice of the teacher, is the power of communities of practice to enhance both teacher and student learning. We consider communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2014). Many communities

of practice are flourishing in our schools as we model the importance of weaving professional dialogue, deliberate practice and collaborative learning through an advertised array of district communities of practice at the elementary, junior and senior high levels.

With themes established through the voice of principals and site based learning teams, two teachers from each school are invited to



Also, in the past two years, Edmonton Catholic Schools has refined our tradition of offering four district-wide professional learning Thursday afternoons (September, January, February, April), such that our teachers drive their own professional learning based upon identified classroom need. Each teacher is invited

participate in district communities of practice that meet several times throughout the school year. In our format, communities of practice begin with facilitation by our district consultants who invite teachers into dialogue. Over the course of 30 hours of dedicated time, classroom teachers engage in reciprocal learning “from and with” all involved in their specialized community of practice.

Through the sharing learning of artifacts such as digital slides of classroom work, personal testimony, or creative and innovative lessons, participants have spoken strongly as to the positive impact their participation has had on their daily practice. Last spring, many of our teachers responded in detail to our question, “How is your involvement in this community of practice impacting your practice and the learning of your students?” Three illustrative responses follow:

1. The strategies that I have tried, regarding responding to a piece of writing or video clip being watched, have been very well received. The writing my students have created exceeded my expectations.
2. I have transformed my class. I like the small group instruction and I feel like I can

intervene quickly when my students aren’t grasping concepts.

3. I am learning so much from other teachers. I am a newer teacher and I need to talk with others and learn from them.

In Edmonton Catholic Schools, we purpose our district professional learning menu as support for and input into the continuous daily learning of our teachers and students in schools. On one hand, our ongoing work with such global educators as Sandra Herbst and Simon Breakspear in exploring assessment technique and improvement learning sprints, informs our focus on teacher voice. Additionally, the responsive work of our consultants combined with the district dollars and time described earlier, create the conditions our teachers need to live in our provincial competencies: collaborating, communicating, managing information, thinking critically and problem solving, while planning for and supporting optimal student learning (Alberta Education, 2016).

District anecdotal data shows that when teachers, as learners, have the time and space to personalize their professional learning, they authentically engage as learners to

positively impact student learning (Breakspear, 2017). Many of the hundreds of teachers who chose to attend our various August professional learning sessions expressed appreciation and joy in expanding their instructional repertoire to be able to respond to what their students need next in their learning. The voices of teachers as learners are key to creating conditions that promote optimal student learning. We are excited to continue our journey along this pathway. ■

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Reimagining Teacher Learning

By Bonnie Annicchiarico, Ph.D., and Cheryl Kuemper, M.Ed., Christ the Redeemer Catholic School; and Kathi Lalonde, M.Ed., Ambrose University

How can system leaders engage teachers' imaginations in order to rethink literacy practices in secondary classrooms? At Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools it is our goal to lead students to become skilled, passionate and voluminous readers. We want them to find their voice and improve the quality of their writing. This requires teachers who are accomplished and motivated readers and writers themselves.

With these goals in mind we began to reimagine our traditional professional learning approaches. Our leadership team set out to create collaborative, interactive and continuous learning experiences that would challenge teachers' taken-for-granted literacy practices and implement deep and meaningful pedagogical change. The readers' and writers' workshop became our means to this end.

Personal and reflective: *You See Me*

Throughout the professional learning journey we observed a number of evolving themes. The first theme to emerge we titled, *You See Me*. Teachers felt understood, affirmed and appreciated. *Seeing* teachers meant understanding their core beliefs and values, and knowing where they were with regards to expertise and experience. *Seeing* teachers respected what they contributed to and constructed in collaborative learning, and honoured them as important voices. This model encouraged continued learning no matter where teachers were on the learning spectrum.

The experiential nature of this professional learning allowed teachers to engage in critical reflection about themselves, their students and the learning process. Teachers asked genuine questions about their practice and this provided the forum for meaningful conversations about literacy. Teachers analyzed their experiences and



current pedagogy, and compared them to the principles of the readers' and writers' workshop.

The moniker of side-by-side learning emerged, in contrast to top-down learning. Teachers were partners and had ownership in the process.

When we gathered teacher feedback we heard that they were deeply inspired. Teachers felt a sense of purpose and renewal. They critiqued their own understandings about literacy practices through a new lens. Teachers began to work collectively and their voices were integral to the literacy conversation.

One participating teacher commented, "The readers' workshop in one word has been renewing." Another noted, "I truly enjoyed working with my peers, talking about new and innovative ways of teaching literature and having open, honest, and frank discussions about concerns and fears."

Invitational and affirming: *I Matter*

A second theme that emerged was termed: *I matter*. When teachers viewed their work as a vocation with higher purpose and intrinsic value, teaching became much more than a job. Who the teacher was, shaped and informed the teacher's professional work. We have learned that much of the power of the readers' and writers' workshop lies in its inherent ability to reflect and align with teachers' own beliefs and literacy experiences. When teachers were recognized for who they were, their passions, their beliefs, and their lives had value.

Choice is fundamental to the workshop pedagogy and is key to the design of this professional learning experience. An invitation was extended to all teachers and the decision to say yes rested with them. Each member was personally welcomed and received top quality professional literature on teaching at the workshop.

The professional development (PD) environment was carefully attended to through setting, personal touches, good food and adequate time for learning. Each teacher was allotted \$200 towards purchases for their classroom library. These books were self-selected by the teacher who had ownership for stocking and designing their reading environment.

Each teacher received two visits and written feedback from the leadership team. Teachers and students were interviewed and teachers were given all the data. Participants were asked to be thoughtful about their learning and teaching. These visits generated stories and insights that became the content for future meetings.

Teachers saw their own words and classrooms become the text for the next PD experience. They were the lesson and the inspiration. As new cohorts were created, previous cohort teachers were asked to be panel members and mentors. This opportunity to teach others accelerated and enhanced the teachers' own learning. Their work was affirmed and their experiences had value for others who were on a similar learning path.

Renewed purpose: I'm Inspired

A third and powerful theme that resulted from this PD told us that teachers were renewed and inspired by their learning. When teachers were clear about why they were teaching, the how was realized in transformed classrooms. Their desire to provide authentic literacy experiences drove teachers to align belief with practice. From redesigned reading spaces, to increased professional reading, to published personal writing; teachers were rethinking how their students would become lifelong readers



Workshop Wisdom showcases great outcomes each issue.

and writers. Classrooms became communities where teacher and student voices were shared and respected.

The workshop immersed teachers in personalized experiences that challenged them to be readers and writers with their students. For some, this process reignited a passion. For many the emotional ties to literacy became evident. Conversations about books occurred inside and outside the classroom. Teachers, both passionate and reluctant, began writing alongside their students, sharing their drafts, modeling vulnerability and developing a deeper sense of trust.

Mini-lessons combined curriculum with student needs. During conferencing, teachers listened, provided feedback and validated student decision making. These conversations informed instruction, deepened comprehension and built relationships.

When teachers were inspired, student learning was impacted. Students shared that teachers understood them as readers and writers. High school students reported choosing to read beyond the required reading lists. Increasingly, students were articulating personal goals, identifying where they needed help and making personal choices.

The release of responsibility was underway. When asked about how the workshop experience could be enhanced in the classroom, students responded, "Let us do the work!"

Our conclusion? Teachers' lives matter. Their value is inherent but often overlooked in traditional PD models. Designing learning to begin with heart and experience is key. Taking the time to invest in teachers sends a message of dignity and worth. Respecting teachers' own experiences, and encouraging the reader and writer within, honours the stories that each teacher owns. By investing in teachers we've witnessed authentic pedagogical change, measurable student growth and a positive shift in literacy across Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools ■

Bonnie Annicchiarico, Ph.D., is associate superintendent for Christ the Redeemer Catholic schools. Her experience and study in the area of literacy has been foundational in her work with the readers' and writers' workshop.

Cheryl Kuemper, M.Ed., is director of Curriculum and Instruction with CTR Catholic Schools. Her literacy background and working with students and teachers is central to the work she does with the readers' and writers' workshop.

Kathi Lalonde, M.Ed., has recently retired from Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools where she served as both Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Director of Instructional Initiatives. Kathi is currently a sessional instructor with Ambrose University, Calgary.

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Mental Health and the Goal of Happiness

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

As educators, we all aspire to help our children become successful and grow to be healthy, happy adults with meaningful lives. We realize that the complexities of our children, youth and families are becoming more challenging. Our student's mental health is a key factor that directly impacts their ability to learn, grow and stay alive.

The World Health Organization, Investing in Mental Health (2013, page nine) shares that, "There is a longstanding and recently re-emphasized argument that happiness is the truest measure of well-being." Edmonton Catholic Schools, in their quest for student happiness, have created and embarked upon a comprehensive, systemic Mental Health Strategic Plan. The key components are based on the following, as depicted in the image that is top right.

- Health Promotion and Prevention: This is where schools have the biggest influence and is a strength-based approach, building on resiliency and enhanced social and emotional learning.
- Early Identification.
- Early Intervention.
- Treatment.
- Follow-Up.

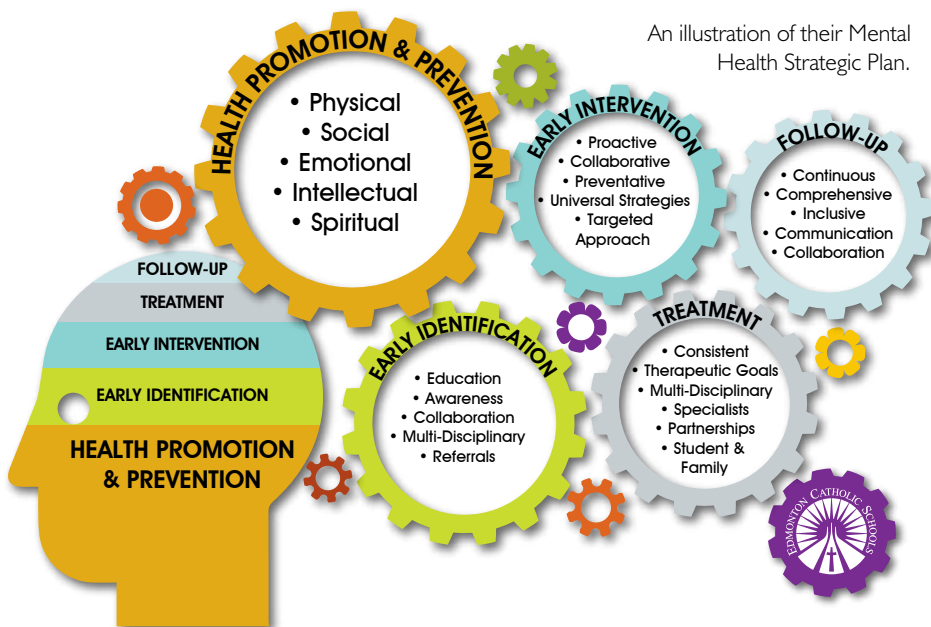
As our district team formulated the plan, we spoke often with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services/Addiction and Mental Health (Alberta Health Services). We had several conference calls with Dr. Stan Kutcher, Director of World Health Organization Collaborating Centre in Mental Health Policy and Training, at Dalhousie University, and Izaak Walton Killam (IWK) Health Centre in Canada. We understood that the whole school and district had to be involved in a systemic way.

Recently, the Alberta Government released a document *Working Together to Support Mental Health in Alberta Schools* (2017), *Mental Health in Alberta Schools*.¹ The document provides information to support school-wide implementation and many of the frameworks are articulated in the document, including comprehensive school health, social-emotional learning,

MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIC PLAN: CONTINUUM OF SUPPORTS

Creating a culture that supports the health and well-being of all students

An illustration of their Mental Health Strategic Plan.



response to intervention, trauma-informed practice and positive behavior supports.

In addition, *The Working Together* (Ab. Ed) document describes whole school approaches—sustained over time, based on research, embedded throughout the day, inclusive to all, building student and staff capacity, partnerships and data collection—and these are actualized in our Mental Health Strategic Plan.² We have used this document as a resource in reflecting, reviewing and critiquing our plan, as we continue to revise it this year.

Together with the District Plan, each school is encouraged to create their own plan, based on the needs of their student population and their Inclusive School Profiles. Data from *Tell Them from Me* and the *Joint Consortium for School Health Foundational Online Module/Mental Health Module* is also used.

As illustrated in the continuum of supports (which can be viewed online in our strategic plan), the development of a multidisciplinary team, including Family School Liaison Workers, Emotional Behavioral Specialists, Psychologists, Speech Language Pathologists and Occupational Therapists, has been instrumental in providing layered services within our schools.

Beginning in our early learning department several years ago, our multidisciplinary team has grown over time. Over the years, we have realized how integral a team like this is, in supporting schools to meet the complexities of the children that they serve. Teachers cannot meet all the demands and all the needs of our students. Through multiple lenses and areas of expertise, we can much better address the needs and embrace the strengths of our communities.

To support and build the capacity of the teacher, the multi-disciplinary team provides modelling, coaching and professional learning opportunities to the staff on an ongoing basis. The team also provides direct support and therapy to students. Teachers receive formal training with curriculum support resources, including PATHS (to all Kindergarten to Grade 6 teachers), Fourth R and Mental Health Curriculum Resource (Grades 7 to 9) and Health Relationship Plus (Grades 10 to 12 health teachers).

In addition to teachers and our multidisciplinary teams, every layer of the organization needs to be addressed. All staff in our schools received *Go to Educator* training, a program via Alberta Health Services. This year, all new staff will be trained.

Currently, we are developing a *Go to Booster* video series. During staff meetings or other PD learning opportunities, staff will be able to review a short video and reflect on how they can take the ideas from the video and continue to foster the ideas as part of their school-wide approach to mental health. Each video will have corresponding “Go-To-isms,” to help lead reflective discussions about how to take ideas and grow them.

As our plan is multifaceted, it has incorporated a variety of frameworks including positive behavior supports. In collaboration with the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium, we created a video series for professional learning, demonstrating a school-wide approach, utilizing positive behavior.³ School teams are trained with this model and a focus school has been created, focusing on positive behavior supports and trauma-informed practice, providing temporary and transitional onsite programming. In addition, therapy is provided for some of our highest needs/complex students, together with their community school teams and family. The school is also a training site for school staff across the district.

As we support students, the school culture and program can develop and promote protective factors within our children. As an example, social justice projects coordinated by students and the school community are ways in which we can nurture compassion. Just as important as receiving supports, students must also understand and practice giving. It is through the act of giving that students can learn to further care, and understand how they play a direct role in helping someone else, and the impact that their actions can have on them. Protective factors that develop a positive sense of self, being a social support for others and fostering tolerance to others, helps and protects their mental health.

Pathways to success require many different hands; partnerships are essential. Mental health therapists, who work with Alberta Health Services (AHS), and who are enhanced through the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery Model (RCSD), play a critical role for students with illness and in imminent crisis.

In addition to our RCSD model and a mobile mental health team, we also have grown our mental health therapist cohort. Resident mental health therapists, hired via Alberta Health Services, can be found in some of our schools. A mental health transition team has

been created with AHS to support student transition from hospital stays or day programs and back to the school.

A region-wide suicide prevention protocol has also been established. We are fortunate to have been involved in many of the discussions together with AHS over the past year. Further, we continue to grow a community of practice with our psychologists. Last spring, we created a Memorandum of Understanding with Concordia University. Our key objectives include the development of a framework that fosters research collaboration projects, strengthens the psychological service capabilities of our district through the development of tools and resources that support school-based programs and family interventions, advances research and innovation, and provides Concordia students with practicum experiences.

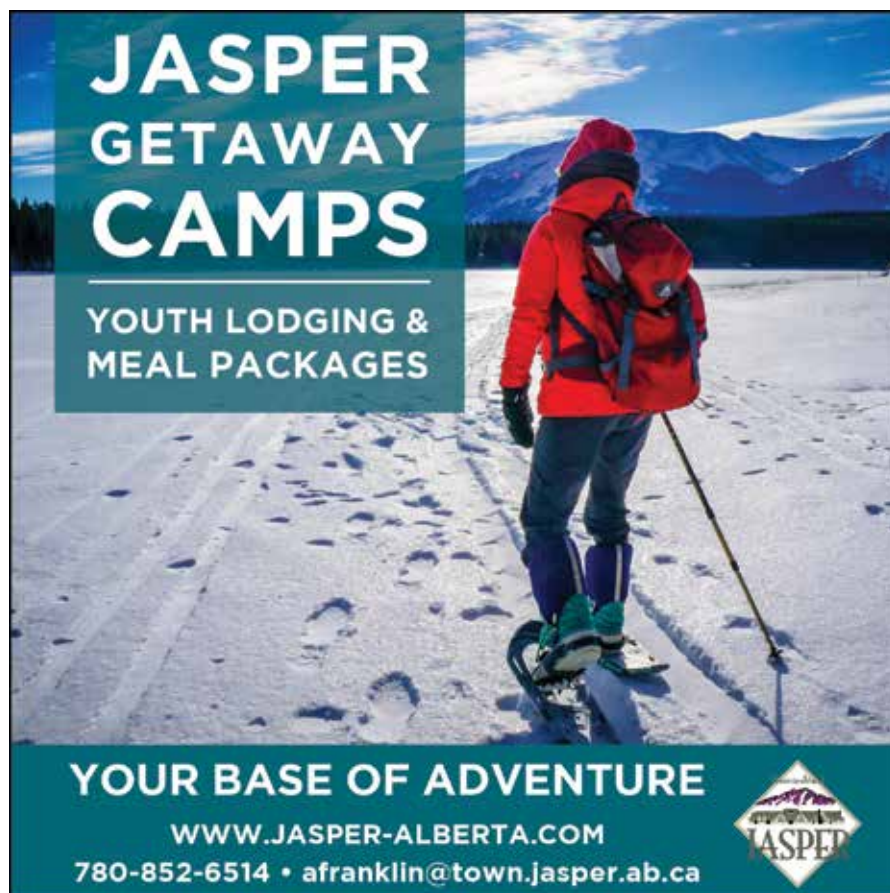
The goal to happiness is multifaceted and involves a variety of scaffolds, programs, resources and services. Our children are the focal point. We must do everything that we can to surround them with love and support, while fostering resiliency within them, giving

them the strength to travel the roads that lay before them. With school and district systems in place, all our students can experience happiness and know that there is always hope. ■

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

Resources

1. *Working Together To Support Mental Health in Alberta Schools* (Alberta Government, 2017): https://education.alberta.ca/media/3576206/working_together_to_support_mental_health.pdf.
2. *Edmonton Catholic Schools Mental Health Strategic Plan 2017*: www.ecsd.net/Programs/Overview/Inclusive-Education/Documents/Mental%20Health%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf.
3. *Positive Behavior Supports in Practice, Alberta Regional Consortia 2017*: <http://arpcresources.ca/positive-behaviour-supports-in-practice>.



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Take a Walk on the Wellness Side

The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is a health and welfare trust governed by 10 Trustees. It offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for over 56,000 covered members, their dependants in 58 school jurisdictions and 11 associations across the province. ASEBP is pleased to contribute a regular column in the CASS Connection.

By Kelli Littlechilds, ASEBP

As your heart rate returns to normal, staff are laughing around you, leaning into stretches and unwinding from a good walk outside. You give your team high-fives for continuing the momentum of this walking group. It has been six months since the Walking Warriors club took their first step and nine months ago this was merely an idea on a brainstorm session sheet.

What really boggles your mind is how far that initial brainstorm has taken you and your workplace. Nine months ago, you sat around a table with a group of your staff and one of ASEBP's workplace wellness liaisons, formerly known as health advisors, to work through a strategy for your team's workplace health and wellness program.

You discussed your successes and pinch-points over the years, using the Idea Readiness Tool, a resource by the University of Alberta's PLACE Lab, you grabbed from The Sandbox. You collaborated on the best approaches to rolling out a two-year strategy and focused on creating a culture of workplace wellness.

Upon sharing this brainstorm information with your larger team and gathering their input, your group adds more to a rollout plan that has spurred the creation



of an entire wellness committee, rather than just one staff member doing this off the side of their desk. As you stretch out those hamstrings and see smiles across your groups' faces, you can't help but think about how far your team can really take this workplace wellness program and the positive impact it could have across your whole jurisdiction. The possibilities seem endless!

Does this sound intriguing? Read on to find out how to access the support you need to make it a reality in your workplace.

The Health Promotion Services team at ASEBP, previously called Prevention Services, is available to collaborate with you and your team to help create a sustainable

culture of wellness in the workplace. By taking a broad look at long-term wellness support and capacity building, our team of workplace wellness liaisons can assist leaders like you, in creating a comprehensive wellness strategy for employees in your jurisdiction or organization. This model allows ASEBP to strategically work with you on a long-term and highly collaborative relationship.

It's interesting how words evolve over a period of time. Traditionally, health promotion and disease prevention were used interchangeably at ASEBP. As our knowledge in these areas grew and our employer groups altered their approach to employee health, it

only seemed natural for our health services to evolve too.

As we reflected on ASEBP's goals and the intent of our programs and services, we realized the focus on interventions tied to specific disease states or health risks, wouldn't help us fully realize our health promotion goals for the long-term. We want to create opportunities to educate and connect with our employer groups, ensuring their teams understand that their benefits aren't only for when employees are ill or already at risk for specific diseases. A benefit plan can play a powerful role in helping your employees stay well too.

We can work with you to create an effective wellness plan focused on the needs and interests of your employees, connecting you with community resources to help sustain your programs and efforts. It can be through customized school jurisdiction health profiles, facilitated in-person planning sessions and workshops, or using specific tools on The Sandbox (like the Self-Directed Wellness Guide), or the many forum discussions and countless wellness focused blogs. Our goal is to help you achieve impactful results, providing sustained and tailored support to help your group achieve success.

Let's revisit our scenario. Two years after the initial discussion and ongoing work together, with your workplace wellness liaison, you conclude that your group has evolved further than you planned for based on the benchmarks you set. What a great problem to have! It's a green light for you to keep moving along the path of workplace health and wellness, getting better and better as you go.

You and your team work with your ASEBP workplace wellness liaison to collaboratively refresh and realign your workplace wellness plan based on these successes and your current workplace environment; strategic, comprehensive and focused on your team's needs.

Make this your workplace wellness reality and connect with ASEBP Health Promotion Services by emailing health@asebp.ca. It's really that simple. ■

Kelli Littlechilds is the CEO of ASEBP and has more than 30 years in the health and benefits industry. As the leader of one of Alberta's Top 70 Employers for 2016, Kelli is a champion for personal and workplace well-being.



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